

A STUDY OF HUMAN RIGHTS, ENVIRONMENT AND EDUCATION

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Human rights define certain **minimum standards and rules of procedure** to which those in power should or must adhere in their treatment of people. This primarily concerns state authorities such as governments, police or armed forces, but increasingly also those wielding non-governmental power, such as international Organizations, business enterprises and/or the private sector in general as well as religious communities or individuals that exert power over other people. On the one hand, human rights set limits to the power exercised by government and nongovernmental entities and on the other they oblige these within their purview to lay the foundation for enabling people to actually exercise and enjoy their rights through affirmative measures.

Seen historically, human rights have developed in a dialectical process of various revolutions and generations. It began with the bourgeois revolutions against absolutism, feudalism and the power of the Roman Catholic Church, legitimated by the ideas of the Enlightenment, rationalistic natural law, the social contract, constitutionalism and liberalism in Europe and North America. These culminated in the establishment of **civil and political rights** to life, liberty, property and democratic participation in the constitutions of the nation-states of the 18th and 19th centuries. Despite the ideological controversies between East and West and North and South, the United Nations (UN) did finally succeed in developing an extensive set of norms for the protection of human rights, which was drafted through consensus and can therefore be seen as a synthesis of these three different ‘generations’ or ‘dimensions’ of human rights. A typical outcome of this synthesis is the **International Charter of Human Rights**, which consists of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 on the one hand, and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the other. With the cessation of the Cold War, the ideological debate about different ‘generations’ of human rights was also formally ended. Despite the mounting North-South conflict, the heads of state and government of more than 170 states reached agreement at the **World Conference on Human Rights** in Vienna in 1993 on the principles of the universality, indivisibility, interdependence and equality of all human rights.

In the 21st Century, the international human rights movement faces new challenges and new opportunities. Building on the standard-setting successes of the past few decades, human rights organizations are finding new ways to implement and enforce rights, moving beyond law and norm development to make rights real for more people and to demonstrate that the global human rights system can work. To do this, they are using new tools to better document, analyze and publicize human rights abuse and to better advocate for changes in policy and behavior. And they are focusing on new spaces for international engagement, from Brasilia to Beijing.

Nature of Human Rights

All human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. The international community must treat human rights globally in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing, and with the same emphasis. While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Vienna Declaration and Program of Action, 1993

Human rights are indivisible, interdependent and interrelated that they are equal in importance and equally essential for the respect and dignity of each person. Human beings need them all to live a minimal good life. In other words, the violation or lack of a single human right affects the whole set of rights and thereby undermine the human quest of living a dignified life.

Categories of Human Rights

Human rights either for philosophical account or for simplicity categorized in different ways depending upon different parameters. One of such classifications is grouping rights in to negative, active and positive rights. A negative right is a right not to be subject to interference by others. These constitute the classical liberal rights as articulated in the philosophy of John Lock. Active human rights imply the right to participate in the political process as outlined by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Positive rights on the other hand impose duties on the part of the duty bearer to do positive actions. These are economic, social and cultural rights for which one find basis in the philosophy of Karl Marx. The classification of rights into negative, active and positive is based on the duty they impose on the duty bearer.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND ENVIRONMENT

All peoples have the right of self-determination, the right to freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources and thereby freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development. At the same time they have a right to live in a clean environment. A government that tolerates or actively engages in the corrupt transfer of ownership of national wealth to the benefit of some nationals, who occupy positions of power or influence in the society, operates to deny the people, individually and collectively, their right to freely use, exploit and dispose of their natural wealth in a manner that advances their development. The facts and the decision in the Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (SERAC) and Another Nigeria case are illustrative of how corruption by the Nigerian military government negatively impacted on the rights of the people of Ogoni land to inter alia, freely dispose of their wealth and natural resources, and to live in a satisfactory environment favorable to their development.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND EDUCATION

The document gives an outline for the development of substantial programmes in the field of human rights teaching and education. The ten principles and considerations of the document lays stress on the indivisibility of different categories of human rights as also the need for teaching about human rights at all levels of education, including out of school settings. The seven principles and considerations serving as guidelines may be summarized as follows:

1. Human rights education and teaching should be based on the principles which underline the UN Charter, the UDHR, the International Covenants on Human Rights, and other international human rights instrument. Equal emphasis should be placed on economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights as well as individual and collective rights. The indivisibility of all human rights should be recognized.
2. The concept of human rights should not be formulated in traditional or classical terms alone; this should include the historical experience and contributions of all people having particular regard to major contemporary problems like self- determination and all forms of discrimination and exploitation.
3. Human rights education must aim at:
Fostering the attitudes of tolerance, respect and solidarity inherent in human rights;
Providing knowledge about human rights, in both their national and international dimensions and the institutions established for their implementation; and
Developing the individual's awareness of the ways and means by which human rights can be translated into social and political reality at both national and international levels.
4. Education makes an individual aware of his/her rights. At the same time instill respect for the rights of others.
5. Constant care should be taken to create awareness about the close relationship between human rights and development and peace including inter alia disarmament.
6. Human rights must be seen as an aspect of professional, ethical and social responsibility in all fields of research, study, teaching and work.
7. Human rights education and teaching should stress that a new international economic, social and cultural order is essential to enable all people to enjoy their human rights and to promote and facilitate education on human rights at all levels in all countries.

CONCLUSION

The running thread of this paper is promotion of human rights education as a means of ensuring the observance of these rights in the interest of this generation and generations to come. Science and technology have opened up tremendous prospects practically all along the line for material progress. Peaceful conditions should ensure a just social order for all human beings all over the world. In order to enjoy fruits of economic development at all levels, efforts are required at all levels whether international, national or regional..

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