

Human Rights Poverty Eradication and Participatory Growth Program Rationale

The below rationale is based on the founding lecture delivered by Dr. Bhausaheb Ubale at McLaughlin College Lunch-on Lecture series in March 2008 and his writing: [1] Ubale, Bhausaheb; Human Rights, Poverty and Development Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in "A New Millennium Edition of Development Express" December 1999.

Poverty affects a large number of people and has many dehumanizing effects. Many people have a misplaced belief that poor people are merely an appendix to mainstream society.

In fact, they are very much an integral part to society. They are inextricably interwoven in the social fabric of society. Poverty impacts everyone; it deprives society of the potential of those affected and deepens social problems. Denial of equal opportunity and access leads to poverty. Poverty requires a human rights approach to poverty eradication.

All human rights are conceived as universal and indivisible, rooted in two binding agreements: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (which includes the right to life, freedom of expression and association) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (whose article II requires states to recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living i.e. right to housing, land, education, health, environment among other things, and to take appropriate steps to enforce them). By accepting such principles, states as well as societies recognize that all rights should be protected, promoted, and enforced.

International debates on human rights have emphasized civil/political rights and underplayed socio-economic rights (which are undermined by Galbraith's Contended majority). Society blames the state when someone is tortured, but remains relatively silent when thousands starve or are uprooted. Equally, societies and states spend billions of dollars on wars which cause untold deaths and destructions, yet show reluctance to spend on the war against poverty, which affects millions of people. Indivisible human rights rooted in the two covenants were supposed to be enforced simultaneously. This has not happened yet because human rights became a Cold War weapon (the U.S.S.R. stressing

socio-economic rights, the West and U.S. dominated institutions using civil/political rights to weaken Communist regimes).

As a result, U.S and its allies put more emphasis on civil/political rights process, which by implication made the human rights implementation efforts litigation-oriented. The human rights movement, therefore, has become merely a legalistic adjudicative dispute settling mechanism and has traditionally relied on the judiciary to remedy violations. Despite the clear status of human rights laws, the international legal community has yet to tackle violations such as homelessness, hunger and exclusion that threaten the world's social and economic fabric.

The states that are the signatories to the aforesaid two binding Covenants have incorporated obligations under the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in their National Constitution but have failed to do the same for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It is therefore, essential to enshrine the latter in the Constitution to inject real force to fight poverty, intensively and extensively, with accelerated speed. Such move will help to create a level field for improving the quality of life.

This requires both governments and societies decisive action to adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach to poverty eradication through social and economic development. From a human rights perspective, the central goal of socio-economic policy should be to provide all citizens with the opportunity to reach their potential. That does not mean erasing differences in wealth, background, talent, or personal ambition, it means removing the impediments that hold people back as a way to overcome poverty.

An effective response to poverty requires a better understanding of what it means to be poor and better analyses of the characteristics and underlying social processes that result in sustained and intractable poverty.

Poverty is multidimensional and complex. It is typically characterized not only by low income and assets but also by hunger and under-nutrition, illiteracy, and the lack of access to basic necessities such as safe drinking water and health services, and social isolation and exploitation.

Poor people have little access to productive assets and lack competency in terms of health, education, and social capital. As a result, they are trapped in poverty in good time and bad time.

However, to optimize research capacity development through partnerships and networking, and to maximize the value of the research outputs for society, specific focus is necessary. This is achieved through collaboration with the departments and centre's dealing with the following subjects: Development Studies, Economics, Sociology, Health, Education, Environment, Information and Communication Technology and other related areas.

The collaboration with researchers and research groups around these themes is expected to improve their local, regional, and international standing and enhance their access to research resources. Each of the themes encourages multi-disciplinary, people- and problem-oriented approaches.