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Human Rights-Based Approach to Poverty Reduction – Analytical Linkages, Practical Work and UNDP

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A discussion on the issue of human rights-based approach to poverty reduction may begin with three initial observations :

- In the human development perspective, one takes a broader view of both human rights and poverty. Human rights are not limited to civil and political rights only; they encompass economic, social and political rights. Similarly, poverty is not only lack of income, but it also encompasses deprivations in areas of health, education, participation and security. Thus both human rights and poverty are multi-dimensional from a human development angle.
- Human poverty is a denial of human rights – because it infringes on human freedom, it destroys human dignity and it implies discrimination and injustice.
- The human rights-based approach to poverty reduction is not only an analytical issue, but it has practical and operational implications.

Human rights, poverty reduction and MDGs – analytical linkages

How does a human rights-based approach make a difference to poverty reduction? Three distinctive analytical ways can be identified :

- In the human rights framework to poverty reduction, the are claimants of rights and then there are the duty-holders, which include communities, governments at all levels, private sector, civil society, external development partners – bilateral and multilateral. In conventional poverty reduction approaches, if goals are not achieved, promises are broken or responsibilities are not carried out, there are no

obvious duty-holders who can be made accountable. But in the rights-based framework to poverty reduction, poor people can claim that their right to overcoming poverty has been violated and they can hold the specifically identified duty-holders, who are responsible, accountable. They can even take them to courts. The public litigation cases in the Indian Supreme Court against the State for non-provisioning of primary schools and thus denying rights to education is a case in point. Accountability and transparency is at the core of the human rights framework. Accountability and transparency are at the core of the rights-based approach to poverty reduction.

- In conventional approaches to poverty reduction, it is only the *outcomes* that matter. But in the rights-based approach, the *process* is as important as the *outcome*. For example, if two countries, A and B, achieve 99% literacy rate, from a traditional human poverty reduction assessment, they have done equally well. But the rights-based approach would also look into the process, which has been adopted to achieve this outcome. Country A may have achieved 99% literacy through a participatory mechanism and incentives, while country B might have achieved it through coercion. In the human rights framework, even though they have achieved the same outcome, country B's process is unacceptable and thus its outcome cannot be at par as that in country A.
- There are usual *poverty indicators* in the conventional approaches to poverty reduction for monitoring progress or setbacks. But the human rights-based approach adds to them *standards*, normative reference to assessment.

The issue of poverty reduction today is very much discussed in the context of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs are time-bound quantitative targets for overcoming human poverty (**box 1**). These Goals are solidly anchored, both in terms of substance as well as process, into human rights. In term of substantive linkages, MDGs, by focusing on deprivations in basic dimensions of human lives, represent human rights. For example, poverty is termed as the greatest denial of human rights. The first goal of the MDGs, by concentrating on reducing extreme poverty and hunger, in fact,

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highlights that right. In terms of the process linkage, monitoring MDGs can bring in the dimensions of transparency and accountability – important elements of the Human Rights framework.

The substantive linkages between the MDGs and human rights can be *direct* or *indirect*. The direct linkages between the two become more obvious when one compares the various Goals of the MDGs with Articles 25 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Article 25 of UDHR states - *Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and the well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services ...Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.* It is clear from box 1 that the goal of halving extreme poverty and hunger, that of child mortality and maternal health, and that of halving the proportion of people without access to safe water can directly be related to this Article.

Similarly, Article 26 of the UDHR states – *Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education should be compulsory ...*Goal 2 of the MDGs on achieving universal primary education is directly linked to Article 26 of UDHR. In addition, when this Article is combined with the principle of non-discrimination of human rights, we have MDG 4 - Promoting gender equality in education and empowering women.

Furthermore, Article 28 of the UDHR highlights the need for a social and international order that help realize the rights set forth in the Declaration. MDG 8 is exactly geared towards building such a world order.

In fact, the substantive *direct* linkages between MDGs and human rights become even stronger and broad-spread when the plane of comparison is changed from the MDGs to the Millennium Declaration itself. The Declaration directly mentions human rights as an absolute requirement for realizing MDGs. It also emphasizes issues of participation and human security, highlighted in a number of Articles of the UDHR.

But MDGs and human rights also have strong *indirect* substantive linkages through the paradigm of human development. Human development and human rights are closely linked as they have a common denominator – *human freedom*. Human development, by enlarging human capabilities and opportunities, enhances the freedom of choices. Human rights, on the other hand, protect that freedom. Human development and human rights are thus mutually reinforcing.

MDGs, being time-bound quantitative targets in human development, are basically derivatives of the human development paradigm (**box 2**). And by being derivatives of human development, they are indirectly

linked to human rights.

But even though MDGs are anchored in human development, there are two qualifiers. First, the MDGs refer only to some basic dimensions of human development and do not cover all its dimensions. They do not reflect such human development dimensions as participation or human security, which, of course, are part of the broader Millennium Declaration. Second, even though anchored into the human development paradigm, for natural and obvious reasons, MDGs have a stronger association with the deprivation side of human development, i.e. human poverty. Human poverty refers to a multidimensional concept of poverty going beyond income poverty and including deprivations in areas of health, knowledge, child mortality, malnutrition etc.

In the human rights framework, the are claimants of rights and then there are the duty-holders, which include communities, governments at all levels, private sector, civil society, external development partners – bilateral and multilateral. In development as usual, if goals are not achieved, promises are broken or responsibilities are not carried out, there are not obvious duty-holders who can be made accountable. But in the rights-based framework, people can claim that their right to development has been violated and they can hold the specifically identified duty-holders, who are responsible, to accountable. Accountability and transparency is at the core of the human rights framework.

In the rights framework, process is as important as the outcome. In traditional development, it is mainly the outcome that matters. For example, if two countries, A and B, achieve 99% literacy rate, from a traditional development assessment, they have done equally well. But the rights-based approach would also look into the process, which has been adopted to achieve this outcome. Country A may have achieved 99% literacy through a participatory mechanism and incentives, while country B might have achieved it through coercion. In the human rights framework, even though they have achieved the same outcome, country B's process is unacceptable and thus its outcome cannot be at par as that in country A.

The time-bound characteristics and the quantitative aspect of MDGs strongly imply that they need to be regularly monitored. The monitoring is necessary for three fundamental reasons : to measure the progress made so far; to identify the gaps; and to formulate strategies to overcome the gaps in the remaining time period. But since the MDGs, in substantive terms, are strongly anchored, directly and indirectly, into human rights, their monitoring should also be closely linked to the human rights framework.

The whole purpose of THE MDG monitoring, therefore, should not just be to have quantitative measures of progress and quantitative identification of

gaps. The exercise should also review the nature of the progress made, the instruments used to achieve it, and if it has been achieved through means not compatible with human rights, to identify the actors responsible and make them accountable for it. Similarly, when the MDG gaps, which need to be covered in the remaining time period, are identified, it is also necessary to identify the duty-holders who are responsible to undertake necessary actions to overcome those gaps and achieve the MDGs in the stipulated time period. In terms of policy formulation to overcome the gaps, it is again not enough just to draw the strategies, but also to identify the duty holders, responsible to deliver those and accountable in case of failures.

Monitoring of MDGs should thus go beyond mere quantitative assessment and policy formulation as usual, it should also be strongly linked to duty holding and accountability, the corner stone of the human rights framework.

In the ultimate analysis, the human rights-based approach to poverty reduction has the potentials of advancing the goal of poverty reduction in *seven* distinct ways :

- Urging speedy adoption of a poverty reduction strategy (PRS), underpinned by human rights, as a matter of legal obligation
- Broadening the scope of the PRS to address the structures of discrimination that generate and deepen human poverty
- Strengthening civil and political rights, which can play an instrumental role in addressing the cause of poverty
- Confirming that economic and social rights are binding obligations, not just programmatic aspirations
- Adding legitimacy to the demand for ensuring meaningful participation of poor people in decision-making process
- Cautioning against retrogression and non-fulfillment of minimum core obligations in the name of policy trade-offs, and
- Strengthening institutions through which policy-makers can be held accountable for their actions.

Human rights-based approach to poverty reduction – practical work and UNDP

Within the analytical framework elaborated above, UNDP’s involvement in the practical work related to the human rights-based approach to poverty reduction has not only covered substantive areas; but also operational work as well as partnership building.

Substantive

UNDP has been involved in undertaking a series of substantive work in the area of human rights-based approach to poverty reduction. A few examples can be pertinent :

- *Human Development Report 2000* : The Human Development Report 2000 on the issue of human rights and human development has been a significant substantive contribution to the analytical linkages between human rights and human development, to the issue of methods of assessment and indicators and the relevant policy options.
- *National Human Development Reports* : Over the years, a number of National Human Development Reports (NHDRs) took human rights as their themes and discussed policy implications for integrating human rights and human development, including the role of the State and the civil society in this context. A list of such Reports is provided in **table 1**.

Table 1: NHDRs on human rights & human development

Country and Year	Title
Armenia (2000)	Human rights and human development
Colombia (2000)	Human rights and human development
Colombia (1999)	Violence and human development
Czech Republic (1998)	Human rights, liberties and elections – quest for democracy
Hungary (1999)	Population, demographic trends and human rights
Lithuania (1998)	State and human development – the human rights-approach
Macedonia (1998)	Role of state in providing social environment that supports human rights
Slovak Republic (1998)	Human rights and minorities issues
Turkey (1998)	Human development and moving towards a rights-based approach to development

Source : www.undp.org

- *Policy document on Integrating Human Rights with Sustainable Human Development* : UNDP’s policy on human rights has been presented in this policy document. Its primary purposes are to test guidelines and methodologies and to identify best practices and learning opportunities in the development of national capacity for the

promotion and protection of human rights and in the application of a human rights approach to development programming.

- *Policy note on Human Rights and Poverty Reduction* : The policy note focuses not so much on the *what* question of the human rights-human development nexus, rather on the *why* and the *how* question.
- *Pro-poor policy work* : Country studies in six Asian countries under the Asia-Pacific Regional Programme on Pro-Poor Macroeconomic Policies addressed issues of pro-poor growth, macroeconomic framework, access to resources and basic social services for poor people and the policy options that need to be there. A number of these issues implied a rights perspective and concentrated on ultra-poor
- *Making Global Trade Work for People* : This book, spearheaded by UNDP, assesses global trade regimes from a human development perspective and proposes policy options, both at global and national levels, to bring the benefits of globalization to poor people and to minimize its vulnerabilities for them. Many options take a human rights angle to opportunities of poor people to global trade.

Operational

Operational work in UNDP on human rights-based approach to poverty reduction has been based on four principles :

- Universality and indivisibility
- Equality and non-discrimination
- Participation and inclusion
- Accountability and rule of law

Principal areas where operational work on this issue concentrated are :

- *Advocacy* – sensitizing all stake-holders
- *Capacity* – creation of a substantive system of enforcement
- *Implementation* – application of human rights in law and reality
- *Monitoring* – effective systems for societal monitoring of human rights enforcement

The Results-Oriented Annual Reports (ROAR) of UNDP has clearly indicated increased human rights activities in UNDP. In fact, the ROAR 2000 registered human rights – including political, economic, social and cultural dimensions – for poverty reduction as a key focus, with 50 UNDP Country Offices (40% of the total). Some examples :

- Assistance to national action plan for human rights
- Undertaking rights-based approach to programming
- Advocacy, awareness- building, training, ombudsman, education for human rights, institution-building
- Five regional seminars on human rights-based approach to poverty for UNDP Resident Representatives and Virtual Development Academy (VDA) training for UNDP staff
- Thematic Trust Fund (TTF) money going for human rights initiatives and projects

All these substantive and operational work were not accomplished by UNDP single-handedly, rather they were carried out through partnership building with other actors.

Partnership building

In substantive areas, partnership of UNDP with the UN Office of the High Commissioners on Human Rights (OHCHR) has been a crucial element in the Human Development Report 2000 on Human Rights and Human Development. The UNDP Human Development Report Office (HDRO) and the OHCHR interacted on substantive issues and collaborated on the process to bring multi-dimensional views to the Report. There have been substantive interactions on policy notes as well, e.g. policy note on *Poverty Reduction and Human Rights*.

In operational areas, UNDP has been collaborating with various actors. *HURIST*, a joint programme of UNDP and OHCHR, is supporting the implementation of UNDP's policy on human rights as presented in the policy document *Integrating Human Rights with Sustainable Human Development*. Its primary purposes are to test guidelines and methodologies and to identify best practices and learning opportunities in the development of national capacity for the promotion and protection of human rights and in the application of a human rights approach to development programming.

During its first phase (1999–2002), efforts were particularly devoted to supporting the development of national human rights action plans and to strengthen the human rights capacities of UNDP Country Offices through programming support and the provision of UNV Human Rights Specialists. During the second phase (2002–2005) of the programme, while pursuing what has been initiated, priority attention will be devoted to methodology development and implementation and to the documentation and dissemination of learning experiences for human rights-based approaches in UNDP's main practice areas.

There are other collaborations with the OHCHR as well. UNDP, in partnership with OHCHR, is implementing *Assisting Communities Together (ACT)*, a global small grants project that promotes community-based poverty-focused human rights initiatives requiring little support, but whose impact at the local level is significant. Activities are being supported in over 30 developing countries.

In cooperation with the UN Foundation and the People's Movement for Human Rights Education, UNDP has been involved in a major programme on *Human Rights Cities*, a programme to create cities worldwide that value and protect human rights. The goals of the programme include instilling in communities a sense of ownership over human rights as a way of life; enhancing democracy, peace, security, and social justice; and strengthening the infrastructure that supports human, social, and economic development. To help sustain this effort, four regional learning programmes for human rights education train community leaders. Human rights cities already in development include Rosario (Argentina), Thies (Senegal), Nagpur (India), Kati (Mali), the Abra Indigenous Municipality (the Philippines), and Dinajpur (Bangladesh). Further development of human rights cities is taking place in the Wa municipality and Minni Minnoa (Ghana) and two additional cities - Timbuktu and Kayes (Mali).

Concerned with removing legal barriers to gender equality, a prime requirement for poverty reduction, UNDP, in conjunction with UNFPA and UNIFEM, made it possible to prepare 800 women for participation in local elections – in which 300 of them were elected.

Some of the building blocks of the partnership were : Collaborative approach to the human rights-based approach to poverty reduction by the UN system using Human Development Thematic Groups at the country level, Use of the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), and the UN common understanding of human rights-based approach to poverty reduction.

In terms of operational work and partnership building, some of the areas that need to be focused are :

- *Revisiting the compact proposal* : The issue of compact between the donors and financial institutions on one hand and developing countries on the other, where the compact would be used as an operational tool and a functional framework to implement the human rights-based approach to poverty reduction may be revisited. This is related to the issue of progressive realization of human rights for poverty reduction.

- *Adopting a rights ethos for aid* : Aid, in its early phases, was not concerned with an integrated vision of human rights. Indeed, much of it was dictated by foreign policy concerns. Today, people in donor countries need to address directly the concerns of the people in poor countries – by engaging in debates and decisions about the use of aid to promote economic, social and civil rights.
- *Collaborating on methodology* : In order to find a common assessment tools for assessment of legislations, policy analyses, so that people can claim their rights, there is a need for collaborating on methodology – both in terms of standards as well as indicators.

Conclusion

With all the analytical and operational work that have done on human rights-based approach to poverty reduction, formidable challenges still remain. In substantive terms, human rights are still seen by many as a governance issue. Some people still do not feel comfortable in recognizing poverty as a denial of human rights. The pre-occupation with political and civil rights also sometimes sideline economic, social and cultural rights in many societies. In substantive terms, part of the challenge is changing the mind-set and part of it is to pursue more convincing analytical work. The issues of methodologies, standards and norms are still hanging there with so many unanswered questions.

But in operational terms, challenges with regard to advocacy, awareness-building and human rights education are very much there. Challenges also remain in terms of concrete practical work in terms of rights-based approach to programming. But one area that needs to be focused is the issue of bringing in the human rights-based approach to the Poverty Reduction Strategy papers (PRSPs) – both in terms of content as well as the process. Since PRSPs would be the major strategies for poverty reduction in most developing countries and would be a critical instrument for achieving the MDGs, a human rights-based approach to poverty reduction must be a major element in PRSPs.

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Box 1 : Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

By 2015 all 189 United Nations member States have pledged to :

Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

- Reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day
- Reduce by half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger

Achieve universal primary Education

- Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling

Promote gender equality and empower women

- Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and all levels by 2015

Reduce child mortality

- Reduce by two-thirds the mortality rate among children under five

Improve maternal health

- Reduce, by three-quarters the maternal mortality ratio

Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases

- Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS
- Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases

Ensure environmental sustainability

- Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes; Reverse loss of environmental resources
- Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water
- Achieve significant improvement in lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers, by 2020

Develop a global partnership for development

- Develop further an open, rule-based, predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system
- Address the least developed countries' special needs
- Address the special needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states
- Deal comprehensively with developing countries' debt problems
- In cooperation with the developing countries. Develop decent and productive work for youth
 - In cooperation with pharmaceutical companies, provide access to affordable essential drugs in developing countries
 - In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies – especially information and communications technologies

Source : <http://www.undp.org/mdg>

Box 2 : Analytical linkage between human development and MDGs

Human Development						
Directly enhancing human capabilities dimensions			Contextual dimensions			
Long and healthy life	Knowledge	Decent standard of living	Participation	Environmental sustainability	Human security	Gender equality
MDGs 4,5 and 6	MDG 2	MDG 1		MDG 7		MDG 3
Child mortality Maternal mortality HIV/AIDS	Universal primary education	Extreme income poverty Hunger		Environmental sustainability		Gender equality in primary education

Source : Jahan (2002)