

Chapter 2

Universal Human Rights Education for the Post-2015 Development Agenda

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Abstract Human rights education provides a unique approach to bringing the fields of law, education and international development together to work on the most important global human rights challenge of our time, the eradication of poverty. In the Charter of the United Nations (1945) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), nations around the world committed to promote education, human rights and social progress as means to eradicate poverty and achieve global peace. Since the turn of the Millennium, human rights scholars and practitioners have advocated specifically for the integration of human rights into the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which set the international development agenda for 2001–2015. While they were largely unsuccessful in securing a human rights-based approach to the MDGs, the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which establish the 2016–2030 agenda, are more promising. In this context, this chapter proposes comprehensive universal human rights education during the compulsory years of schooling as an integral part of the SDG framework because human rights education is required by international law, it is effective in building a culture of respect for human rights and it will build bridges between law, education and international development communities toward the common aims of eradicating poverty, realizing human rights and achieving global peace.

Keywords Accountability • Global human rights culture • Global peace • Human rights • Human rights education • Right to education • Millennium Development Goals • Poverty • Sustainable Development Goals • Values

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Introduction: Human Rights Education and International Development Agendas

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, is the foundation of the modern human rights movement. Among the rights enshrined in the Declaration is the right to education, which is an education specifically “directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (UDHR, art. 26). Since 1948, there has been tremendous progress in building the international human rights regime, including achievements toward universalizing human rights education. Human rights concepts and standards have been defined; treaties have been drafted, ratified and implemented in domestic spheres; school curriculum has been developed and delivered; and training programmes for a wide variety of professionals have been implemented. There is no doubt that there have been many successes at the local, national and global level, particularly in the last two decades, in improving human rights awareness and building a culture of human rights. Upendra Baxi has called this an “Age of Rights” in which “the language of rights nearly replaces all other moral languages” (Baxi 1997, p. 143).

Despite many successes, there continue to be enormous challenges. One of the main issues in the twenty-first century is that human rights continue to be sidelined in the international development agenda. In 2000, the UN Millennium Declaration recognized that the central challenge of the organization was “to ensure that globalization becomes a positive force for all the world’s people” (UNGA 2000, para 5). Toward this end, governments recognized that “only through broad and sustained efforts to create a shared future, based on our common humanity in all its diversity, can globalization be made fully inclusive and equitable” (UNGA 2000, para 5). The Millennium Declaration then set forth goals in the areas of peace and security; development and poverty eradication; and human rights, democracy and good governance. Like the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Millennium Declaration recognized the interdependence of social development, human rights and global peace.

While the Millennium Declaration captured this broad vision, the plan for implementation narrowed the agenda considerably. In 2001, the Secretary-General issued a *Roadmap for implementation of the Millennium Declaration*, which addressed the Declaration’s goals and commitments in all areas – development, human rights and peace. Only the eight development goals, however, were translated into a nested framework of goals, with targets and indicators to measure progress toward each goal. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework proved to be highly successful in gaining attention from international organizations, governments and civil society and focusing expertise and funding on a key human development targets (Alston 2005). By focusing solely on the development aspects outlined in the Millennium Declaration, however, the MDG framework failed to integrate human rights into development policy and practice. As a result, the MDG framework

received substantial criticism from the human rights community (Robinson 2010; Langford 2010; MacNaughton and Frey 2010; Saith 2006; Pogge 2004).

As the 2015 deadline for many of the MDG targets drew near, there were broad-based global discussions about the post-2015 international development agenda (Beyond 2015, 2014; World We Want 2015, n.d.; Viennaplus20 2013; Center for Economic and Social Rights 2013; High Level Panel of Eminent Persons 2013; 17 Special Procedures Mandate-holders 2013). One of the main concerns was that the new goals and targets be aligned with the human rights obligations of the UN member States (Joint Statement 2013). Moreover, as recognized in the Millennium Declaration and numerous other declarations of the UN General Assembly, respect for the human rights and dignity of all people should be recognized as an integral aspect of development policy and planning. Toward this end, universal human rights education is an appropriate – indeed ideal – strategy for integrating human rights and development as it meets all the elements of a human rights-based approach to development as defined by the UN Inter-Agency Statement on a Common Understanding of a Human Rights Based Approach (United Nations 2003).

Universal human rights education would effectively integrate human rights and development, it would also serve to bring together two other communities, those working in human rights education and those in human rights law. Recently, Phillips and Gready (2013, p. 217) noted that “[o]n occasion it can seem as though human rights and human rights education inhabit two parallel worlds”. The authors describe human rights education as often “mere human rights legalism” which “is sometimes understood to be no more than the formulaic delivery of international human rights standards” (Phillips and Gready 2013, p. 217). On the other end of the spectrum, human rights education may be reduced to “vague talk” about human rights values and culture without any grounding in the legal instruments that give substance to core principles such as nondiscrimination, participation and accountability (Phillips and Gready 2013, p. 217). Phillips and Gready recommend moving beyond these “all law” or “no law” models. In response, this chapter attempts to bring together two seemingly independent branches of the modern human rights movement – human rights law and human rights education – in the context of the post-2015 international development agenda – for collaboration in achieving universal human rights education.

Following this introduction, the argument is presented in five parts. Part I sets out the international law on the right to human rights education. Part II outlines the history of human rights education, and part III reviews the evidence on the impacts of human rights education in creating a culture of respect for human rights. Part IV provides an overview of the Millennium Development Goals and the ongoing efforts of human rights scholars and advocates to mainstream human rights into international development policy and programming. Part V links human rights in law, education and development into a single proposal for universal comprehensive human rights education in the post-2015 global agenda. Finally, the chapter concludes that through such interdisciplinary collaboration – that crosses scholarship and practice – we can create a global human rights culture that is better able to address the enormous challenges we face together in the twenty-first century.

Human Rights Education in International Law

Human rights, education and development are closely linked in the UN Charter, which declares them necessary to secure stability, well-being and global peace. Importantly, the Charter obliges all UN members to promote (1) higher standards of living and conditions for economic and social development, (2) international cultural and educational co-operation, and (3) “universal respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all” (UN Charter 1945, art. 55). These provisions reflect the understanding that human rights, education and social development are interrelated and interdependent, and that progress in these areas requires governments to take “joint and separate action in co-operation” with the United Nations (UN Charter 1945, art. 56). The obligation of UN members to promote respect for, and observance of, human rights that is established in the Charter implies a government obligation to provide education on human rights, an obligation that is explicit in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties.

The Universal Declaration proclaims “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations.” The preamble to the Declaration states that “every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall *strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms*.” By these words, the Declaration establishes that human rights education is the key to securing universal recognition and observance of human rights in the jurisdictions of the UN member States. Article 26 of the Declaration codifies this ideal, providing that “[e]veryone has the right to education,” which shall be free and compulsory at the elementary level. Further, “[e]ducation shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and *to strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms*” (UDHR, art. 26). Thus, education is established as both a right and a duty in the Declaration and must be implemented to build a culture of respect for human rights. This is the human right to human rights education (Baxi 1997, p. 144).

The Universal Declaration also requires education to “promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups,” and to “further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace” (UDHR, art. 26). Thus, the links between development, human rights and peace established in the Charter are also explicit in the Universal Declaration, which implements this vision, in part, through the right to human rights education.

The right to education, including human rights education, is further detailed in international human rights treaties, including the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The right to education in article 13 of the ICESCR is similar to that in article 26 of the Universal Declaration. It states that “education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (ICESCR 1966, art. 13). This provision also requires education to promote

understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and peoples for the maintenance of peace. Similarly, the CRC calls for the education of children to be directed to “the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations” (CRC 1989, art. 29). Notably, as of November 2015, there are 164 State parties to the ICESCR and 196 State parties to the CRC. In all of these countries, the right to human rights education is binding international law, meaning that the member states have a legal obligation to provide human rights education to everyone in their jurisdictions.

Thus, the obligation for human rights education is implied in the UN Charter and explicit in the Universal Declaration, the ICESCR and the CRC. Despite the clear obligation for human rights education, the UN human rights monitoring mechanisms have not given the subject great attention. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, responsible for monitoring implementation of the ICESCR, issued a General Comment on the right to education in 1999 to elaborate the content of ICESCR article 13 on the right to education. Although the Comment devotes two paragraphs to the objectives of education that are spelled out in the first section of article 13, it omits any reference to the specific aim of strengthening “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (ICESCR 1966, art 13). Instead it simply refers State parties to other international instruments, including the Plan of Action for the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, for further elaboration on the objectives of education. In 2001, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, responsible for monitoring implementation of the CRC, issued General Comment 1 on the aims of education outlined in CRC article 29 (CRC Committee 2001). This Comment devotes only one paragraph to human rights education, and although issued mid-way through the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2004), the Comment does not mention this initiative or the Plan of Action to implement it (CRC Committee 2001, para 15).

Similarly, the UN Special Procedures have given little attention to human rights education. Katarina Tomasevski, the first UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, referred to human rights education several times but did not address it in any depth in her reports (Tomasevski 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004). Vernor Muñoz Villalobos, the second Special Rapporteur on the right to education, included a short section on human rights education in his 2005 report in which he indicated that the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995–2005) received “lukewarm reception from the States” but nongovernmental organizations had implemented many initiatives that achieved excellent results (Villalobos 2005, para 110). In the same report, he emphasized that human rights education was necessary to quality education and that the World Programme for Human Rights Education would continue previous efforts to integrate human rights into education (Villalobos 2005, para 112). Aside from these few reports, UN human rights mechanisms have not focused on promoting or monitoring human rights education (MacNaughton 2015).

Nonetheless, it is now widely accepted that human rights education is a legal obligation of all UN members. In 2011, the UN General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, which reaffirmed

“that States are duty-bound, as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and other human rights instruments, to ensure that education is aimed at strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (UNGA 2012a, preamble). The UN human rights mechanisms, on the other hand, have not contributed significantly to monitoring human rights education, defining its content, or holding States accountable for their legal obligation to ensure universal human rights education. These mechanisms should bring greater attention to human rights education by emphasizing to governments their legal obligations to provide human rights education and by examining implementation in domestic policy and practice. Instead, they have left much of this work to other UN entities, in particular UNESCO and more recently the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (MacNaughton 2015).

Implementation of International Human Rights Education

In contrast to the international human rights mechanisms, over the past several decades, UNESCO, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, scholars and NGOs have initiated and carried out a variety of programmes to expand and enrich human rights education (Baxi 1997; Suarez and Ramirez 2004; Shiman 1986; Reardon 1995; Flowers 2000; The People’s Movement for Human Rights Learning n.d.; Human Rights Education Associates n.d.). They have developed definitions, produced guidance on the content of human rights education, developed curriculum guides and collected information on best practices. Consequently, a short history of the human rights education movement, which is largely distinct from the development of human rights law, is helpful to understanding the current state of human rights education on the international agenda (MacNaughton 2015).

Like the international human rights legal regime, the human rights education movement also began in the post-World War II era following the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. According to Morsink, “[h]uman rights education itself is the first and primary purpose of the Universal Declaration as a whole” (Morsink 1999, 326). As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the preamble to the Declaration states that “every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms” (UDHR 1948, preamble). Over the past 60 plus years, the human rights education movement has grown considerably, reflecting the development of the human rights movement more generally as well as the tremendous expansion of education in many countries during this period (Suarez and Ramirez 2004).

On the international level, UNESCO has been the leader on human rights education (Suarez and Ramirez 2004). In 1953, UNESCO established the Associated Schools Project – a network that continues today – to support experimental schools and activities aimed at promoting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the activities of the United Nations (Suarez and Ramirez 2004). Aside from the

UNESCO Associated School Project, there was little activity at the international level to promote human rights education until the mid-1970s (Suarez and Ramirez 2004). Then in 1974, UNESCO issued its *Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Cooperation and Peace and Education Relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedom on Human Rights Education*, which set out guiding principles for education curriculum at all stages (UNESCO 1974). UNESCO followed up by convening the First International Congress on the Teaching of Human Rights in Vienna in 1978 and the International Congress on Human Rights Teaching, Information, and Documentation in Malta in 1987 (UNESCO 1978, 1987).

Mirroring developments in international human rights law, after the end of the cold war, human rights education steadily became a broad-based international movement. In 1993, UNESCO held the third conference on human rights education, the International Congress on Education for Human Rights and Democracy, in Montreal (UNESCO 1993). The outcome of this conference was the *World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy*, which aimed “to create a culture of human rights and to develop democratic societies that enable individuals and groups to solve their disagreements and conflicts by the use of non-violent methods” (UNESCO 1993, p. 15). The *World Plan* established objectives and guidelines for human rights education at all levels of schooling, in non-formal settings and in contexts where rights are at high risk, including during armed conflicts, foreign occupation, transitions to democracy and natural disasters. It also created an agenda for research, teaching and learning materials and information networks.

Later the same year, the World Conference on Human Rights was held in Vienna. The outcome of that conference, the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action* (1993, para 81) recognized the *World Plan of Action on Education for Human Rights and Democracy* adopted earlier that year and recommended that countries develop specific programs and strategies to ensure wide implementation of human rights education. The UN General Assembly followed up on the Vienna Declaration by requesting that the Commission on Human Rights consider a proposal for a United Nations decade for human rights and that the Secretary-General transform such a proposal into a plan of action to be considered by the General Assembly (UNGA 1993). The following year, the General Assembly declared 1995–2004 to be the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education and welcomed the plan of action prepared by the Secretary-General (UNGA 1994).

In 2004, an evaluation of the UN Decade for Human Rights Education by the High Commissioner for Human Rights indicated that the Decade was only a mixed success. Unfortunately, only 28 of the 192 UN members responded to the questionnaire sent out by the Director-General of UNESCO and the Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights to gather data for a study on the Decade. As a result, there was too little data to be able to draw many conclusions. Nonetheless, several countries reported progress on integrating human rights into the school curriculum and training programs, and the respondents’ experiences and recommendations have provided valuable information for follow-up to the Decade (High Commissioner for Human Rights 2004).

On December 10, 2004, international human rights day, the UN General Assembly, followed up on the Decade for Human Rights Education by establishing the World Programme for Human Rights Education (UNGA 2005). The World Programme began on January 1, 2005, and has been structured in phases. The first phase (2005–2009) focused on human rights education in primary and secondary school systems. The second phase (2010–2014) focused on human rights education in higher education, as well as human rights training programs for teachers, civil servants, law enforcement officials and military personnel. The third phase (2015–2019) is focusing on strengthening the first two phases and promoting human rights training for media professionals and journalists (OHCHR n.d.a, n.d.b).

All of this activity and support at the international level has resulted in definitions, standards and guidelines for human rights education. In 2010, the High Commissioner for Human Rights reported that the international community has increasingly recognized “the fundamental contribution of human rights education to the realization of human rights” (HCHR 2010, para 1). Considering the history of international instruments from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) to the 2005 World Summit Outcome, the High Commissioner reported that the international community had agreed on a definition of human rights education “as any learning, education, training and information efforts aimed at building a universal culture of human rights (HCHR 2010, para 3). This includes:

- (a) The strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- (b) The full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity;
- (c) The promotion of understanding, tolerance, gender equality and friendship among all nations, indigenous peoples and minorities;
- (d) The enabling of all persons to participate effectively in a free and democratic society governed by the rule of law;
- (e) The building and maintenance of peace;
- (f) The promotion of people-centered sustainable development and social justice (HCHR 2010, para 3).

While human rights education involves acquiring knowledge of human rights and the mechanisms, it also means building the skills to apply them, developing values and behaviors that respect and uphold human rights, and taking action to promote respect for human rights (HCHR 2010, para 3).

The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training, adopted by the General Assembly in 2012, reflects many of the areas of consensus on human rights education developed since the Universal Declaration (1948) through the UN Decade on Human Rights Education (1995–2005) and the World Programme for Human Rights (2005–present) (UNGA 2012b). The Declaration calls on governments, civil society, private actors, and international and regional organizations to promote and ensure human rights awareness, education and training as a lifelong process toward the goal of developing a universal culture of human rights. Crucially, the Declaration reaffirms the legal and ethical obligation of all States to ensure that education is aimed at strengthening respect for human rights, and recognizes that human rights education is essential to promote universal respect for, and observance of, human rights (UNGA 2012a, preamble and art. 1).

The Impact of Human Rights Education

While there has been substantial activity on human rights education at the international level, there is also an emerging field of research documenting the diverse and interdependent impacts of human rights education on participants, including students, educators, families, and local and national communities. A brief overview of this research indicates that human rights education – as defined by consensus of the international community – may fulfill many of its promises. This overview is based on a variety of research evaluation studies undertaken in diverse geographical, political and social contexts. All of the studies reviewed here evaluated programs that (1) are self-defined as human rights education, or (2) have human rights at the nucleus of the learning experience.

The research on the impact of human rights education has indicated a dynamic and positive influence on the cognition, behavior and attitudes of the students who have participated in such programs (Sebba and Robinson 2010; Bajaj 2012; Tibbitts and Kirchschlaeger 2010; Morgan and Kitching 2006). For example, an evaluation in 31 primary and secondary schools in the UK of a 3-year programme on human rights education with a focus on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) as a “guide to life” had “a profound effect in the majority of schools” (Sebba and Robinson 2010, p. 3). The majority of schools reported the programme had a positive impact on the relationship between the students and staff by endorsing values such as respect, empathy and listening. In addition, the positive values were a contributing factor in the students’ ability to manage and resolve disputes among themselves, an increase in the use of rights respecting language and a decrease in bullying and shouting. The evaluation also found that students had improved attitudes to diversity, knew how to go about making informed decisions and became active citizens in their schools (Sebba and Robinson 2010).

Similarly, the influence of human rights education on the behavior and attitudes of students has been recorded in several developed countries, where student understanding of and engagement with human rights education has transformed into numerous positive outcomes. These outcomes include, among others, deepened moral development, increased awareness of human rights, positive attitudes towards a diverse society, empathy and respect for others, a sense of empowerment, respect for the environment, active participation in decision making, better management of conflicts, as well as creation of an environment that supports peers with learning disabilities. (Sebba and Robinson 2010; Tibbitts and Kirchschlaeger 2010). In Canada, teachers also raised awareness of local and national human rights issues related to indigenous peoples, including teaching students about relevant treaties and land claims (Froese-Germain and Riel 2013).

Research has also shown that human rights education has the potential to impact the lives of the students and their communities in developing countries. A study in Tamil Nadu, a state in India, reported results from observations, interviews and focus groups in 21 schools that offered human rights education (Bajaj 2012). The evidence showed impacts of human rights education on students between the ages

11–15 in four areas: “(1) intervening in situations of abuse, (2) reporting or threatening to report abuse, (3) spreading awareness of human rights, and (4) attitudinal and behavioral shifts at home or in school that were more aligned with human rights learning” (Bajaj 2012, p. 75). Importantly, the evidence indicated that in addition to acquiring knowledge about human rights, the students took action. Examples of such actions included trying to prevent the early marriage of peers and visiting a family in order to convince them to not kill their female baby (Bajaj 2012). In addition to directly intervening, students were able to identify abuse, and report it or threaten to report it to authorities. Students also shared their learning of human rights with siblings and parents and began to negotiate household norms that were previously based on gender and caste (Bajaj 2012).

Studies have shown that human rights education for adults has positive impacts as well. For example, a study on the engagement of women in human rights education in rural Turkey showed significant increases in their cognitive, affective and action competencies (Ikcaracan and Amadeo 2005 as cited in Tibbetts and Kirchsclaeger 2010). Importantly, they reported decreased emotional and physical violence from their partners, and increased self-confidence, which led in some cases to decisions to return to education or employment (Ikcaracan and Amadeo 2005 as cited in Tibbetts and Kirchsclaeger 2010). Likewise, in Argentina, women who participated in workshops on the right to healthcare demonstrated willingness to contribute to a human rights report by conveying their own testimonials, which led to new human rights programming for doctors and nurses as well as investigation into allegations made in the report (Chiarroti 2005 as cited in Tibbetts and Kirchsclaeger 2010).

Nevertheless, there remain challenges for human rights education. Evidence suggests that in elementary schools, some teachers perceive the concept of human rights as “abstract, complex and difficult to relate to the real life situations of students” (Wade 1994). Educators often lack in-depth knowledge and understanding of human rights and therefore may not be able to illustrate the ways that human rights apply in the contexts in which the teachers and students live, in their schools, their communities and internationally (Torney-Purta et al. 2008; Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center 2009). From the student perspective, there is strong interest in learning about human rights, although they may have little understanding of the field. In a survey of almost 3,000 students in the Los Angeles area, 73 % of the students indicated that they had learned about human rights in their classes, however, 71 % had not heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the foundational document of the international human rights movement (Human Rights Education Student Task Force 2011). The lack of an in-depth understanding of human rights prevents students from using this moral, analytical and legal framework to bring about positive change in their schools and in society (Human Rights Education Student Task Force 2011).

The potential of human rights education may be limited not only by lack of human rights knowledge but also by an authoritarian culture in which a critical approach to education is discouraged (Magendzo 2005). A study on human rights education in Latin America found that without this critical perspective on the edu-

cational system – the ability and inclination to ask the “why” and “how” – teachers became part of a system that reproduced inequities, social injustices and discrimination (Magendzo 2005). By partaking in human rights education as a framework for their own liberation, teachers examined how the educational system and curriculum could be transformed to empower people to claim their rights (Magendzo 2005). Similarly, the study in Tamil Nadu found. “When rigid hierarchies or entrenched corruption dampened the motivation of teachers and headmasters to take on a new [human rights education] program or be open to students’ demands about their rights, the programs seemed to remain at the level of a ‘time pass’” (Bajaj 2012).

A further challenge to the implementation of effective human rights education programs is the crucial need for scientifically rigorous evaluation of the outcomes. As Bajaj notes, we need greater empirical research on human rights education “rather than repetitive claims of its importance” (Bajaj 2012). Other challenges include the lack of qualified personnel and the absence of multi-stakeholder assessment and monitoring mechanisms to ensure the quality of human rights education. Further, human rights education initiatives are often of limited scope and timeframe as they are frequently implemented as projects with limited funding rather than integrated into the regular curriculum (Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center 2009). Finally, governments often hold human rights education as a lower priority in competition with other educational programs, such as initiatives for sustainable development (Asia-Pacific Human Rights Information Center 2009).

While evaluation of human rights education is still in its infancy, the initial studies have provided insight on the potential of human rights education to nurture an educational environment that empowers and transforms learning for both teachers and students. Moreover, in some contexts the influence of human rights education at school has extended to the family and community. Importantly, the transformative potential of human rights education should be enhanced from the very first phases of its formulation and planning by engaging vulnerable and marginalized groups within society in the process (Irish Human Rights Commission 2011). In addition, human rights education programs should be implemented and assessed on a continuous and reflective basis in the specific social context. To conclude, human rights education and transformative pedagogy can contribute to social justice by empowering the participants to self-reflect critically and act collectively for the realization of respect for the dignity and human rights of all.

Human Rights and International Development

Like the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Millennium Declaration, links peace and security, development and poverty eradication, and human rights and democracy into a holistic vision for a peaceful, prosperous and just world (UNGA 2000, para. 1). The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), drawn from the Millennium Declaration, were elaborated in 21 targets for improvements in education, health, gender equality, decent work, safe drinking

water, and other poverty reduction measures, as well as 58 indicators to measure progress toward these targets. This process of translating the Millennium Declaration into a limited number of goals and time-bound targets necessarily narrowed the aspirational vision in order to create a practical framework for an operational plan that could realistically be measured in countries around the world (MacNaughton 2015).

From 2001 to 2015, the MDGs, target and indicators served as the focus for global collaboration on international development policy, planning and monitoring. This framework was highly successful in gaining commitment from governments, international organizations and civil society to focus attention, expertise and funding on key human development targets. Nonetheless, the MDGs also received considerable criticism (Robinson 2010; Langford 2010; MacNaughton and Frey 2010; Saith 2006; Pogge 2004). Among the critiques was the failure of the MDGs to include, or even align with, the international human rights laws to which State parties have committed themselves (OHCHR 2008). For example, under MDG 1, the target was to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people who suffered from hunger. Human rights law, however, requires States to ensure immediately a minimum level of all economic and social rights, including the right to food (CESCR 1990).

The MDG target for education also received criticism from the human rights community. MDG 2 was to “achieve universal education,” and the target for this goal was to “ensure that, by 2015 children everywhere, boys and girls alike, would be able to complete a full course of primary schooling” (UNGA 2001, p. 56). There were two main criticisms of this target. First, under international human rights law, as expressed in both the ICESCR and the CRC, States must ensure that primary education is both free and compulsory (ICESCR 1966, art. 13; CRC 1989, art. 28). The MDG education goal and target failed to incorporate these human rights norms. Second, universal primary education is an immediate obligation of the countries that are parties to the ICESCR, and countries that do not provide free and compulsory primary education to all at the time that they ratify the ICESCR must undertake to prepare a plan to do so within a reasonable number of years (ICESCR 1966, art. 14). As Langford (2010) has argued, 15 years is definitely not a reasonable period of time to comply with this immediate obligation.

Human rights scholars and practitioners, as well as others, have also criticized (1) the process by which the goals and targets were selected, largely by the global north – lack of participation (Hulme 2007; OHCHR 2008); (2) the lack of any focus on equality or marginalized groups – failure to integrate equality and nondiscrimination (Langford 2010); (3) the disconnect between some targets and the indicators intended to measure progress toward them – lack of transparency (MacNaughton and Frey 2010); and (4) the failure to address poverty in high- and middle-income countries – not universal (Saith 2006; OHCHR 2008). There were also calls for greater accountability as we neared the 2015 deadline for achieving many targets, and it became clear that many would not be met (OHCHR and CESR 2013). In sum, the criticisms were that the MDGs, targets and indicators did not align with international human rights legal obligations to which the States had committed themselves, and they did not reflect the human rights principles of universality, participation, transparency, equality and nondiscrimination and accountability (MacNaughton 2015).

Linking Law, Education and Development Through Human Rights

Discussions on the post-2015 development agenda and the promulgation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aimed to address these deficiencies. Recommendations gleaned from discussions in both development and human rights communities included: (1) the process of selecting new goals and targets must be less top down and more participatory (Langford 2010; Burnett and Felsman 2012), (2) targets must focus on reducing inequality, including marginalized groups and ending discrimination (Robinson 2010; 17 Special Procedures 2013; Fukuda-Parr 2010), (3) indicators must clearly measure progress toward the targets (MacNaughton and Frey 2010), (4) mechanisms of accountability must be strengthened (OHCHR and CESR 2013), and (5) time-bound targets must apply to both developed and developing countries (Langford 2010; Burnett and Felsman 2012). These five concerns – participation, transparency, equality, accountability and universality – are key human rights principles that were not adequately incorporated into the MDG framework. Not surprisingly, to meet these concerns, civil society called for integrating human rights into the post-2015 international development agenda (Pillay 2013).

Human rights education is one strategy for applying human rights to development policy and practice (Marks 2008) that might fit well into the SDG framework. While human rights education has been described as a human right, a global movement (Tibbitts 2008), and a transformative pedagogy (Marks 2008), it is also considered as a strategy for development (Dias 1997). As Dias (2007, p. 52) explains, “human rights provide the rationale for development, the normative framework for development, and the criteria by which those who undertake development can be held accountable.” UNESCO and the OHCHR have defined human rights education simply as “education, training and information aimed at building a universal culture of human rights” (UNESCO and OHCHR 2006, p. 12). At its core, human rights education seeks to raise awareness of human rights and promote a culture that encourages individuals to demand their own rights and to respect the rights of others (UNGA 2012b).

In this context, universal comprehensive human rights education would have been a suitable goal for the post-2015 international development agenda. Universal human rights education, mandated during the free and compulsory years of schooling, as a goal would have effectively integrated human rights into the Sustainable Development Goals framework. Such a goal is particularly well suited for the global development agenda as universal human rights education furthers one of the four main purposes of the United Nations as set out in article 1 of the UN Charter, namely, to promote respect for, and observance, of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. Moreover, governments in almost all countries have international legal and ethical obligations to provide free and compulsory primary education that aims to promote the realization of human rights, as set forth in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent international human rights treaties.

In addition to the legal and ethical obligations to provide universal human rights education, universal human rights education correlates to all three components of the human rights-based approach to development policy and practice, promoted by the United Nations, as elaborated in the UN Interagency Common Understanding of a Human Rights-Based Approach to Development Cooperation (United Nations 2003). Following this approach, the goal of universal human rights education is (1) based on an explicit human rights framework and will further the realization of these rights, (2) implemented in a manner that is guided by human rights principles, including universality, equality, participation, transparency and accountability, and (3) contributes to building the capacities of rights holders to demand their rights and duty bearers to meet their obligations. Additionally, a goal of universal human rights education has the potential to unite distinct communities – in human rights education, human rights law and human development – toward a unified effort, with funding and other support, for the promotion and protection of human rights. Finally, universal human rights education is a goal that addresses a gap in both developed and developing countries, bringing a more balanced approach to the post-2015 global agenda. By responding to many of the criticisms about the MDGs and fulfilling the elements of a human rights-based approach to development, universal human rights education should have been a strong candidate to be an SDG or an SDG target.

In September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the SDGs as the new framework for the post-2015 development agenda, including 17 goals and 169 targets (UNGA 2015). One of the 17 goals addresses education; it is to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning and opportunities for all” (UNGA 2015). The post-2015 framework also enumerates ten targets to measure progress toward this multi-faceted goal. One of the targets addresses human rights, although somewhat buried among other aims of education. The target states: “By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture’s contribution to sustainable development” (UNGA 2015). This single reference to human rights in the SDG framework, in a multi-faceted and therefore largely unmanageable target, is certainly inadequate to respond to the demands for integrating human rights fully into the post-2015 international development agenda.

In contrast to the adopted target, a more appropriate target for achieving the legal obligation for universal human rights education would have been: “By 2020, ensure that children everywhere receive comprehensive human rights education – as defined by the World Programme on Human Rights Education – during every year of their free and compulsory schooling” (MacNaughton 2015, p. 567). Although not adopted as a stand-alone goal or target, universal and comprehensive human rights education is the means to bring together distinct communities, expertise, funding and energies to build a global culture of human rights in which people may hold their governments accountable for ending poverty and realizing human rights for all.

Conclusion

Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, there has been tremendous progress in conceptualizing and implementing human rights and human rights education. Despite this progress, there remain challenges and gaps. One of the most evident is the lack of any serious system of accountability for the legal and ethical obligation to ensure universal human rights education. This gap could be partially filled by the UN human rights mechanisms, including the human rights treaty bodies, which could take a more active role in defining the legal obligations that States have in implementing universal human rights education. The human rights mechanisms could also hold States to account for their failures to ensure comprehensive and meaningful human rights education throughout the free and compulsory school years. Just as importantly, including universal human rights education as a Sustainable Development Goal would have brought (1) greater attention, efforts, and funding to the development and delivery of human rights curriculum that is context specific, (2) increased research and evaluation of such programs, and (3) greater accountability through continuous monitoring of the post-2015 global development agenda. The multi-faceted target that includes human rights education – one of 169 SDG targets – fails to make human rights central to the SDG framework. Universal human rights education – in all the free and compulsory years of schooling – is the goal we need to move toward eliminating all forms of poverty and creating a global human rights culture.

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Globalisation, Human Rights Education and Reforms

Zajda, J.; Ozdowski, S. (Eds.)

2017, XX, 275 p. 1 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-94-024-0870-6