



Session 1:

Grassroots empowerment and child rights movement

On the 14th of June 2007, eleven resource persons from equalinrights' online database engaged in an online discussion on grassroots empowerment and the child rights movement. The following questions were the focus of this one-day debate:

1. How can we help promote grassroots empowerment that integrates all community members, including marginalized groups such as women, children or minorities?
2. In particular, what lessons can we learn from the child rights movement, which has seen successes overcoming traditional attitudes towards children and children's role in the community?
3. Can rights-based strategies used by child rights practitioners be successfully adapted to other issues, such as gender equity?

The discussion was facilitated by Upala Devi Banerjee (UNESCO) and reported by Megan Brown (equalinrights). For a complete list of participants, see the table. This paper is a report of the discussions that took place.

The role of empowerment using HRB strategies in effecting policy-level changes and policy implementation

Empowerment, as the first round of email discussions on these issues reveal, can be considered both the means and the end. As Daniel states, empowerment encompasses the capacity development strategies that "equip individuals with a sophisticated understanding of human rights concepts, national and international norms, constitutional and other legal protections, democracy and its key institutions, empowering them to provide local leadership in the defence, protection and promotion of human rights" or, as Batra adds, in "ensuring access to information".

The vulnerable and the marginalized are then empowered to fight for and claim their rights. Such a strategy also ensures that rights claimed and policies influenced are viable and sustainable in the long run. Moreover, in such a process, rights holders (with a focus on those who are the most marginalized, as Ohenjo emphasizes) are capacitated to participate and gain some form of ownership over the development process. And since Appeldorn and Farrugia

Participants of the 14 th of June Discussion	
Name	Organisation
Allen Sophia Asimwe	IHRN East Africa
Meenakshi Batra	War Child
Megan Brown (Rapporteur)	Equalinrights
Christopher Daniel	Goodwill Social Work Centre
Upala Devi Banerjee (Facilitator)	UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Office
Ruth Farrugia	University of Malta
Kapila Gureja	Consultant
Martha Llanos	Consultant
Anthony Wafula Nyongesa	Radio producer/ HR consultant
Nyang'ori Ohenjo	Consultant
Henk van Apeldoorn	Consultant
Sonal Zaveri	Center for Research & Development

rightly state that “the key is enforcement”, any empowerment strategy would have to keep in mind that using such empowerment should target both policy change and implementation/enforcement.

As all participants note, however, the challenges remain enormous for fostering grassroots empowerment to bring about community-focused and sustainable policy and developmental changes and implementation. Examples of these challenges include: elite capture of power by the most powerful in the village, “token” participation of the most vulnerable and the marginalized, the transformation of community volunteers into parallel power structures (Asiimwe), dominant patriarchal and traditional cultural mores that lead to a “lack of voice in household affairs” (for Kenya children, for instance, as Wafula noted). “Changing mindsets” (Zaveri) also is a key challenge that can take a very long time, especially since changes in society are gradual, qualitative and, hence, difficult to measure. Moreover, “policy changes and resultant implementation can often be top-down” (Asiimwe) or “implementation can be flawed” (Batra).

As Batra notes, “the realisation that development is a right and not a favour done to the people by the state and the powerful” is central to the empowerment process. There are other crucial factors and strategies that contribute to building and sustaining a sense of empowerment, so that it becomes “internally facilitated from being externally facilitated” (Batra). Several participants, including Farrugia and Asiimwe posed questions about how to support empowerment or capacity building when a community is unmotivated or doesn’t see the benefit, and no local advocate comes forward. How can one stimulate demand for change? Batra’s response is negotiation, sharing information, exposure to issues and helping create a vision – all key elements of creating “demand for something that from our point of view might be relevant”. On the issue of how to define meaningful participation, Batra emphasized, “Effective participation is not just about hearing a wish list [from a community]...it’s about negotiation as well.”

Others queried about how to change attitudes of the wider community or public, in order to build a broad base of support. Sensitising key duty bearers in communities, not just those in leadership positions, was highlighted (Wafula), as was the technique used to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS – making sure the information is everywhere and in many different formats (Apeldoorn). Other examples include the role of enabling legislation like the “Right to Information Act in India” (Batra) or accessing the justice system. An example stressed by Apeldoorn, Batra, Wafula and Ohenjo is the role of media in highlighting human rights related successes. Ohenjo emphasized the benefit of approaching journalists as partners in the process, rather than “news conveyors” development practitioners use to get out their message. He suggests they “should actively participate in programming and implementation of [HRB] strategies,” learning about the issues first-hand.¹ While Banerjee suggests targeting specific journalists with “significant spheres of influence”, Wafula counters that it could backfire when media house change staff, suggesting periodic trainings and interaction with a broader base of journalists is a more sustainable approach.

Banerjee proposed three tiers of focused capacity development based on international treaties and norms, as well as national constitutions and laws, which can build and sustain empowerment levels to help advocate for HRB policy changes and policy implementation:

- The first level of strategy addresses specific community sub-group capacity needs, e.g., Dalits in Nepal fighting oppressive social practices and participating in social audits; HIV-positive women advocating for gender-specific policies; poor people in India participating in public hearings.
- The second level of the strategy focuses on the role of the catalytic nurturer or the mid-level duty bearer such as civil society groups or the media. These duty bearers, as the discussions demonstrate, have a vital role to play in effecting policy level changes. For example, Daniel contributed the idea of developing a “network of human rights animators, capable of training and communicating fundamental concepts of human dignity and rights

¹ For example, “during the Great Trek Campaign for the Kenya Pastoralist Week in 2005, journalists were enlisted as participants and taken care of like any other participant during the whole period of the campaign. This develops... a sense of belonging” (Ohenjo).

within their communities, and capable of collecting and analysing information on human rights violations on a local and regional level”.

- Finally, the last level addresses the role of both state and non-state institutions – such as the informal justice systems in Afghanistan or Indonesia, or “community laws [that] play a major role” in some Islamic countries (Assimwe) – in influencing the realisation of rights.

A key element to consider in this regard would be how to best relate local needs and priorities to the international framework of rights, which serves as the basis for this three-tier strategy, so that communities do not feel that top-down ideas are being imposed on them.

The Integration of Child Rights into Developmental Programming

On this issue, discussions centred on the “fatigue” surrounding the many thematic or sector-specific areas that need to be mainstreamed while developing a programme, instances being gender, environment or HIV/AIDS. At the same time, it was suggested by some like Batra and Zaveri that a “child scan” to “enable analysis of programmes from a children’s perspective was necessary”.

Banerjee notes that in her work in the UN, using HRBA has been mandated for all programming. HRBD has been found to be the most effective and sustainable since it enables development practitioners to emphasize more than just the traditional quantitative programme outputs, also focusing on quality and rights realisation of highly vulnerable and marginalized target groups. Viewed and implemented using HRBA, even a programme like “agriculture, ...seen as an adult sector but which has millions of children working there” (Batra), would have to identify the most marginalized and vulnerable, considering both adults and children. The programme could then be designed accordingly to target the needs of specific sub-group. This would then lead to more effective realisation of rights, for example, the right to a livelihood, acceptable work conditions for work, fair and equal wages (for the adults) and the right to be free from exploitation and child labour and to go to school (for children).

The role of developing specific indicators to build and measure empowerment levels of both adults and children (Farrugia) to contribute to child rights realisation was also brought up. Banerjee stated that while defining and developing human rights indicators is a complex process, this is underway and taken very seriously within the UN with the intention of strengthening rights-based programming in various sectors.² Using rights-based indicators (that focus on principles of empowerment, participation, accountability, non-discrimination and linkages to human rights standards) to identify rights violations of a particular highly vulnerable and marginalized group³ and then developing appropriate programming responses are important topics for further inquiry.

Concrete strategies and tools for HRBD

Participants of the online discussion on empowerment and the integration of Child Rights into development programming suggested the following strategies for the advancement of HRBD:

- Working with media, approaching them as partners/stakeholders to impact policy changes and resultant implementation

² Banerjee note that, for example, in the UN, rights-based indicators are used, *firstly*, to identify the specific components of a right;² *secondly*, to set national benchmarks or targets of achievement; *thirdly*, to identify the concomitant duties in terms of substantive content, time frame, and who the duty-bearers are. *Additionally*, using such indicators necessitates measuring both conduct and result. The former may involve performance standards, e.g., quality of a teacher’s performance. The latter necessitates desegregation of data because human rights are for all irrespective of race, religion, gender, age, etc. From the above, there is a need to collect data and human rights information and then analyse it.

³ E.g., children or minorities, or even sub-groups within these groups, for instance, children of even domestic servants who are exploited (Gureja).

- Multi-tiered approach to capacity building that focuses on different levels of stakeholders, using international treaties and conventions as the norm and connecting with local contexts and priorities
- Simplifying HR concepts to make them more accessible
- Choosing strategic language to get people on board with a project/issue, also choosing “easier” issues to address first while still building community support for change, then tackling “sticky” issues later on
- Using “rights-based” tools like i) Social audits to enlist stakeholder participation and accountability or ii) Community/civil society projects with a peer-monitoring element
- Identifying and sharing community-level solutions that have successfully addressed ongoing policy problems