



*Abolishing Poverty Through the
International Human Rights Framework:
Towards an Integrated Strategy for the
Social and Human Sciences*

Consultation

Bergen, Norway, 5-6 June 2003

Organised by CROP
for UNESCO,
Sector for the Social
and Human Sciences



Comparative Research Programme on Poverty

UNESCO Sector for the Social and Human Sciences/CROP

Consultation, Bergen, Norway, 5-6 June 2003

on the draft document

“Abolishing Poverty Through the International Human Rights Framework:

Towards an Integrated Strategy for the Social and Human Sciences”

(Draft V.3 24.03.03)

Report

0. Introduction

On the initiative of Pierre Sané, Assistant Director-General of UNESCO, the Comparative Research Programme on Poverty (CROP)¹ organised a scientific Consultation in Bergen, Norway from 5-6 June, 2003. The theme of the Consultation was the draft document produced by the UNESCO Sector for Social and Human Sciences, outlining a new strategy for the abolishment of poverty through the international human rights framework.

15 international specialists on poverty and human rights were invited to the Consultation. 2 observers (from NORAD and the Norwegian National Commission for UNESCO) also participated, together with 3 representatives from the UNESCO Sector for Social and Human Sciences and 2 representatives from the CROP Secretariat.²

The Consultation was chaired by Pierre Sané and Else Øyen, CROP.

The following report is based on the contributions of the participants during the discussions, as well as other relevant material brought to the attention of the CROP Secretariat by members of the Consultation group. CROP wants to thank all participants for their valuable contributions.

CROP bears the sole responsibility for the final contents of the Report.

¹ For more information on CROP, see <http://www.crop.org>.

² For a full list of the participants, see App. 2.

1. The draft document

The draft document, *Abolishing Poverty Through the International Human Rights Framework: Towards an Integrated Strategy for the Social and Human Sciences*, contains proposals for reorienting UNESCO's contribution to the UN System Wide effort to attain the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by year 2015. This is in accordance with the UN Secretary General's request that all Specialised Agencies and Funds streamline their programming and budgeting so as to meet the MDGs.

The document outlines the special role and responsibility of UNESCO, being endowed with an ethical mandate within the UN system, to address the problem of poverty as a moral responsibility and ethical necessity that must implicate the world community. The UN Community has already accepted that poverty is *a denial of all human rights*³. UNESCO infers from this that poverty is a *violation* of human rights and, as such, must be considered *illegal*, according to international law.

The insight that poverty is a denial of all human rights, though accepted both by the UN system and by the international community working with poverty reduction, still has not moved far beyond the stage of rhetoric. UNESCO therefore sees it as its special task, within the MDG process, to launch a concerted global campaign to influence the UN system, the political will of governments and NGOs to internalise the notion that *poverty is a violation of human rights*, and to raise national and international awareness of the political implications of this fundamental paradigmatic shift.

As an intellectual agency, UNESCO also sees it as part of its task to engage the international research community in providing new knowledge conducive to the new paradigm. The theoretical basis for regarding poverty as a violation of human rights should be further substantiated and relevant knowledge must be provided for states and the international community to construct legal instruments and new policy approaches needed to achieve the ultimate goal of poverty abolishment.

2. General reactions to the draft document

The Consultation participants applauded the UNESCO initiative. In the words of Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed: "It is a well thought out document, very radical in its approach and takes into consideration the experience of various organizations within the UN system that address the issue of poverty."⁴ It was especially appreciated that the document moves away from the narrow focus on income poverty and quantitative analysis towards a multi-dimensional view of poverty, creating heightened awareness of the injustice of poverty as *a sustained and chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights*.

³ The UN General assembly affirmed this position when it approved a resolution from the UN Human Rights Commission stating that poverty is a denial of all human rights.

⁴ Ahmed, Abdel Ghaffar M., *Note to the Consultation*, p. 1

The participants supported the view that more knowledge is needed to assess the implications of accepting a human rights violation approach to poverty, both theoretically and in terms of legal implications, policy implementation and monitoring systems.

The clear obligation of UNESCO to engage in the proposed campaign, given its international ethical and intellectual mandate, was not questioned. However, several warnings were given as to the scope and general design of the project.

Generally, a more *focussed* approach was recommended, concentrating efforts on a few key objectives within the reach of UNESCO's competence and resources. Many other organisations are already working on questions of human rights and poverty, and it is important that UNESCO co-operates closely with as many of these organisations as possible, not to duplicate their work. The recommendation was for UNESCO to concentrate on activities that will bring *added value* to the quest for world-wide poverty abolition, most notably to take the lead in demonstrating the legal and political implications of a human rights violation approach to the abolishment of poverty.

Recommendations to UNESCO:

- *To concentrate its work on clarifying the legal and political implications of using the human rights violation framework to achieve poverty abolition, and what this means in terms of legal and political action.*
- *To work closely with other bodies and organisations, within and outside the UN system, to minimise duplication of projects.*

3. Political implications of a human rights approach to the abolishment of poverty

The aim of the UNESCO campaign is to give *power to the powerless poor* through utilising the international human rights regime, and thus provide an international *political* and *legal* basis for a redistribution of resources and influence.

The moral obligation entailed in the human rights framework is the acknowledgment that a human rights exist, *a priori*, independently of itself. The establishment of poverty as a violation of human rights thereby becomes a powerful moral statement that poverty can never be accepted by *any* legal or political system claiming moral legitimacy, i.e. the moral authority to enforce their law and orders. Politically this means that the reduction of poverty *cannot* primarily be considered a question of available economic resources, but must be seen as a question of *political will* and *legitimacy* and an issue under domestic and international law.

It follows from this that the adoption of policies and strategies for the abolishment of poverty is imperative for any government to be accepted as politically *legitimate*, both at home and in international relations and negotiations. How this assertion that violations of human rights are related to *states' claim to legitimacy* and what consequences this should have for the

regulation of inter-state relationships and the organisation of the international community, is yet to be established. On state level, however, it clearly implies that donors and national and international NGOs should support endeavours of governments to respect, protect and implement the rights of their citizens. For the UNESCO campaign to succeed it is therefore paramount to collaborate closely with individual governments and NGOs from the very start of the programme.

Knowledge building and information dissemination are key factors to the success of the campaign, in order to create *awareness* of the problems at stake. As pointed out by Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed, “Awareness rising to circumvent local, national and global economic and other injustices is a basic requirement for any intervention program targeted towards abolishing poverty.”⁵

One of the areas where raising awareness is essential, is the international economic order. This order has to be described and analysed since it contributes significantly to the production and reproduction of poverty. It must be exposed where it represents obstacles in the realisation of economic, social, political and cultural rights of the poor in local and national contexts.

Another area that needs to be particularly targeted is the role of *different forms* of governance and the occurrence of poverty.⁶ More knowledge is needed to understand how different forms of authoritarian and democratic regimes function with respect to realizing the economic, social, political and cultural rights of the poor. Political *practice* must be analysed to unravel what actual practices are conducive or not conducive to providing equal rights for the poor, in order to create awareness of what actually constitutes *good governance* as a means to achieve the aim of poverty abolishment within the human rights framework

The shift of focus from poverty reduction as a question of economic development, to poverty as a violation of human rights entailing a *political* obligation on individual states and the international community, challenges the existing national and global power structures.

This obvious threat to the existing international order is bound to meet resistance by powerful elites on national and international levels, and much is likely to be done to marginalise the work. It is therefore of utmost importance that research knowledge aimed at substantiating the claims on behalf of the powerless, is strongly focussed and *rigorously substantiated*.

Recommendations to UNESCO:

- *To create awareness of the political implications of conceiving poverty as a violation of human rights, by identifying governmental and non-governmental action required to contribute to the realisation of this Millenium Development Goal.*
- *To identify and understand better those forces that are counteractive to the implementation of human rights in poverty reduction.*

⁵ Ahmed, Abdel Ghaffar M., *Note to the Consultation*, p. 4

⁶ “Considering poverty a violation of human rights leads to a confrontation with the status-quo in which poverty is rooted. In today’s world poverty is more pronounced in states under authoritarian regimes and there are many of those under the UN umbrella. The injustice imposed by such regimes leads to the impoverishment of large sectors of the population. This has to be addressed and it is here where the feasibility of the proposed framework will be questioned and subjected to test”, Ahmed, Abdel Ghaffar M, *Ibid*.

- *To secure that the proposed strategy of using the human rights framework to obtain the abolishment of poverty is strongly supported by rigorously substantiated scientific research.*

4. Legal obligations

Though based on a powerful moral argument, it is clear that the implementation of policies to abolish poverty cannot depend on “good will” alone. The added value of the UNESCO campaign lies mainly in the *legal obligations* that follow from a rights-based approach.

However, the shift from considering poverty as a condition that should not be accepted by any legal or political system claiming moral legitimacy, to poverty as a violation of human rights that *can be prevented* by legal regulation, is not unproblematic.

Legal systems are, *per definition*, rigid systems requiring hard evidence to perform, and legal categories may even constitute a hindrance to new thinking in a short and medium term perspective. Legal powers have often been seen to maintain power for the rich and those who have assets to be protected, rather than defending the powerless.

Nonetheless, most of the individual human rights already given a legal foundation in the international Declarations and Conventions on Human Rights have both moral and legal aspects, and the system as such should therefore in principle provide no hindrance to include the right “not to be poor” as a basic human right to be tried by courts of law, operationalised as breaches of a series of specified rights under international law (for instance right to adequate food and clean water, right to health provisions, habeas corpus, political freedoms, etc.).

It is clear, though, that poverty is more than a breach of the rights of individuals, as normally tried in cases of human rights violations. Poverty is primarily a *structural* human rights violation, where relations of dominance and control deprive people of having their basic human rights fulfilled. Actions that may be considered *illegal* in so far as they contribute to produce or sustain poverty for larger or smaller groups within nations, call for *collective action* (‘actio popularis’) to be efficiently handled by the law.

While it is the responsibility of the UN High Commissioner for human rights and national and international courts of law to develop the legal frameworks of international human rights, UNESCO’s role should be to help provide relevant research information and feed it into the national and international legal and political systems by:

- 1) showing *how* existing human rights laws are or are not used to protect the interests of the poor,
- 2) evaluating whether existing human rights law needs to be complemented to constitute a sufficiently strong bulwark against violations of the rights of the poor,
- 3) evaluating the need for special legal *enforcement* mechanisms to secure the rights of the poor, and
- 4) assisting NGOs and other civil society groups in executing *collective action* to claim the (legal) rights of the poor.

Central in this approach must be to assess the *accessibility* for the poor to existing legal rules and collect information on relevant *court cases* to ascertain what has already been, or is being done, on national and global basis in this field.

It is also necessary to collect and analyse human rights *case-law* relevant to studies that explore situations and cases of poverty as human rights violations.

It is especially important to collect information on how existing human rights law is reflected in *national* constitutional legislation. If national legislation is not in conformity with international law, a system must be created to put pressure on governments to change their legislation and application of law accordingly.

To fulfil the *legal* obligation inherent in the notion of poverty as a violation of human rights it is above all necessary to produce hard evidence on what these violations *are*, and to hold duty-bearers accountable. Ways must be found to empower the poor and other relevant actors to be able to exert their rights and to secure a legal and political framework that is strong enough to force the duty-bearers to fulfil their duties.

Recommendations to UNESCO:

- *To collect systematic information on court cases, national and international, relevant to poverty as a question of human rights.*
- *To collect systematic information on human rights case-law already in existence on national and international level.*
- *To take an active role in promoting collective action (the legal ‘actio popularis’.)*
- *To develop a catalogue of concrete examples of poverty as a human rights violation to establish a common understanding of what these violations are and to identify the duty-bearers to be held responsible.*

5. Participation of the poor and local ownership

Abolishing poverty through the human rights framework recognises that rights entail *individual involvement*, also on the part of the poor. The poor themselves can be seen as primary actors in their own cause and their own right. As stated in article 2 of the UN Declaration on the Right to Development, the human person is the central subject of development processes and should be the active participant and beneficiary of development (and the right to development as a process).

The Consultation participants argued the need for the UNESCO campaign to have a stronger focus on securing the *participation of the poor* in the analysis and implementation of policies and strategies needed for the abolishment of poverty, and emphasized the need for *local ownership* to poverty abolishment programmes. An important element of the campaign should be to set objectives for national governments on how to include the poor in policy formulation.⁷

⁷ “For example, the drafting of a national anti-poverty declaration or statement with the participation of the poor, the enactment of legislation and the creation of a monitoring mechanism with the participation of the poor”, McCarthy, Thomas E., *Paper prepared for the UNESCO Consultation*, p. 8.

The poor are as different from each other as are the non-poor members of more affluent societies. Poverty takes different forms and shapes in different nations and cultures, depending on historical background, resource availability and distribution, as well as social, political, religious and cultural factors. The notion of individual human rights as advocated by the international community may be partly alien to certain cultures. It is therefore of particular importance to construct and deconstruct poverty in every different environment so that the problems of poverty perceived by members of poverty-stricken societies are properly understood within a framework of mutual dignity and respect.

It follows from this that comparative analysis of poverty as human rights violations across nations and cultures should analytically construct and deconstruct poverty in different economic, social, cultural and political contexts. Only then can lessons be learned for the general application of the human rights framework in the development of policies aimed at the abolition of poverty.

Recommendations to UNESCO:

- *To facilitate equal participation (partnership) of the poor in the development of pro-poor policies at local, national and international levels.*
- *To recognize and take into account the heterogeneity of the poor, in terms of historical background, resource availability and distribution, as well as social, political, religious and cultural factors.*

6. Competency and Advocacy

A significant aspect of the existing national and international order is that affluent groups and states, as well as NGOs and private enterprises, enjoy great advantages in bargaining power, knowledge and expertise. This problem can only be remedied by developing corresponding expertise in poor countries through the education of local negotiators and the establishment of an *independent international system* of advocacy and active support. The proposed UNESCO Chairs could be used not only “to study the problems related to poverty as a violation of human rights” and “support interdisciplinary research and improve curriculum in this area”⁸, but also be given an explicit mandate to act as ‘ombudsmen’ for poor groups and states and organise local competence building to strengthen the poor countries’ bargaining power. Under the condition that the UNESCO Chairs are provided with sufficient resources to fulfil such a mission, this could prove one of the more important inputs of UNESCO to the MDG Campaign.

Many parts of the UN system, as well as many NGOs and social movements are already heavily engaged in helping the poor getting out of their impoverished conditions. These already existing advocates of the poor must be involved as partners in the UNESCO strategy both as informants on infringements of the rights of the poor, receivers of information on how to use the existing legal system to acquire justice for the poor, and as organisers of contact meetings between poor groups and responsible political authorities.

⁸ Draft V.3.24/03/03, pt. 44.

In nurturing competency and advocacy the emphasis should be put on *information, dialogue* and *responsibility*. Conferences should be held to disseminate knowledge to all parties involved. Justice bearers (police, lawyers, judges, and others), as well as politicians, should be especially targeted.

Advocacy must also focus on the issue of *gender blindness* that characterizes different institutions at local, national, regional and international levels. It was noted in the Consultation that the document falls short of addressing this issue adequately.

Recommendations to UNESCO:

- *To establish a number of UNESCO Chairs endowed with the necessary resources to also act as ‘ombudsmen’ for poor groups and states.*
- *To organise meetings across all levels of society to raise public awareness of the implications of using the human rights framework to abolish poverty.*
- *To raise awareness of gender issues and secure active participation of women on all levels in the campaign.*
- *To strengthen the poor countries’ own bargaining power by initiating and supporting local programmes for specialist competence-building within these states.*

7. Political implementation of a moral imperative

The argument that the abolishment of poverty rests on a *moral imperative* for the whole of humanity, raises some fundamental problems as to *how* and *at what speed* it is morally acceptable to institute the new order required to obtain the stated goal.

While international human rights conventions presuppose that rights are universally applicable, inalienable and indivisible, they recognise that in country contexts their full realisation can only be progressively achieved (cf. for instance Article 2 of the UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights). This, however, does not exempt the state from taking *immediate* steps to implement rights progressively, in particular by introducing legal reforms and drawing up political strategies for human rights realisation. This includes plans to mobilise all available domestic resources to the “maximum benefit” for rights implementation. It also implies a state obligation to trace and mobilise international resources, for instance through development partnerships.

It is equally clear that the present global distribution of resources does not permit an immediate realisation of all the stated goals, as for example the MDGs. Hence, the international community accepts that human rights, should be realised *progressively, over a period of time*. However, to be credible to the world community, progressive realisation must be planned (and *foreseeable*), the process must be *monitorable* and the results must be *visible*.

Fundamentally, this becomes a question of the *credibility* of the UN system. It is therefore of the utmost importance that UNESCO takes a very firm stand as to how the campaign to abolish poverty through the international human rights framework is to be implemented and monitored.

Key concepts must be defined and worked out for operationalisation, demanding a large input of scientific effort and strategic thinking. Time-tables of *progressive realisation* must be developed, taking into account the different resources available in different states. Ways must be found to calculate what are the *maximum available resources* in each and every country. This should primarily be done by the states themselves, but many of them will need assistance to acquire the necessary data to do the calculations. Tough *priorities* will have to be made, possibly in direct conflict with governments' own immediate priorities. The whole process must be *transparent* and *accountable*, for the population and the whole world to see.

To be able to monitor the process adequately more analytical work is urgently needed to define and operationalise human rights concepts such as:

- *human rights indicators and benchmarks*,
- *human rights 'core obligations'*, and
- *human rights 'minimum thresholds'*.

Above all, there is the need to develop instruments for *impact assessments*. In the words of Paul Hunt⁹ :

"Before a State introduces a new law or policy it has to ensure that the new initiative is consistent with its existing national and international legal obligations, including those relating to human rights. If a State has adopted poverty reduction as its major policy objective, it must ensure that any new law or policy is consistent with that policy goal. Rigorous policy-making demands an analysis of the distributional impact of reforms on the well-being of different groups in society, especially the poor and vulnerable. Such an analysis has to consider – before, during and after implementation of any relevant policy intervention – the intended and unintended consequences of the initiative, with a view to identifying appropriate mitigating or other measures. This requirement of socially responsible impact analysis applies to States and other actors in the context of national and international policies."

As Paul Hunt also points out in his Report there are obstacles to the preparation of rigorous impact analyses, most notably *data limitations*, *weak national capacity* and *lack of donor coordination*. However, most of the countries in the North regularly do impact assessments before and after introducing new policy measures, so the instruments are already there and can be adjusted to meet the (may be) special needs of the less affluent states. The World Bank has also recently prepared a lengthy draft *User's Guide to Poverty and Social Impact Analysis*. The contribution of UNESCO should be to undertake the development of a system of 'poverty impact assessment' especially tailored to meet the need for monitoring the process of *poverty abolishment within a human rights violation framework*, in affluent as well as in the poorer states.

For any state to have a consistent pro-poor policy, *policy coherence* is a central problem. This problem can only be alleviated by maintaining relevant data bases for carrying out statistical analyses and close co-ordination of the different actors involved. In this situation it is crucial that the poorer states are given the proper assistance to develop their own institutions and independent mechanisms for monitoring the process.

⁹ *Economic, social and cultural rights. The right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Report of the Special Rapporteur, Paul Hunt, submitted in accordance with Commission resolution 2002/31* **, UN Economic and Social Council, E/CN.4/2003/58, p. 19-20.*

Finally, *the responsibilities of the affluent North* (e.g. the international financial institutions, the powerful major states, NGOs and private enterprises), must be clarified. Further investigation is needed to ascertain how the human rights violation approach can provide *extra momentum* to the demands on the affluent states and trans-national organisations and corporations to organise their own policies so as to contribute to the ultimate goal of poverty abolishment.

Recommendations to UNESCO:

- *To take an independent initiative to develop instruments for impact assessments, recognising the special responsibility to advocate the human rights violation perspective.*
- *To collaborate closely with the UN Commission on Human Rights, the UN Economic and Social Council and other relevant bodies to develop a set of concrete human rights indicators and benchmarks to be applicable to the monitoring process.*
- *To collaborate closely with the UN Commission on Human Rights, the UN Economic and Social Council and other relevant bodies to define the concepts of human rights core obligations and human rights minimum thresholds, for practical application in policy formation.*
- *To provide assistance for member states in need of setting up national data bases for statistical analysis, for purposes of impact assessment.*
- *To institute procedures for state reporting on progress made or not made as to the achievement of set benchmarks for human rights implementation and the abolishment of poverty, for maximum transparency and accountability.*

8. The need for research

The Consultation participants supported UNESCO's view that the situation calls for a broad coalition of researchers contributing to knowledge building from *different* scientific perspectives. However, they also warned against discarding the extensive research that has already been done, most notably during the last 15-20 years. *Poverty research*, including research on poverty and human rights, has been increasingly important on the research agenda in many disciplines, both within international organisations and in the research community. One important way of gaining new insights is to revisit previous works and look for new synergies.

Another important source of knowledge, all too often not known by the international research community, is research work done by researchers in the South. A special effort should be made to make these works available to larger audiences, both inside and outside their countries of origin.

The Consultation participants supported the proposal to collect examples of 'best practices' and 'worst practices' in a database that can be consulted directly by researchers, politicians and practitioners in need of information. Collections of literature on poverty and human rights, including cases of 'best practices', are already numerous on the Internet, including the material collected by UNESCO itself. However, the information is often unsystematic and overlapping and provides no security for the user that she has found the information that is

relevant to her case. Also, little or no indication is generally given as to how reliable this information may be. For such a database to be of practical use for the UNESCO campaign the material must therefore be *analysed in a human rights framework* and systematised for *relevant* retrieval.

The Consultation participants agreed that the building of research expertise in the countries with the largest occurrence of extreme poverty should be given the highest priority. There is a need to develop the states' own capacity for research to provide informed political decisions and argue the case for using a human rights framework in dealing with local problems of poverty. Currently, this is particularly important in connection with the development and implementation of national PRSPs, to provide true national ownership of these plans.

In principle, the participants supported the idea of establishing a Small Grants Programme "to assist Member states, particularly but not exclusively in Africa, to develop their capacity to conduct research and to prepare poverty reduction plans and national action plans".¹⁰ To achieve maximum results from the programme, UNESCO should itself establish initial guidelines as to what kind of research should be prioritised, emphasising *comparative aspects* and *general knowledge building* for possible added value of the individual projects. A consistent evaluation system must be built into the programme.

Above all it is important that the research programme is developed in close partnership with already existing research milieus, NGOs and social movements in the South, for maximum synergetic effects and information dissemination.

Recommendations to UNESCO:

- *To organise a broad research programme to take stock of what has already been done in the way of relevant poverty research.*
- *To make a special effort to trace poverty research done in the South.*
- *To establish a data-base on 'practices' relevant to the creation, reduction or sustaining of poverty, and commission scientific analysis of the examples provided to substantiate their relevance to a broader understanding of poverty in a human rights violation perspective.*
- *To implement the Small Grants Programme in accordance with the proposed plan, with an explicit target on supporting research conducive to raising public awareness of poverty as a violation of human rights and to strengthen the poor states' own capacity for research to provide relevant and informed input to local political decisions.*
- *To work closely with research milieus, NGOs and Social movements already present in the South and secure their involvement in the implementation of the Small Grants Programme.*

¹⁰ Draft V.3.24/03/03, pt. 32.

9. Access to knowledge

Poverty and social exclusion tend to be accompanied by limited access to information and knowledge. This is due both to lack of education on the part of the poor and lack of proper information channels (like a free press), as well as the general ‘invisibility’ of the poor, brought on, intentionally or un-intentionally, by society at large.

For poverty to be acknowledged as a violation of human rights by all society, the first priority must be to make the poor visible as *individual bearers of rights*. The proposed UNESCO strategy plan goes a long way in achieving this goal by invoking the *moral* conscience of the global community. In terms of practical implementation, however, concrete measures must be taken to overcome the *information gap* and provide the poor with proper access to the information they need in order to be able to claim their rights and build their own future.

The universal right to basic education is already accepted by the international community and head-lighted as one of the goals especially targeted by the MDGs. UNESCO’s special role in this should be concentrated on developing a better understanding of what a *pro-poor right to education* actually looks like, and what kind of educational policies must be developed for maximum benefit to the poor. Special attention should be given to the investigation of how gender differences are, or perhaps *should be*, reflected in educational strategy plans and the implementation of educational policy.

The problems constituted by governmental censorship, lack of a free press and denial of access to the Internet and other sorts of information are basic hindrances to the poor’s access to information. What can be done, in the short term, is to *circumvent* these hindrances by gaining direct access to the poor, informing them through public meetings, and identify *opinion leaders* in the poor societies for special information targeting.

As pointed out in the draft strategy document: “(b)ridging the digital divide will enable poor people to leapfrog some of the traditional barriers to development improving their access to knowledge”.¹¹ Wherever possible, UNESCO should continue to co-operate closely with governments, social movements, NGOs and other relevant institutions and organisations to facilitate general public access to Internet through multiplying Internet Cafés and other digital meeting points, as well as stressing the importance of giving high political priority to the development of a technological infrastructure necessary for the poor to be included in the digital society.

Recommendations to UNESCO:

- *To define the concept of pro-poor education in a human rights violation perspective*
- *To establish a direct dialogue between the poor, their advocates and relevant duty-bearers through the organisation of public meetings.*
- *To organise consultative bodies with poor people as participants for continual information exchange and formal interaction.*
- *To identify opinion leaders in poor communities and collaborate closely with them in the development of pro-poor policies.*

¹¹ Draft V.3.24/03/03, pt. 32.

10. The information programme

The Consultation participants underscored the need for broad and efficient dissemination of information to spread the “new knowledge of ways in which human rights violations hardens into structural poverty”¹² and to make the knowledge directly instrumental in fostering capacity building in poor states and societies. They strongly emphasised the point that information dissemination must go *beyond academia*, and that UNESCO has a particular responsibility that knowledge is shaped and distributed to be of direct use to politicians, practitioners and the poor themselves.

UNESCO already has broad experience in organising *thesauri* for human and social science sciences, both in the narrow meaning of *systematic collections of concepts* for the facilitation of information retrieval and in the broader meaning of constituting “a treasury or storehouse of knowledge”. The organisation should therefore be especially well equipped to organise a special Thesaurus on poverty and human rights, as well as realizing the problems inherent in such a project.

A main problem is probably *information overflow*. The abundance of important and not so important, even useless, information is such that the sheer quantity forbids even institutional memory to function if the collection of data is not accompanied by appropriate *information structuring* and proper evaluation and documentation.

It is therefore important to secure that

- the information collected is carefully chosen and *properly defined* and *documented* to provide a solid knowledge base directly targeted at supporting the campaign for poverty abolishment
- sufficient human resources are allocated to the project to secure *quality control* of the information to be processed

The participants supported the creation of a UNESCO Website on poverty and human rights. This should facilitate the retrieval of data from the information data base and offer the services of a ‘bulletin board’ with respect to activities, events and the reporting of ‘best’ and ‘worst’ practices. It is important that the information is edited and presented in a language that can easily be understood also outside academia and the UN system, and that the retrieval system is ‘user-friendly’ and formatted with respect to the limitations on down-loading capacity often encountered in poor countries. A guide to the use of the website should be provided for less experienced users.

Paper equivalents must be produced to compensate for inequalities in technological access, and to widen the number of languages used.

One particularly important outcome of the ‘small grants programme’ should be the publication and wide dissemination of research results, in both electronic and paper form.

¹² *Ibid.*, pt. 37.

The organisation of series of public meetings, conferences and scientific workshops should be a *core activity* of the information programme. This is important to secure participation of all relevant groups, including the poor themselves and their advocates, *and* to provide an arena for researchers in poor countries to qualify themselves in poverty research and thereby contribute to the necessary capacity building in these countries.

In addition to a meeting programme, a series of lectures on scientific knowledge and policy implementation should be commissioned, directed at researchers and duty-bearers, both national and international.

The participants support the launching of a feasibility study for an innovative, inter-disciplinary journal of *high academic standard* on poverty and human rights. Immediate action should, however, be taken to approach already existing journals within the human and social sciences to look at the possibilities of publishing *special issues* dedicated to poverty and human rights. This can also provide experience and capacity for later publishing of a quality in-house journal.

Recommendations to UNESCO:

- *To launch a broad information programme to disseminate high-quality information of direct use to politicians, practitioners and the poor themselves.*
- *To establish a UNESCO Website on poverty as a violation of human rights.*
- *To organise series of public meetings and conferences to secure two-ways communication and contribute to knowledge building among the different groups of actors involved in research and policy development.*
- *To organise scientific conferences and workshops to provide an arena for researchers in poor countries to qualify themselves in poverty research and the human rights framework.*
- *To commission a series of lectures on scientific knowledge and policy implementation, especially directed at researchers and duty-bearers, both national and international.*
- *To launch a feasibility study for an innovative, inter-disciplinary journal on poverty and human rights, of high academic standard.*
- *To investigate the possibilities in already existing high quality journals of publishing special issues on human rights and poverty.*

11. Concluding remarks

The deliberations of the Bergen Consultation witnessed a strong engagement in favour of the UNESCO initiative, though at the same time recognised the difficulties ahead. The *need for concrete action* was strongly underscored, both with respect to the legal aspects of anchoring poverty abolishment within a human rights framework, and the overall task to institute necessary political change.

Three main strategic points were defined, as UNESCO's special fields of strategic interventions:

1. A need to develop and strengthen knowledge and analytical capacity about poverty as a human rights violation.
2. A need to strengthen national and international legal frameworks and institutions for law enforcement of practical usefulness in pursuing poverty as a violation of human rights through litigations and quasi-legal institutions, the UN human rights treaty bodies, the Human Rights Commission, and other relevant international human rights bodies and institutions.
3. The need to strengthen public governmental provisions for abolishing poverty as a human rights violation, and to strengthen citizens' capacity for making individual or collective complaints about violations of their right to be free from poverty.

The recommendations of this Report may be considered as suggestions for an initial *Plan of Action*. It consists mostly of proposals for very concrete projects aimed at the establishment of a *knowledge-based approach* to the abolishment of poverty, and the creation of the necessary *awareness* for the international community to realise both the gross injustice done to the poor and the existence of possible policies and strategies that can be implemented to change the present world order.

The difficult part will be the actual implementation of these policies and strategies. Long established structures are not easy to change. Many vested interests are at stake. Therefore, the final recommendation to UNESCO is

- to call an independent and active team of experts *outside UNESCO* to act as a “watch-dog” in following up the actions taken by UNESCO to achieve the abolishment of poverty through the utilisation of the international human rights framework. The team must have the power and legitimacy to publish an on-going commentary on ‘best’ and ‘worst’ practices, and to provide recommendations to UNESCO for further action.

Bergen, 9th of July, 2003

Else Øyen
 Scientific Director of CROP
 (sign.)

Kirsti Thesen Sælen
 Rapporteur

Proposals for further action and research, presented to the Consultation by Pierre Sané

At the end of the Consultation, Pierre Sané summed up the work that has been done so far by UNESCO Sector for Social and Human Sciences to develop an integrated strategy for the abolishment of poverty through the international human rights frame-work, and what will happen next to the draft document presently under discussion.

He informed the participants about the establishment of a *UNESCO World Forum on Human Rights* which was to be organised annually, in co-operation with the University of Nantes, France. The purpose of the Forum was to gather specialists to exchange information to advance scientific knowledge on globalisation and human rights and report on progress made within this area of research.

Three broad themes were chosen for the Forum:

1. Human rights and forms of discrimination
2. Human security and human rights
3. Poverty and human rights

Within this framework, any interested party is welcome to organise special workshops or round-tables. UNESCO will provide space within the programme, but the workshop organisers must bring their own researchers.

CROP was especially invited to present a Workshop or Round Table proposal for the first Annual Forum which will be organised in October 2003.

As a matter of expediency, Pierre Sané also singled out some of the suggestions made during the Consultation and asked participants to think about working out project proposals and send them to UNESCO for evaluation as soon as possible:

Paul Hunt was asked if he would be interested in undertaking a special Consultation with the other special rapporteurs and committees to present a comprehensive list of research that needed to be done on human rights, as well as research *problematique* in general in this area.

Hans-Otto Sano was asked if the Danish Institute for Human Rights would be interested in doing some commissioned research on the *value added* of a human rights approach to poverty followed by the organisation of a workshop on *validation*. The purpose should be to have a publication quickly.

Ramaswamy Sudarshan was asked if UNDP would be interested in commissioning comparative research on rights based approach of NGOs in the regions.

CROP was asked if they would be interested in doing a *state of the arts* project (region by region) on poverty and human rights.

Vigdis Broch-Due was asked if she would be interested in organising a research project on the violation of *the right to own property* and poverty, followed by a special workshop and a publication.

Mr. Sané also announced an interest in commissioning an analysis of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article by article, from the perspective of the poor – open for all to apply.

Mr. Sané asked that anybody interested in his proposals contact his office as soon as possible with concrete project proposals. All the other participants were also asked to send in project proposals in areas of special interest to the strategic programme.

UNESCO Consultation, Bergen, 5-6 June 2003
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