

DISKUSSIONSPAPIERE

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**Human Rights and
Economic Growth**

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by Dieter Weiss*

Development: A Fundamental Human Right

Four and a half decades ago the Universal Declaration on Human Rights proclaimed the basic principle that human rights are inherent in every individual human being of whatever race, sex, culture, language, religion or belief. Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundlandt has stated in a letter to the organizers of this Festival: "Inherent and inalienable rights is not a privilege of a few, but rights belonging to all. Racism and an emerging extreme nationalism constitute a threat against human civilization, and against the concept of universal human rights. The spread of democracy is needed for protection of human rights to become more effective. Development and the eradication of poverty are needed for human rights to flourish."²

The recent Report of the UN Secretary-General on Development and International Economic Cooperation starts with the statement: "Development is a fundamental human right. Development is the most secure basis of peace."³

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations on 10 December 1948. It includes civil rights such as the right to life (Art. 3), freedom from torture (Art. 5), basic political rights such as the right to free expression (Art. 19), and freedom of association (Art. 20), economic and social rights as the right to work (Art. 23), and the right to education (Art. 26). In 1966, the General Assembly adopted its

* Opening Lecture at the International Student Festival 1994 in Trondheim on October 7, 1994.

² Letter of Prime Minister to International Student Festival in Trondheim. Oslo, November 22, 1993.

³ United Nations, General Assembly, 48th Session, Development and International Economic Cooperation. An Agenda for Development. Report of the Secretary-General, 6 May 1994, p. 4.

two covenants on civil/political and economic/social rights, and these have since been ratified by over 90 countries. The UN Under Secretary-General for Human Rights, the Human Rights Commission, the Human Rights Committee and a large number of other institutions are to ensure respect for these human rights' covenants. However, they all lack mechanisms for sanction and depend on the power of public opinion.

Repeated calls for UN development aid to be used as a means of enforcing human rights have been strictly rejected by UNDP. This position was supported by a coalition of the socialist block and a majority of authoritarian Third World regimes. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the Under Secretary-General for Human Rights and the administrator of UNDP jointly addressed a letter to all UN representatives in the field calling for an effort to secure the enforcement of human rights. "But resistance of many governments in the Third World is still very strong, and this is evidenced, for example, in the fact that the representatives of developing countries in the administrative council of the UNDP have blocked the publication of a 'human freedom' table on which each country is rated"⁴.

The Impact of Values

As a civil servant and foreign aid administrator, and as an academic I was exposed to a vast variety of value systems and life styles. What is highly esteemed in one culture may be a taboo in another one. If we have learned one thing from four decades of development efforts in some 200 countries, it is the impact of culture on development. Hindu or Buddhist outlooks are fundamentally different from Muslim or Confucian ones. Development turned out to be a competition of cultures. The World Bank Atlas⁵ lists the East Asian city states of Hong Kong

⁴ Waller, Peter P., Human-Rights Orientation in Development-Cooperation, in: Rainer Tetzlaff (Ed.), Human Rights and Development. German and International Comments and Documents, Bonn 1993, p. 54.

⁵ World Bank, World Bank Atlas 1994, Washington D.C. 1994, for 1992.

and Singapore with per capita incomes of US\$ 15,380 and US\$ 15,750 respectively side by side with poverty-stricken countries like Sierra Leone or Uganda with US\$ 170 or Rwanda with US\$ 250. Social indicators have the same range. Illiteracy rates stand at 2 to 4 per cent in Jamaica or South Korea, but at 65 per cent in Pakistan and Bangladesh, 70 per cent in Chad, and 79 per cent in Sierra Leone, often with even higher percentages for women, particularly in rural areas. Primary school enrollment amounts to 19 per cent in Mali, 28 per cent in Ethiopia, and 29 per cent in Burkina Faso. In other words, illiteracy will persist here at least for another decade.

Elementary preconditions of human rights are being denied to these people. How can development occur if the majority of the people can neither read the operating instruction of a machine tool nor type a commercial letter? How can they hope to participate in international flows of communication and technological innovation? The UN Secretary-General insists that "people are a country's principal asset"⁶.

Creativity and Freedom of Thought

The essential condition for development is creativity: Mankind's unique capability to design one's own life, and to shape one's future. Our essential tool is technological innovation in the widest sense. In the early years aid donors believed in foreign assistance to close the technological gap. But experience has shown that technology is no commodity that can be bought (by petro-dollars) or be given (through development aid). Instead, it requires active participation in the international process of research, continuous innovation and learning. The recipients must be qualified enough to understand, absorb, adapt and further improve the imported technologies in line with their specific needs.

Technology is not a commodity but a process. It can be viewed as an expression of a global evolutionary trend towards higher

⁶ United Nations, op. cit., p. 18.

levels of complexity that is visible in the evolution both of nature and the social realm. But creativity cannot flourish without a hospitable environment. It needs intellectual and emotional encouragement from early infancy to adult life. And, most crucial, it requires personal freedom and freedom of thought - the two most noble human rights. This is the basic lesson of four decades of development efforts with their divergent outcomes.

Creative innovators are not always welcomed in different cultures. Innovations may be viewed as a threat. They challenge traditional ways and means, question authority and established power structures. Is it acceptable that the pupil criticizes his teacher? Or must he be punished? Is the student allowed to argue against his professor? He is not in many Third World universities where I lectured. He would get up and repeat exactly what I had said, but was embarrassed when I asked for his own opinion, his criticism. The whole cultural, social and political fabric would just not allow, let alone encourage young people to oppose elder people and challenge established views.

I have seen young medical doctors with their brand new Ph.D.s from a Western university. By regulation of their Ministry of Health back home they were ordered to sit two years in the medical practice of an elder colleague to readapt, quietly listening to outdated medical prescriptions, just to break their innovative drive. The young engineer may have to be cautious before proposing a technical innovation to a superior. Before advancing a controversial argument, the young university lecturer ought to be careful, considering the social status, family background and clientele connections of his faculty colleagues who may not like their prestige to be questioned.

I know enterprises where the core value is loyalty, not efficiency. As a result, technical information is not shared by all professionals in the factory. It is reserved to the man on top to flatter his sense of power, thus improving one's chances for a promotion.

Is innovative capability an asset that should be carefully cultivated or is it considered as undecent behaviour? Is a youngster or a member of a lower class or cast allowed to suggest an improvement, or is this an impudent, impertinent act of a fellow who has to be taught his place in the social hierarchy?

The concept of personal freedom and freedom of thought has been the major contribution of Europe to the riches of world civilizations. It is at the root of modern science and technology gained by fighting old hierarchies of feudal rule and inquisition which sentenced Galileo Galilei.

Its political outcome is parliamentary democracy. The principle has received majority support in the United Nations. To quote UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali again: "Democracy and development are linked in fundamental ways ... Democracy is the only long-term means of both arbitrating and regulating the many political, social, economic and ethnic tensions that constantly threaten to tear apart societies and destroy states"⁷.

The Soviet Union collapsed because it was unable to keep up with the dynamics of economic and technological change. It had blocked creativity. Political oppression is not compatible with more sophisticated levels of development. New forms of religious fundamentalism are heading toward a similar disaster.

On the other hand, fairly rigid regimes in the Far East have learned the lesson that advanced levels of economic development cannot be managed by top-down command structures. Military regimes have stepped down to leave the floor to more democratic structures. They understood that the mobilization of the human potential is linked with human rights. Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan are heading toward more democratic patterns of decision-making to make sure that they can advance to higher levels of technology. This means R+D, rapid transformation of

⁷ United Nations, op. cit., p. 22.

research results into new products, and sophisticated international marketing in ever changing niches. Total commitment and continuous adaptation to the international market place cannot possibly be steered by a National Planning Commission.

Contrary to the stunning performance of the East Asian dragons, Subsaharan Africa has a strikingly poor development record. In the majority of African countries, the denial of basic human rights has had a devastating effect on their intellectual climate and their creative potential. The native intelligentsia left or was repressed. Resource rich countries like Zaire have ended up as the poorest performers among some two hundred Third World competitors.

Irrespective of different cultural traditions, international experience shows that an adequate political framework must include a number of vital components:

firstly, rule of the law and of basic individual rights,

secondly, the right to articulate common interests in the fields of cultural, religious, and political matters, freedom of expression for professional organizations, farmer co-operatives, trade unions, student organizations,

thirdly, a critical general public with freedom of press,

fourthly, the right of communal self-rule within decentralized patterns of administration and decision-making,

fifthly, legal accountability of government action,

and sixthly, surveillance institutions as independent courts, admittance of appeal, and the general possibility of challenging administrative decisions.

In other words, the essential ingredients of development are

respect of human rights, rule of the law and adequate forms of political participation.

The Case of Kenya

Kenya is a case in point⁸. For many years it was an economic success story based on development commitment and good governance. However, since an unsuccessful airforce coup in 1982 the ruling party became ever more authoritarian, suppressed the political opposition and eliminated the independence of justice. Police forces would break into a newspaper publishing house and eliminate parts of the printing press. Elections were manipulated, and voters had to queue up behind their candidate in public. Still, the government candidate, although with the shorter queue was quite often declared to be the winner.

The Kenyan ruling elite had developed an extraordinary system of self-enrichment. Special banks had been founded just for the purpose of channeling foreign aid into private accounts. Export extension schemes were established for gold and diamonds which do not even exist in Kenya.

In summer 1990 widespread anti-government demonstrations were brutally repressed. The Nordic countries warned President Moi that aid disbursements would be jeopardised if he continued to ignore calls for democracy, and in November 1990 diplomatic relations were severed and new aid commitments were suspended after the arrest of a political refugee formerly resident in Norway⁹. It is clear that under such extreme conditions development cannot progress unless basic political reforms are implemented. The international donor community and particularly the Nordic states decided in November 1991 to stop further quick disbursing aid unless the ruling party would

a) return to a multi-party system,

⁸ Waller, Peter P., *Aid and Conditionality. The Case of Germany*. German Development Institute, Berlin 1994, pp. 8 f.

⁹ Waller (1994), *op. cit.*, p. 9.

- b) eliminate corruption, and
- c) carry on economic reforms.

The regime reacted promptly. Within ten days it cancelled Article 2 of the constitution which had declared Kenya a one-party-state, released most of the political prisoners, and carried on with its previous reform policies.

Human Rights and Sovereignty

Linking development assistance to political performance criteria raises the problem of legitimacy. Aid conditionality questions the concept of sovereignty cherished within the United Nations after independence from colonial rule. But this principle meant independence of people and not new suppression by their own ruling elites. The new core question is: Has the International Charta of Human Rights precedence over national sovereignty, if the latter is abused?

A glimpse on history shows that there is an old tension between human rights and sovereignty¹⁰. Human rights have been gained in a long struggle against the absolutist state. Communist ideology took the opposite view and blamed the idea "of human rights taking precedence over the sovereignty of the nation states as a Western bourgeois smoke-screen serving capitalist power interests"¹¹. Western liberal thought insists that human rights do have priority over national sovereignty, in the idea that the individual person is endowed with freedom and an inalienable canon of personal rights independent of state, clan, class or caste.

¹⁰ Weiss, Dieter, Internationale Unterstützung des Reformprozesses in Entwicklungsländern im Rahmen von Auflagenpolitik und Politikdialog - das Beispiel patrimonialer Regime in Afrika. Korreferat zum Referat von Peter P. Waller, in: Hermann Sautter (Ed.), Wirtschaftspolitische Reformen in Entwicklungsländern, Schriften des Vereins für Socialpolitik N.F., Vol. 209, Berlin 1991, pp. 213 f.

¹¹ Meister, Roland, Studie zur Souveränität. Eine Kritik bürgerlicher Theorien, Berlin 1981, p. 89.

In the West, these concepts emerged from Natural Law and lead to the milestones of political emancipation: the Magna Charta of 1215, the Bill of Rights of 1689, the American Declaration of Independence of 1776, the claims of the French Revolution of 1789, and the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations of 1948 and its amendments.

Cultural traditions in Third World countries emphasize the social group rather than the individual. Thus, the Charta of the Organization of African Unity of 1963 has shifted its focus from the right of the individual to the right of the people, from human rights to national sovereignty¹².

Third World governments reject the pressure of donor countries for democratic reforms. India and Pakistan protested when European aid flows were cut because of excessive arms purchases. In 1992, the ASEAN countries were embarrassed when Portugal tried to block a new co-operation agreement between ASEAN and the EC because of Indonesian human rights violations in East Timor. The Indonesian Foreign Minister also told the government of the Netherlands to stop its aid to Indonesia after Dutch protests against massacres of the Indonesian army in East Timor, thus abandoning US\$ 91 million. Nigeria's President Babangida complained in 1992: "Donors are unfair if they introduce this conditionality - by the way since the end of the Cold War. They may call for democratic reforms, but they must leave us time. We in Africa still have to learn democracy". The People's Republic of China since its 1989 massacre on the Tiananmen Square keeps saying that Western sanctions would only strain the good diplomatic relations and would have no impact on the internal Chinese policies anyway. Prime Minister Li Peng prematurely broke off his state visit in July 1994 in Germany because of persistent human rights protests.

Traditionally, governments shy away from bilateral diplomatic conflict when insisting in the implementation of the United Nations Human Rights agenda. This general attitude has changed

¹² Weiss (1991), op. cit., p. 215.

since developing countries do no longer have the option of turning to the Soviet Union. In the face of rising chaos in various Third World countries, the Secretary General of the United Nations has called for international interventions of peace-keeping forces and humanitarian action.

Aid Conditionality?

The urgency of economic and social reform in many parts of the Third World, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa has led to a basic change of donor policies. There is a new consensus that aid should be tied to good governance. Its major components are

firstly, an adequate political framework,

secondly, a development-oriented economic order,

and thirdly, the existence of feasible macroeconomic policies.

Meanwhile, it is clear that development assistance cannot ignore deficiencies in the political system as regards human rights, political participation, and the judicial system. A comprehensive policy dialogue - both bilateral and multilateral - is emerging, aiming at a policy environment in the recipient countries which permits creative, productive expression of human talent. This is what development is all about. The tension between the United Charta of Human Rights and the concept of sovereignty may occupy us for at least another decade.¹³

In the Kenyan case it was interesting to see that the majority of the opposition called for hard foreign pressure on their own government. An essential element in this political process was the still relatively free Kenyan press. This is rare in Africa.

In fact, internal and international publicity has turned out to be a most effective tool to induce reforms. However, the United

¹³ Cf. Waller (1993), pp. 63 f.

Nations system and the international community supporting basic democratic reforms cannot deal with more than a dozen of country cases at the same time. While it is true that good governance is crucial for development, indirect support measures in favour of reform-oriented internal policies may be more feasible than sanctions.

Direct Reforms on the Project Level

Let us take the example of decentralization of government, and political grassroot participation. Rather than trying to impose moves toward these goals through a bilateral policy dialogue and hoping for internal policy changes from above - with hardly any chance for implementation -, it may be more operational to implement direct reform measures within aid projects. For instance, seemingly neutral urban development and water supply projects have been tied by donors to the introduction of an efficient decentralized community management responsible for maintenance, repair, and tariffs, thus strengthening local government and giving real substance to the concept of political participation on the village level. Marginal regions can be supported by shifting aid to poverty-stricken backward areas and by establishing employment and social safety measures.

German aid has designed particular technical assistance programs geared to support civil society, democracy and human rights, by financing support measures for NGOs, opposition parties, reform of parliament and legal systems, e.g.

- human rights' training centers in various countries of Africa and Latin America,
- support for the establishment of a legal advisor in the Ministry of Justice in Ruanda,
- various legal advisory programmes in Africa,
- supply of office equipment for the Supreme Court in Zimbabwe,

- finance for imports of printing material for independent newspapers in Mauretania.

There are special programs for

- demobilization and training of former soldiers in Angola,
- labour-intensive road construction programmes for demobilized former soldiers in Mozambique,
- small-scale industry programmes with reintegration components for former soldiers in Mozambique and Uganda,
- vocational training and reintegration of demobilized militia men in Nicaragua,
- and scholarship programmes for demobilized soldiers in El Salvador.

Obviously, it is extremely important to give these people an attractive alternative in civil life. Positive measures of this type have an immediate impact on the situation of human rights, on political participation of the population, and on the encouragement of more democratic structures. The Ministerial Council of the EU has started to prepare similar programmes.

This is also a vast field for activities of non-governmental organizations like political foundations or churches. They have been active for many years in supporting human rights groups, trade unions, professional associations, and journalists struggling for a free press.

Another field of NGO action is the support of partners operating far from central government and its corruption, and shifting cooperation to decentralized administrative units and support of self-organization on the village and town level.

A Word of Caution

I have stressed the concept of individual freedom and creativity. The idea of personal freedom has been the great discovery of ancient Greece and Europe's unique contribution to

mankind. But we may add a word of caution. We may be well advised to listen to what other cultures have to say.

To take an example, Taoist concepts of ancient China would emphasize co-operative social harmony rather than competitive individuality. In economic terms, Taoism encouraged soft technologies, subtle agricultural recycling, minimum intervention into organic processes, and co-operation with nature at large.

Instead, the Christian message calls for domination of nature, exploitative technology: No feeling of being interwoven with nature. Early warnings have been ignored. In the 16th century, Giordano Bruno taught that nature is a living entity to be respected, not inanimate matter as opposed to the spiritual. For the Catholic Inquisition, this was a deadly sin, and Bruno was burnt at the stake¹⁴. The dark side of Christian heritage is its engrained environmental insensitivity rooted in basic perceptions of the World and humankind's role in it. Our styles of technology, our patterns of economy, and our environmental catastrophe are a direct result of these Judaic-Christian beliefs radically different from earlier religious systems.

Recent environmental shocks have made it clear that nothing less than a fundamental reorientation is inevitable. Meanwhile not only in the West. Western mainstream thinking has fascinated the intellectual elites around the globe, and has exported its insensitivity with regard to environmental concerns. It is a paradox of our time that Third World societies rush to repeat the unsustainable Western way of economic development. On the other hand, young people in the West have been discovering the spiritual heritage of non-European cultures. This process has profoundly influenced the frontiers of most advanced science - far ahead of public

¹⁴ Weiss, Dieter, Culture, Perception of Reality, and the Newly Emerging Planning Paradigms, in: Social Indicators Research 16 (1985), p. 211.

awareness. I may quote Bohm's "Wholeness and the Implicate Order"¹⁵ or Lovelock's "Gaia hypothesis"¹⁶.

Human Rights and Environmental Sustainability

Human rights must be reconsidered in a broader perspective. Rights must be balanced by responsibilities embedded into an enlarged concept of sustainability. Considering the growth of man's technological impact on his environment, a fundamental proposition of Christian theology and secularized Western technology has become untenable: Man opposed to Nature rather than man part of Nature, a Creator fixing a clockwork world on the seventh day rather than an ever evolving Creativity in a thoroughly dynamic universe¹⁷. The untenable outcomes are environmental destruction and emotional alienation adding up to an existential crisis.

We have to speed up our learning process. With T.S. Eliot: "Where is the wisdom which we lost in knowledge, where is the knowledge which we lost in information?" Technology in terms of the old megamachine is outdated. So is the concept of a narrowly defined efficiency. During the last decade already, the Brundlandt report has set new standards as to respect for nature, and awareness of our responsibility for life opportunities of future generations on our planet.

During the last decades young people in the West have become aware of these necessities to rebalance our basic outlooks, and have started to explore non-European life concepts and cosmologies from native American to Far Eastern ones in search of a renewed spiritual dimension as a guidance to more viable paths to the future. Similar quests are being made in Islamic and Buddhist societies. Beyond economics, spiritual guidance

¹⁵ Bohm, David, Wholeness and the Implicate Order, London 1982.

¹⁶ Lovelock, James, Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth, London, New York 1979.

¹⁷ Weiss (1985), op. cit., pp. 203 f.

may emerge as a major basic need in the face of mounting global turbulence.

Freedom, Responsibility, and Evolutionary Ethics

And still, being aware of these impending reorientations, we should trust the early Greek discovery that the human being is free and entitled to think. The creative human mind represents the forefront of natural evolution. The discovery of freedom of thought is in my view an irreversible step in the evolution of human consciousness, whatever forms of economic and social organization may evolve in the future course of history.

However, human freedom has to be matched by human responsibility amidst a radical change of cultural outlooks which will bring radically new patterns of technology and economy subject to our responsible action. Sustainable forms of development will hopefully evolve. This process is on its way.

We moved from a technology of heavy steel wheels to artificial intelligence and bionics. Intelligence is replacing matter. Changing consciousness alters scientific and managerial concepts. Symbolically, two institutions have come to the forefront of international attention: Amnesty International fighting for human rights, and Greenpeace fighting for the rights of nature.

A rising number of people are heading toward the adventure of creative learning and - to use Erich Jantsch's vision - of evolutionary experimentation. A rising number of people are changing their priorities. They want to act out their full potential within the poles of freedom and responsibility.

This process may hopefully lead us toward a more enlightened concept of development based on a more comprehensive perception of human rights linked with mankind's perennial wisdom and making use of our right to INTELLIGENCE.

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