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## Minority Participation - A Challenge for Human Rights

The questions to be asked when referring to human rights and human rights education (HRE) for minorities are - how to use HRE to:

- a. minorities to become active participants in societal decision making processes and
- b. achieve equality and justice between majority and minority groups in any given society? In this paper I will discuss human rights education as an empowering tool - helping individuals to become aware of human rights and empowering them not only to claim their own basic human rights but also to advocate for the rights of others.

It is this empowerment and action combined that helps to bring about equality and justice for all. For minorities and other groups and individuals in society, this means being knowledgeable about each others' political, civil, economic and cultural rights, customs and history so that there is respect for, and recognition of, difference. To achieve this, it is important to identify the problems faced by minorities and the needs of these groups and to endeavour to overcome short-comings in education systems so that diversity in society is seen as a positive thing - something which is beneficial to all.

### Keywords:

Human rights, minority rights, human rights education, minorities, teaching, curriculum, integration of minorities, education policy, participation, equality, levels of human rights education

## 1 Minority Rights and Human Rights

What are minority rights? To understand how human rights education may be beneficial to minority groups it is important to understand what minority rights are. Minority rights are human rights; they encompass economic, social, cultural as well as political and civil human rights. Violence and discrimination can often arise from lack of access to these rights. For example it is important to look at minority rights issues when examining ethnic violence and other grave human rights violations such as the ethnic discrimination of workers who lose their employment because they belong to a certain ethnic grouping (United Nations: OHCHR 2001, 354). To

uncover these violations it is important to investigate the grounds used for excluding minorities from society. For example, when a fully qualified worker of Hispanic, Roma, or native African origin finds himself/herself dismissed from their employment with no reasonable grounds for the dismissal, it may well be that stereotypical, discriminatory factors are at play.

Basic values of any given group in the society go hand in hand with universal values. I would argue therefore that there is no contradiction or conflict between these values and common universal human rights standards. This is why minority rights are human rights. They are basic societal values which can be found in any given minority group and are therefore inclusive not exclusive to the universal human rights and values system. Values such as "justice," "fairness," "family support," "solidarity," "free movement," "free choice" or "mutual respect" are to be found in every society, among all societal members and can be learned and equally taught, regardless of social affiliation.

However, "rules" which are derived from values do not necessarily go hand in hand with human rights and minority groups. Rules like the rule of law or positive law may specify the practice of such values but the reality on the ground as it were, may be very different from one society to the next. In some societies for example, rules and laws can lead to human rights violations. This is due to a lack of balance between universal values and the particular interests of political actors, community or religious leaders responsible for developing and implementing national or local laws and rules. For example, robbery, adultery and rape are considered severe crimes which go against the basic values of any society and yet punishment for such crimes can vary greatly. In some societies, violation of laws and rules is punishable by death, in others the punishment is a fine or long term imprisonment. There are many examples of societies in which the lifestyles of certain citizens (e.g. homosexuals, immigrants) are oppressed. Again, this is because:

- a. certain rules and norms exist which favour particular interests and
- b. there is no balance between universal values and these particular interests.

In these societies much depends on the interpretation of values set by political leaders and, precisely because of this there is a real need for values to be fair and just. We have seen that rules, laws and punishments do vary from society to society and from country to country. Rules guide daily life but must by no means be confused with universal values of justice/injustice or with human rights norms. In the same way, values must not to be confused with traditions or customs (these are enjoyed and practiced by different groups in the society). Rules are derived from "the way things are done" they represent "best practice" but they are not the same as values. Sadly, many political or minority leaders confuse the rule of law and traditions with common values or respect for human rights. To retain power, leaders argue either that "traditions" reflect human rights or that particular traditions are not in keeping with human rights and are therefore useless to a particular group. They consider "a certain rule of law" or "tradition" as cultural heritage, something to be protected regardless of how much injustice or grievance it causes society or its communities. This

is particularly dangerous when such rules or traditions are "sold" as human rights and are included in the educational curricula under "teaching human rights". Legislation can be developed to ensure that certain "traditions" are protected but these laws may not always be in keeping with universal values or human rights standards.

## 2 Minorities

Defining minorities is a complex endeavour. It has taken decades to come close to achieving some kind of definition for the term "minorities". Currently, the most accepted definition is that of the former UN Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Francesco Capotorti (see article 27 of the 1966 UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights). By this definition, minorities are "a group numerically inferior to the rest of the population of a state, in a non-dominant position, whose members - being nationals of the State - possess ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics differing from those of the rest of the population and show, if only implicitly, a sense of solidarity, directed towards preserving their culture, traditions, religion or language" (Capotorti 1991, 96). This definition is however only the first step towards a broader understanding of the needs, demands and developments of minorities and how these can be both protected and promoted. Capotorti's definition excludes migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, although worldwide these groups make up more than 120 million people. This is a significant number, one too large to be labelled with the one term "minorities". Additionally, their needs vary greatly and can include for example, the right to speak one's mother-tongue, to seek citizenship, to gain adequate employment, to receive economic aid, proper housing, food or official recognition, to gain access to information and education or to partake in political processes. While minorities enjoy the same human rights standards as everyone else, they also have particular protection and promotion needs which are dependant on their specific situation (for example they may be discriminated against and their human rights denied because of their linguistic, ethnic or religious background, stereotypes or non-residence status) (See also Eide 1998). Minorities are considered to be vulnerable because they are disadvantaged and treated unequally generally because of the majority or dominant groups in society. They can be simply outvoted or worse, ignored. Minority groups are receiving increasing attention because in some States they comprise up to 50% of the population. This of course depends on which groups State authorities choose to consider as minorities. In countries like Laos, Lebanon, Nigeria or the USA estimates suggest that minorities make up almost half of the population - these minorities include ethnic minorities, indigenous people, nomads, refugees or migrants. Estimates suggest that there are roughly 370 million indigenous people, 86 million migrants and 40 million refugees worldwide. These figures include internally displaced people as well as ethnic minorities, depending on the definition and declaration of such groups (Amnesty International 2005, 52-56). The majority of these suffer basic

human rights violations and lack economic, social, cultural as well as political and civil rights. Parts of these groups belong to the so called national minorities who are residents of a State. In Europe alone, for example, the Roma community, generally defined as a national minority, is composed of approximately 13 million people.

In most societies, there is increasing potential for future conflict because minority groups' needs and demands are not being taken seriously. Paulo Freire refers to these vulnerable and largely ignored groups as people with their "backs to the wall" - oppressed by the ruling power and by the majority group in society. They are disrespected, discriminated against, ignored and oppressed in many different ways. The result of this gap between minorities and majorities in society causes tension, leading to violent conflict, civil war or segregation. It is vital therefore for Governments to act. Human rights education can play an important role in easing this tension, empowering majority and minority groups in society to act, creating a culture of mutual respect, all of which helps to prevent conflict.

### 3 Human Rights Education

Officially, minority rights are part of the universal Human Rights Regime. This regime consists of international documents, Human Rights Treaties, Human Rights Declarations and Recommendations, monitoring bodies on the Rights of Minorities and the Right to Education. A range of governmental and non-governmental actors also exist which work to promote universal human rights values and hence minority rights. In addition, there are numerous articles and overviews of documents and treaties and their implications which have been published (for further detail see United Nations 1999; Phillips, Rosas 1997).

Since the beginning of the UN-Decade for Human Rights Education in 1995 (UN-Resolution: United Nations 1994 = UN-Doc A/RES/49/184), many intergovernmental bodies have reaffirmed the importance of human rights and the role of HRE in helping overcome discrimination and injustice arising from ethnic, racial, linguistic or religious difference. A good overview of the importance of human rights education can be found in the 1996 UN Secretary General's note (United Nations 1996 = UN-Doc A/50/698). Furthermore, in 1999, the United Nations published a compilation of all UN-documents, including the Right to Education and human rights education for all (United Nations 1999). In at least four out of the 70+ International and Regional Declarations, Treaties and Recommendations on the Right to Education (e.g. by the United Nations, the Organisation of African Unity, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, International Labour Organization, the UNESCO and the Council of Europe) the importance of human rights education for minorities is highlighted (United Nations 1999). However, international legal frameworks and State commitments for the protection and promotion of the rights of minorities are but one step in the right direction. Lip-service, the preparation of drafts and Declarations on

protective measures are all very well but the most important step is to convince State authorities that it is to the benefit of society as a whole that education, especially the formal education sector develops rights education and ensures that minority issues are included in this. The overall goal of human rights education is to educate all members of society to respect one another and to include, not exclude, minorities. HRE with a focus on rights helps to foster peace and tolerance, helping eliminate discrimination, this paves the way for a culture of human rights as outlined in the 1948 UN-Universal Declaration for Human Rights. Therefore, one of the core elements of human rights education must be to specifically refer to human rights standards. If people are unaware of their own and others' human rights they will be unable to claim these rights or to fight for them.

HRE is complex and operates at three levels (Mihir 2004):

Level 1 - The cognitive level: This is the mere knowledge of, and information about human rights standards. Teaching on a cognitive level also includes discussion on the development and history, genesis and roots of human rights based on natural law. The cognitive level focuses on transmitting information about legal frameworks and proclamations such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the seven treaty bodies and committees of the UN System, the Council of Europe's treaty bodies and monitoring system, the International Criminal Court, the Organization of American States (OAS), the African Union (AU) and other international human rights organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their monitoring systems. On the issue of minorities, information must also be provided on the numerous Declarations and Conventions on the rights of minorities and their protection systems. The cognitive level is in most basic level because it deals with universal values, international human rights standards and legal frameworks but it does not necessarily lead to action - action which would help to protect and to promote human rights and minority rights.

Level 2 - The emotional and awareness level: This level focuses on the emotional response - addressing the conscious sense of responsibility towards human rights violations, for example the direct/indirect experience of injustice, anger or the experience of human rights abuses and atrocities. This experience usually invokes sadness or anger over injustice and pain, motivating people to react and to engage. It is at this crucial moment that personal feelings/ emotions are awoken, awareness is raised and individuals realise the importance of human rights violations, recognising injustice and acknowledging that this can lead to threats, anger and pain. It is at this moment that peoples' attitudes and behaviours change (Stellmacher, Sommer, Imbeck 2003, 162). This is the most difficult level of the three levels because it can easily be manipulated by biased information or propaganda. Nonetheless, it is true that people can react differently to the same set of circumstances; some may get upset over injustice while others remain indifferent. Nevertheless, without this emotional response, this empathy, this sadness, there would be no action taken in favour of human rights. Surveys have shown that individuals do have a natural understanding of justice and injustice and do therefore become active participants if they (a) have a sense of self-esteem and (b) have personally experienced great injustice or have been exposed to issues through stories told to them (Krajulec 1999, 367-369; Müller 2002, 17-18; Müller, Weyand

2004, 279-294).

Level 3 - The active level: Finally becoming active! Empowering people, promoting their ability to detect human rights violations and injustice. For example, helping people to improve their communication skills, to present their views and to understand differing viewpoints, providing individuals with conflict resolution skills, empowering individuals to use their knowledge of national and international legal systems to claim (for example via Ombudsmen), their human rights, becoming active can also mean joining an NGO and actively engaging in activities, demanding that lawyers and advocates draw on international laws to help individuals claim their human rights. But, it is not just about putting an end to human rights abuses by lobbying decision-making bodies, requesting fair treatment or affirmative action for minorities, or overcoming injustices and violations in peace building processes; it is also about the promotion of human rights as part of the preventive process (for instance, developing conflict resolution mechanisms and decision making competences) towards eliminating human rights violations in daily life. Self-esteem and feeling empowered to act against injustice and inequality are the major goals at level 3 - the active level. This is particularly important for minority leaders who need to take measures to break the vicious cycle of discrimination.

#### 4 The Three Levels of Human Rights Education

**Level 1 - Cognitive Level**  
**HEAD (receive knowledge)**

**Level 2 - Emotional/Awareness Level**  
**BELLY (become emotional)**

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**Level 3 - Active Level**  
**FEET (become active?)**

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In short, the content of human rights education is based on the universal concepts of justice and injustice. It deals with basic concepts which can be taught and which everyone can learn. It addresses the cognitive, emotional and active levels or in other words helps the HEAD to become informed/aware, the BELLY to become emotional and angry and spurs the FEET into action. The primary goal is to empower people via decision making mechanisms and conflict resolution methods so that societies are transformed and become just and fair. Human rights education can assist this successful transformation process by helping people to feel responsible for change and enabling them to bring this change about irrespective of whether this change is a behavioural, situational/environmental one or one which requires enhanced decision making ability. Once individuals are able to identify problems and to make the changes necessary a more just and fair society can develop.

## 5 Education Policies and Minorities

Bearing in mind the definition of minorities - provided earlier - and understanding what human rights education consists of, it would be fair to say that, in the present day, most Governments and State authorities are inclined towards, and have adopted relatively nationalistic educational policies. These policies are aimed at assimilating minorities not integrating them. Assimilation results in minorities losing their respective cultural or ethnic identities and becoming increasingly distanced from their origins and cultural heritage. Integration, on the other hand aims to ensure that minorities, majority and other groups of society are aware of, and respect the history, lifestyles and cultural heritage of minorities and accept that minorities should enjoy equal treatment and advantage. For instance, the nine million members of the nomadic populations (Fulani, Shuwa, Koyam, Badawi, Buzzu and others) considered as national minorities in Nigeria do not receive an education which addresses their traditions and needs. It is not just school attendance by these nomadic people which is problematic, but more particularly the content of the school curricula which causes problems. In Nigeria, the orthodox school curriculum is designed to meet the needs of the settled mainstream population. Students from the nomadic populations have difficulty in understanding this curriculum. For example, the nationwide curricula does not reflect the constant migration of the nomadic people as they move in search of water and pasture for their livestock, nor does the curriculum address their particular production or traditional living systems (Association for the Development of Education in Africa 2005, 11-13). To create a new curriculum for the formal education sector would entail ensuring that the needs and particularities of other groups in the society are reflected together with those of majority groups. This would help to address issues around the human rights education for minorities and would help to foster greater mutual respect between different societal groups. This would also go towards combating ignorance of each others' customs, traditions, rights etc.

Integration can be achieved through human rights education, particularly in the formal education sector since it is the most widespread sector and it reaches the vast majority of the population. To promote the concept of mutual respect and to seek support for this it is important to know about one's own human rights as well as being informed on issues of cultural difference. In the formal education sector however, we find that Governments' definitions of how the school curricula ought to be are chiefly influenced by their devotion to goals and outcomes, especially those that preserve order and the nation-State (Flowers 2004, 107). School curricula serve as the ideological premise of national States. National school curricula and often higher education curricula also do not necessarily reflect the plurality or diversity of the people living in the State. Governments are more interested in teaching and educating people in official State doctrine to achieve a homogenous State since this is easier to govern. A case in point is teaching classes/lecturing students, in the majority language, on the history and literature of majority groups. If only the majority groups are focussed on then clearly minorities are excluded.

In 2000, UN member states declared the Millennium Development Goals

(MDG). These goals included particularly the promotion and education of minorities worldwide. In addition to this, the UN Sub-Commission on the promotion and protection of human rights has submitted a working paper written by the London based Minority Rights Group International which includes an in-depth analysis of the major obstacles to minority education. There are, for example, several factors which contribute to poor access to education for minorities, these include absence of education in minority languages, poor provision of schools and qualified teachers in regions where minorities are to be found, prohibitive costs of school fees which disproportionately affect minorities since they tend to be among the poorest groups, curricula which does not reflect community priorities for instruction on religious, tradition and lifestyle issues etc. (United Nations 2005, 11) Although there have been improvements - bilingual classes or schools have been introduced in some countries, the major obstacles (outlined above) still continue to remain. As a result, a higher number of children from minority groups fail to finish primary or secondary school, compared to children belonging to non-minority groups (Hornberg 2000, 9-15). There is little evidence to date therefore, that national education systems have succeeded in promoting cultural, historical and linguistic diversity in any country and consequently little evidence of equal education opportunities for minorities.

The two major obstacles in formal education systems are (1) a lack of resources and (2) a failure to acknowledge and nurture cultural identity. To overcome these obstacles strategies for school desegregation need to be established as this will facilitate mixed classes (Rostas, Nicoara 2004, 231-232). To date, most minority leaders have encountered difficulties in establishing such strategies because they themselves have had experience with the formal education sector and are aware that it is not helpful to the maintenance of their cultural identity nor does it help them to improve their economic situation. Instead the current education system promotes assimilation. Secondly, it appears that parents from minority groups who see State led education as having little long term economic or cultural relevance to their children/communities consider enrolling their children in such education systems as a very low priority. Education ought not threaten cultural identity but should instead aim to assist cultural identity to flourish, whilst also enabling children to participate in the wider community, (as seen in the case of Nigeria) (United Nations 2005, 12).

Minority leaders need to overcome these obstacles and address the wider community highlighting the long term benefits of integration for all. The obstacles include access to education and hence to the Right to Education as proposed in most Treaties and Declarations and during the UN Decade for Human Rights Education (1995-2004). The Right to Education might be denied when the economic situation of a family does not allow them to send their children to the formal education sector, for example, as in the case of immigrants, refugees and non-residents. This is also true for adults or parents who may find themselves unable to afford to attend informal training courses on human rights offered by State institutions or NGOs. Living in remote areas, having no time (often because they are employed in low-paying sectors, working long hours), poverty - these are some of the real obstacles which prevent minority participation in informal education initiatives. Many immigrant, indigenous and refugee families find

themselves hindered by such factors and hence are particularly vulnerable. As a result, not only do they not receive any human rights education, but as a consequence they are denied their human rights.

## 6 Transformation Process for and with Minorities

The question is - is there a difference between human rights education for minorities and human rights education for majorities? The answer would be "yes" and "no". "Yes" because any human rights education course or process must be adjusted to the group it is being tailored to. Educating women or children in human rights is different for example, to educating police officers or social workers in human rights. Course curricula and content must be adjusted to the needs and circumstances of the target group and, thus, to the needs of minorities. Teaching mechanisms and methods will remain the same depending on the age and experience of each target group but it is the focus of the content being taught that will vary from group to group. The major challenge for trainers, teachers and those developing the curricula, is to identify and to understand the needs of minorities and to include these in the teaching curricula and in the teaching methodology. Immigrants and refugees need to know more about their residence, citizenship and human rights, in order to work for example. Religious minorities need to be informed about their cultural and religious rights and must understand that they are entitled to practice their religion and tradition in conformity with international human rights standards. The overall content of the message should be the same for all minority groups, namely, that "their" particular minority rights go hand in hand with human rights of others who do not belong to these specific groups. For instance, the enjoyment and celebration of one's culture and traditions should not interfere with the cultures and traditions of others. When one religious group is entitled to build churches, other religious groups should also be allowed to build mosques, shrines, synagogues or temples. In theory, this may sound easy but in practice, it is much more challenging. Challenging because human rights education must empower people providing them with the skills and knowledge necessary to claim their rights and/or entitlements, e.g. legally or through advocates, NGOs and political leaders. At the same time human rights education must be about enhancing communication skills so that others (individuals/groups not belonging to the particular minority group in question) are not discriminated against or insulted. Ensuring mutual respect has never been easy!

Getting back to the original question - is there a difference between human rights education for minorities and human rights education for majorities? Again, the answer could be "yes" and "no". We have seen why there is a difference, now let's see why there isn't. The goals of human rights education ought to be the same irrespective of the target group to be reached. The focus must be on equality, mutual respect and active participation in human rights. Transforming these human rights and entitlements into human rights education, could mean for example (for this see also Toivanen, Mahler, Mihr 2006):

- acknowledging that minorities enjoy universal human rights;
- respecting their political participation;
- respecting the language of minorities and its use;
- recognizing, in a non-discriminatory way, the history as well as the religious and cultural peculiarity of minorities
- providing economic assistance for, and access to, education in the formal and non-formal education sector;
- promoting equal treatment of minorities looking for housing or employment;
- respecting minorities' right to citizenship or residency.

Human rights education can not only empower minority groups and their members to seek equality between their group and other groups of society, but can also create greater equality and respect within minority communities themselves. Knowing about human rights (...head) and being aware of inequality and injustice (...belly) can lead individuals from any given minority community to demand that their rights be protected and promoted so that they may actively seek equality in society (...feet). At the same time, human rights education raises the awareness of those who do not belong to a minority community, so that they too understand that to have a fair and equal society, it is important to respect and promote the human rights of minorities. One of the most important first steps might be to question one's own stereotypical thinking vis-à-vis those belonging to minority groups. State authorities, the media, public administrators and the formal-education sector are all key players in this process.

Human rights education for, and with minorities is independent of any individualism or collectivism, but instead is based on basic societal human rights values of fairness and reciprocity in any given society (Kymlicka 1998). Tension exists between minorities and majorities wherever there is injustice and inequality. Tension is also present when minorities feel that the hegemony of the majority is being imposed on them. To protect themselves, minorities will seek public recognition for their needs and demands (with regard to use of their own language, greater autonomy, recognition of the past and present, social and economic status or political participation).

The human rights of minorities and the human rights education of these groups are not only about legal standards but, are more about understanding the holistic concept of human rights. This holistic concept aims to convince society that living according to human rights norms is to everyone's, benefit irrespective of one's background. This is particularly important because minorities are not a homogenous group themselves, but, are made up of divided and diverse groupings in society. Nevertheless, despite this diversity, they have all experienced some form of discrimination, for example being denied access to the labour sector as the Hispanics in the USA or Caribbean were or the Pakistani immigrants in Great Britain were. Another example would be discrimination on the grounds of territorial, ethnic or religious background etc. This is something that happens almost everywhere. For example, in Krasnodar, in the Russian Federation, the large Muslim Meskhetian community are considered as an "unofficial minority". Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, they have been

denied citizenship rights and hence the proper right to housing, religion, education and employment. This is the result of political decisions and the widespread ignorance of rights among the majority of society (Amnesty International 2005, 29). The lack of respect for minority groups' basic human rights to citizenship and residency has resulted in the deliberate criminalization and stigmatisation of this particular minority group.

## 7 Aiming for Equality through Human Rights Education

I have endeavoured to show that increasing discrimination against minority groups and failure to recognise their rights can lead to inequality and injustice, and can serve as a catalyst for social conflict. Similarly, this process can lead to ethnic mobilization. Such mobilization is often kick-started by a sense of economic, social and political grievance and by allegations of discriminatory treatment by State authorities. Coakley defines this phase as one characterised by the demand for equality for all citizens. Or as Eide puts it, the phase in which minority group's primary struggle is for equal enjoyment of civil, economic, and social rights (*Eide 2001*, 97). The second phase is when minority leaders demand that the minority group be recognised. This is perhaps the most radical and diverse phase, because while other members of minority groups may already be satisfied with the attainment of at least formal equality and ethnic self-consciousness, the demand for recognition can lead to more (*Coakley 2004*, 11-13). The basic demands lie within the human rights framework. These demands are, according to Coakley, threefold. (1) Firstly there is a demand for equality among citizens ranging from a call for formal equality before the law to demands for special measures to ensure economic and social equality. There is also the demand for cultural human rights, ranging from symbolic use of the minority language in public to the right to transact business with all public institutions in a given country in this minority language. (2) Secondly there is a demand for institutional political recognition, ranging from symbolic autonomy in local government and symbolic representation in State institutions, to fully-fledged confederalism. (3) Thirdly, the final demand is the radical demand for secession. This ranges from frontier adjustment, to facilitate the incorporation of minorities/minority group(s) into a neighbouring State, or to afford independence as a separate State (*Coakley 2004*, 12-13). Coakley's observation is useful for understanding the demands of political and minority leaders, but, it is inconclusive as to whether minority leaders have a legitimate right to go beyond the common and legally supported demand of attaining equality and governmental support. Also Coakley fails to shed light on the actors promoting minority rights and does not tell us where we might learn about these actors? State authorities are, in fact, responsible for protecting and promoting the human rights of minorities. Minorities are claimants, rights holders. They have both a claim and a legal entitlement to the protection of their human rights. State authorities are duty bearers having a corresponding duty or legal obligation towards these claimants/rights holders. In other words Governments and their agents have ratified and signed International

Declarations and Treaties in favour of minorities and are therefore accountable for fulfilling such obligations. The duties, whether held by individual States vis-à-vis their own minorities, or, held collectively by the international community towards minority groups in general, can be positive duties or requirements. For example, they can result in an increase in human rights education towards the protection of minorities from discrimination and disadvantage in the labour or housing markets. Adopting human rights-based approaches facilitates the use of a rich and increasing pool of information, analysis, jurisprudence and empowerment developed in recent years by treaty bodies or other human rights specialists and agencies (*UN no date*, 11).

## 8 Participation: Responsibilities, Protection and Promotion

In the fields of human rights and human rights education it is important that the issues of protection (protecting members of vulnerable groups and accommodating minority interests) and minority self assertion (removal of unnecessary barriers to group self-assertion) be kept separate ([Eide 2001](#), 87). With regard to the issue of protection, there is little to dispute. Minority group members have the right to enjoy their cultural, linguistic and religious rights and to have societal and political support for this. The issue of self assertion is much more complex and political. How far can, and should, a central power give in to self-governance or even separateness of a group living within their State boundaries? How far should State authorities promote the human rights of minorities? These questions always go hand in hand with responsibility. It is the responsibility of Government/State not only to protect and promote minority groups but also to protect and promote those belonging to other groups in society. Minority rights must always be balanced against the justified concerns of other members of society. Human rights education to promote and protect minority rights must, from a human rights perspective, ensure that the human rights of non-minorities are also taken into consideration since fairness and reciprocity are at issue. Failure to ensure this will lead to human rights being exclusive rather than inclusive. Everyone should benefit equally from human rights and having exclusive rights for minorities would run contrary to this principle.

Minority groups and their leaders must take the initiative to alter the situation so that there is due regard for the groups' human rights. Their participation is crucial if there are to be changes in favour of minorities and which benefit them. Minority leaders need to lobby State authorities to recognise their identity, to respect their human rights and to highlight minority issues in the formal and non-formal education curricula. Education is a primary tool towards achieving recognition for minority groups and enables them to gain access to the wider society. Minorities themselves need to see education as a tool for integration not assimilation into society. They ought to request that their linguistic, historical or cultural heritage be recognised and promoted in a positive and non-discriminatory way. This can only be achieved through empowerment and participation. Participation

helps to overcome practical obstacles such as a fear of schools, expensive school fees, the lack of appropriate clothing, extra work loads etc which prevent minorities from sending their children to school.

Political leaders on both sides (those who represent minorities as well as those representing majorities) need to promote diversity to ensure that the pluralistic composition of society is properly reflected in the formal education sector. This is an important step towards human rights education for all, because it helps strengthen minority identity, giving minorities self-confidence and protecting them from stereotypical discrimination by others. Knowing about minorities, for example, their history, culture, language and traditions, is one step towards respectful treatment of minorities. When others are more knowledgeable, minorities feel they are being taken seriously and are being properly recognised. This is also important for school attendance - encouraging children and young adults from minority groups to attend class. In some societies, the rate of school drop-out and truancy is high among minority groups, this is because these groups feel discriminated against or are afraid of being assimilated, e.g. the nomadic population in Nigeria, the Roma in the Balkans or Afro-Americans in the USA. As a result of these fears parents and family members prefer their children to stay at home, working and learning more "useful" things in keeping with their traditions and customs. The ruling powers/Governments fail to adjust the national education system quickly enough to address these issues because they fear losing the support of their constituents. It is important therefore that minority leaders themselves take the lead in demanding access to information and education about human rights and, pursuing rulings in favour of diverse curricula and classes. Still, it remains a State authority's responsibility to react appropriately and to provide economic aid, access to the labour market, citizenship, residence, etc, to minority groups.

## 9 Conclusion

Human rights education for minorities is part of a vicious cycle. The lack of political will to promote diversity in society results in mistrusting minorities who have bad experiences with the formal education sector. This keeps minorities away from schools. The failure of minority leaders to mobilise their minority constituents to view the formal education system as a benefit and to begin lobbying for appropriate curricula, compounds the problem. The very absence of minorities from the formal education sector or the failure to develop an "all inclusive" curricula and their own non-formal and private education sector results in continued societal and political ignorance. Lacking self-confidence to participate in the education process and to actively engage in lobbying so that the situation. For minorities' changes in turn leads to the lack of political will to alter things and so the vicious circle continues. This is the unfortunate situation faced by minorities in many countries. The failure to take an interest in minorities has resulted in minorities in many societies being excluded from, rather than included in, mainstream society. Attempts to integrate minorities via

the formal education system based on a dominant culture in a society results in a constant threat of assimilation, as minorities are expected to shed their own cultural characteristics and conform (Eide 1998, 55). This can be overcome by recognising that societies are always composed of different ethnic groups, immigrants, refugees, non-citizens, religious groups etc. Diverse groups need to be recognised as inclusive elements of society. Society as a whole will benefit from this inclusive approach so long as these groups are respected and recognised as equal to others. The goal of human rights education for, with, and about minorities in the formal school sector as well as in the non-formal education sector must be to ensure the adoption of this inclusive approach. There must be a holistic approach based on mutual respect for the perspectives of majority and minority groups since this is how peace in society can be achieved. As long as minorities are viewed by society as exclusive groups needing assimilation into the dominant culture, no affirmative action will be taken by Governments/State authorities to arrest this vicious cycle and steps will not be taken to encourage minority leaders to participate actively in democratic decision making processes.

An integrative education system is vital not only for reflecting the cultural diversity of a society but for promoting pluralism. This is in everyone's interest and will help to reduce injustice, conflict and discrimination and will help to prevent the emergence of a gap between minority and majority groups.

## Notes

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