

LEAD PAPER: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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Popular opinions and statistics claim that we have not, as a civilization, come really far in our plight to fight and protect the human rights of minorities in societies. Fariss, Christopher J in his article “Respect for Human Rights has Improved over Time: Modeling the Changing Standard of Accountability,” provides a contrary opinion. “The pattern of constant abuse found in data derived from human rights reports is not an indication of stagnating human rights practices. Instead, it reflects a systematic change in the way monitoring agencies, like Amnesty International and the U.S. State Department, encounter and interpret information about human rights abuses.”

Our generation has tried to bridge the gap that has always existed between majority and minority groups, correct some wrongs that have been done to the minorities in the past, and tried to assimilate them into the bigger society. This has been consistent with ideologies from groups such as the United Nations in their bid to protect human rights and ensure a progressive society, feminist movements and their bid to protect women and their rights, rights of the disabled that advocate strongly for the rights of the disabled and LGBT groups that advocate for the rights of sexual minorities. What is impressive about all these groups and the great feats they have achieved is that all was possible in this century. It accentuates how tolerant we have become as a generation and how open we are to have conversations that threaten our belief systems.

Efforts of the United Nations

The existence of The United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights established in 1948, put into place a collection of international treaties intended to limit repression and abuse around the globe. It has since seen some level of adherence to humane treatments of minorities all over the world.

In inclusive education lie very essential principles that align with the struggles of the world to attain equality. It is a gateway to the realization of all other human rights. Special groups include all gender, cultural, sexual, racial minorities and the disabled that need special attention from policy makers to

ensure that they (minority groups) are inducted into the society properly and they feel like they belong and are accepted into the society fully.

A world health Organization report shows how there exists nuances in the discrimination even in minority groups. Generalizations about “disability” or “people with disabilities” can mislead. Persons with disabilities have diverse personal factors with differences in gender, age, socioeconomic status, sexuality, ethnicity, or cultural heritage. Each has his or her personal preferences and responses to disability. Also, while disability correlates with disadvantage, not all people with disabilities are equally disadvantaged. Women with disabilities experience the combined disadvantages associated with gender as well as disability, and may be less likely to marry than non-disabled women. People who experience mental health conditions or intellectual impairments appear to be more disadvantaged in many settings than those who experience physical or sensory impairments. People with more severe impairments often experience greater disadvantage, as shown by evidence ranging from rural Guatemala to employment data from Europe. Conversely, wealth and status can help overcome activity limitations and participation restrictions.

Global indices suggest that the world is little different today from a decade ago. In 2002, Freedom House, a non-governmental organization in the United States, recorded that 85 states were "free", 59 were "partly free" and 48 were "not free". In 2011 only two additional countries were judged "free" and one fewer "not free". The Political Terror Scale, an annual report which focuses on integrity violations and which is compiled from reports of Amnesty International and the US State Department, tells a similar story. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the best and 5 the worst, the global average in 2001 was 2.58. Despite differences within data, the global average in 2010 remained at 2.58. This apparent intractability seems to confirm mounting evidence that foreign assistance for governance and human rights are unlikely to deliver sustainable national improvements without genuine local political leadership. These figures might also tell us that in the face of strong countervailing forces, the United Nations has to run just to stand still.

Despite the enduring challenges, on average fewer people are arbitrarily killed and tortured by their own Government, armed conflicts are less likely to reignite, and when violence against civilians does erupt, these episodes tend to be shorter and less bloody. There has also been institutional progress. Most notably, the Secretary-General's commitment to advancing the responsibility to protect (R2P) has delivered real progress. The new Joint Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect, approved by the Fifth Committee of the General

Assembly in late 2010, has already made a positive contribution by providing early warning and by urging governments to uphold their responsibilities. The Joint Office has also begun to assist in the strengthening of regional and national capacities to detect and mitigate risks associated with genocide and mass atrocities. The UN Secretariat has strengthened the place of human rights protection more broadly in its work, including mandating the protection of civilians in peace operations, the growing use of political offices to support the promotion of human rights in- country, and desk-to-desk links between the Secretariat and regional arrangements.

Under the able stewardship of Navanethem Pillay, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has been strengthened. Not only has the High Commissioner herself played a key role in alerting the world to imminent dangers and reminding individual Member States including Libya, Syria and Australia of their legal responsibilities, the Office has also extended its human rights reporting operations and produced significant reportage, including the mapping exercise on atrocities and other human rights violations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The work of the Office to support and encourage national human rights institutions has contributed to the steady proliferation of these bodies.

The Human Rights Council has shown signs of shedding some of the problems that plagued its predecessor. Over the past five years, the Council has proven itself prepared to eject members who abuse the rights of their citizens, and the Universal Periodic Review process has become a core part of the Council's business, building shared expectations among states. This work has also helped disseminate human rights norms across the world. The establishment of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights provides an indication of this.

The creating of the entity UN Women in 2010 marked a potentially significant step forward for the promotion and protection of women's human rights. Their programmes, which are dedicated to the elimination of violence against women and focus on the protection of women during armed conflict, are especially relevant in this regard. The Secretary-General's appointment of Margot Wallström as Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict has also strengthened the Organization's capacity to protect women, notwithstanding criticism of her response to cases of mass rape in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2010.

Efforts of Amnesty International

The most influential and also the largest organization for the protection of human rights worldwide is Amnesty International. It is a worldwide campaigning movement that works to promote and protect human rights

around the world, which has been carefully kept by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international standards. Amnesty International is actually a global NGO; the movement of people who are fighting for the protection of human rights and their international recognition. The vision of this organization is to give support to each individual in order to be able to enjoy all the benefits and rights that are provided with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Amnesty International characterizes itself with working with and for the people through organizing campaigns to protect and promote human rights. She through her campaigns actually sends messages to all governments and authorities to respect the rule of law and thus affect international relations.

Amnesty International as a mass movement for the protection of human rights operates on the principles of international solidarity, global security, human rights universality, impartiality, independence, democracy and mutual respect. Amnesty International acts through voluntary membership, which stands for the cessation of human rights violations, by putting pressure on governments, armed groups, and government organizations, to respect the law and to apply international standards of human rights. Amnesty International also organizes a series of educational activities on human rights and encourages all non-governmental organizations, individuals and social institutions to support and respect human rights. Through its work in discovering violations of human rights, an array of techniques is used, such as pressure on public opinion and on the governments in the world. It does this by organizing various actions ranging from public demonstrations to writing letters, from human rights education to concerts to increase funds from individual appeals for help for specific cases to global campaigns for some particular examples. Despite all stated above, it also conducts research on organization facts, systematic and unbiased individual cases, and patterns of human rights violations through interviewing victims, observing trials, working with human rights activists. Consequent findings are published in the media, in letters or its website. It also issues periodicals, reports, educational materials for the rights of man and other rights-protective literature. In these publications are published cases of violation of human rights in the world, and readers proposed to send letters of support for victims of inhuman acts. The above actions by Amnesty International so far has yielded good results in the fight for human rights. Amnesty International's works and activities are submitted in official messages and reports at the end of each year to all the world's governments to ensure decent, persistent, respect and realization of human rights anywhere in the world.

Amnesty International as a protector of human rights all over the world has through campaigns and organized public demonstrations protested in order to promote and protect human rights. Through its membership worldwide campaigns to stop torture and for the promotion of safety, for the protection of women, education for all persons, the abolition of the death penalty, to control the use of weapons, for the protection of refugees, victim protection, campaign from poverty, and others. Amnesty International however recognizes that their unrelenting effort towards sustainable development is only possible through the genuine commitment of local political leadership.

Efforts by other African countries

The 1990's ushered in a decade of assured hope for Africa with regard to increased respect for human rights. Following the end of the Cold War, growing domestic and international pressure created an unprecedented momentum for change. The calls for reform that swept the continent in the early 1990's forced political concessions from many of the one-party authoritarian regimes that had been in power for decades. At the time, many African countries were subject to longstanding authoritarian single party or military rule, and in South Africa apartheid policies entrenched state-sponsored repression and racial discrimination.

The regional human rights treaty: the African Charter on Human and People's Rights which came into effect in October 1986 was a significant event on a continent dominated by single party structures with restrictions on political participation. Article 26 of the African Charter for Human and Peoples' Rights stated that states parties shall "allow the establishment and improvement of appropriate national institutions entrusted with the promotion and protection of the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the present Charter."

By 2000, Africa was host to the largest number of government human rights commissions of any continent. Yet its human rights record, by and large, stands in stark contrast with this fact. Much of the African continent is characterized by sagging economic performance, backsliding on promises of democracy and other human rights reforms, and increasing ethnic, national, and regional tensions, often breaking out into civil strife. In some countries, however, gains have been made and maintained in recent years and progress towards respect for human rights and the rule of law have stayed on course. Within that context, an examination of the record of the human rights commissions in African thus far reveals both the predictable and the unexpected according to the Human Rights Watch.

Governments in Africa have for some time focused all efforts in ensuring human rights especially in governance. However, some countries like

Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, etc. have shown growth and progress in ensuring human rights especially in education through inclusive education policies.

Inclusive Education:

According to the United Nations, Inclusive education can be understood as:

1. **A fundamental human right** of ALL persons with disabilities.
2. **A means** to achieve the full realization of the right to education and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights.
3. **A principle** that values the well-being of all students, respects their inherent dignity and acknowledges their needs and their ability to contribute to society.
4. **A process** that necessitates a continuing and pro-active commitment to the elimination of barriers impeding the right to education, together with changes to culture, policy and practice of regular schools to accommodate all students.

Inclusive education is a fundamental human right of ALL persons with disabilities.

From the definitions above it seems like a basic thing- making education assessible to all persons., the crux of the matter is that the most part of society still feel the disabled are only good for alms and are supposed to be helped throughout their lives.

There has been a paradigm shift in the recognition of the human rights of people with disabilities, especially and crucially, their right to effective participation in all spheres of life on an equal basis with others. Some 10 per cent of the world's population– about 650 million people – represents persons with disabilities. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which entered into force in 2008, sets out international human rights standards for all persons with disabilities in the world.

The Convention has marked a shift in how people with disabilities are viewed: no longer are they seen as objects of charity or medical treatment but as people capable of making their own decisions and exercising their rights. The Convention requires states, the private sector and others to take on the responsibility of respecting, protecting and fulfilling the rights of persons with disabilities and also promote international cooperation towards development and humanitarian assistance.

All that inclusive education asks is that these 650 million people living with disabilities be educated and accepted as useful members of the society. The challenge society has with this is that generally accepting 'new' things is tough. Inclusive education has to go through ideological and structural changes even before a curriculum change. But most importantly an ideological

change- a change in mentality that breaks all barriers of in-groups and out-groups.

Creating a gender and disability inclusive school emphasizes the creation of schools that nurture academic achievement, provide physical and emotional safety and welcome all students. This should be the need of all educators. As educators, one can create gender-expansive environments that affirm all children by reducing gender role stereotyping and allowing them to express their interests and find confidence in their strengths.

Inclusive education is a means to achieve the full realization of the right to education and an indispensable means of realizing other human rights.

Within its actualization is a roadmap to achieve global educational needs and fulfill the millennium development goals. It is an undeniable fact that education holds the keys to sustainable development in society. The respect for all other human rights will see its realization when all persons are educated.

Inclusive education is a principle that values the well-being of all students, respects their inherent dignity and acknowledges their needs and their ability to contribute to society.

The Government of Ghana inclusive education policy plan for instance, emphasizes, for the purpose of policy, assessment that covers the processes of assessing children with special needs so that they are effectively supported to maximize their potential for learning and living within their communities. They developed a multifaceted approach to assessment that include formative as well as summative assessment and acknowledges that the development potential of children can change and improve over time and with the right support.

Inclusive education is a process. It is a continuous process that recognizes the role of education in setting the tone for how generations after ours will value the rights and freedoms of all persons and build their societies upon the tenets of human rights. According to Booth and Ainscow, inclusive education as a process entails

- emphasizing the role of schools in building community and developing values, as well as increasing achievement
- fostering mutually sustaining relationships between schools and the community
- recognising that inclusion in education is one aspect of inclusion in society

(Booth and Ainscow, 2002)

African Governments have made tremendous contributions towards inclusion of special groups and the disabled in their societies. Historical precedence that has been set by other nations has widened the lenses of human rights to African leaders. The efforts that African leaders have made in ensuring inclusion of minorities in societies through inclusion in education and society must be applauded even though more work has to be done to attain absolute inclusion.

I strongly feel it is possible because the African society is historically a communal and hospitable one and tends to the needs of the vulnerable in society. Inclusion in education and inclusion in our society is not just a theoretical concept but a moral one. It requires an all hands on deck approach by all stakeholders to ensure its realization.

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