

Realizing a vision for transformative development

Right to Development Book launch and Author roundtable

Wednesday, 4 December 2013, Geneva, Switzerland

Unofficial meeting note

Book Launch

The High Commissioner for Human Rights recalled the spirit of hope and the dignity of the human person underlying the Charter of the United Nations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights built on this principled edifice, and the Declaration on the Right to Development is another important milestone towards its full realisation. However, the years since the passage of the Declaration have diverted us along a different path, with economic growth considered the sole measure of development. The right to development is a human right of every person, and yet one third of the world lives in poverty. *Realizing the Right to Development* clarifies the potential role of the right to development in the post-2015 development agenda, and seeks to liberate the right from the conceptual fog and political distortions that have engulfed it in recent times.

Panellists noted that the right to development is as relevant now as at the adoption of the Declaration in 1986. The financial, food, energy and climate crises are signs of the failure of the current world order. Failures of political leadership, particularly in the field of climate change, show that we need a greater imagination of the possible, with transformative leadership that focuses beyond short-term election victories. The innovative solutions required to create new economic and investment models can only be achieved through participatory approaches, involving the affected communities. We are not currently on course for a safe world, and the right to development lies at the heart of the solution.

Panellists reminded participants that the right to development belongs to everyone everywhere without discrimination. The Declaration generated intense excitement and hope in developing countries, and yet people in those same countries, especially women, still face a constant struggle for a decent life, despite the natural wealth and resources that often surround them. The oft-cited measure of \$2 per day is not enough to enable a decent life, and better indicators are needed for measuring development, which will often be indicators of realisation of the human rights of women.

Panellists pointed to the unrealised and yet still powerful, transformative potential of the right to development, and the political issues between States that often undermine its implementation in practice. The Declaration on the Right to Development is frightening only to those with a vested interest in preserving the status quo. In fact, the Declaration provides a framework for a better society, centred on the dignity of the human being, and if the UN is to fulfil the purposes for which it was established, it must serve as a forum in which long-term, sustainable solutions are found.

Panellists referred to the Youth Summit on the Right to Development, which was held in parallel to the launch, as a source of inspiration and hope for implementation of the principles

of the Declaration in practice. That Summit proposed the creation of platforms for voices of youth to be heard, ethical consumerism, and pointed to the need for new perspectives and ways of thinking through collaborative processes, including social media and other platforms for communication and activism.

At the conclusion of the discussion, panellists and participants were clear in their view that the right to development is not an add-on to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but rather an enrichment of the rights enumerated in that instrument.

Author Roundtable 1

The publication *Realizing the Right to Development: Essays in Commemoration of 25 Years of the United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development* was introduced as an important new tool in clarifying the meaning of the right to development and demonstrating its transformative potential at the national and international levels.

Several authors highlighted the link between the right to self-determination and the right to development, both of which are simultaneously individual and collective rights. Historically, the Declaration on the Right to Development (“the Declaration”) was championed by newly-independent States that aimed to consolidate their new political independence with economic independence, and challenged an international system created prior to recognition of their independence. Both authors and participants stressed the need for fundamental, meaningful reforms to global governance to ensure genuine solidarity, equality, democracy and accountability, backed by sustainable, holistic development policies at the national level. The negotiation of the post-2015 development agenda was highlighted as a unique opportunity to ensure practical implementation of the transformative vision of the Declaration, placing the human person at the centre of development, and recognising the responsibilities of all States to ensure meaningful international cooperation and solidarity.

Author Roundtable 2

Authors drew attention to the importance of clearly defining the right to development, in particular articulating links with economic and social policies, national and international institutional arrangements, ‘diagonal’ duties of States to persons under the jurisdiction of other States, and the content and scope of collective obligations. Several authors noted the power of statistics and indicators to focus debate and policy, and the importance of reflecting human rights in the Sustainable Development Goals that will form part of the post-2015 development agenda. Human rights indicators were presented as an important tool to supplement qualitative reviews by judicial and quasi-judicial bodies, contributing to a more comprehensive assessment of the human rights situation on the ground. Such indicators can also provide objective information on the impact of policies on the rights of marginalised or otherwise vulnerable populations, which is vital to combat discrimination. Authors and participants called for the elaboration of further illustrative indicators to measure components of the right to development, in particular active, free and meaningful participation, fair distribution of the benefits of development, and sovereignty over natural resources. Participants noted continuing political resistance to the right to development in some quarters, but considered that achieving the aims of the right to development is of greater importance than explicitly linking relevant policy measures to the right.