



DEN NORSKE HELSINGFORSKOMITÉ
NORWEGIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE

Note on practical steps that could be taken to ensure strategic thinking about human rights education and training in participating States

Address from the Norwegian Helsinki Committee,
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Human rights education means learning and practicing human rights. It means learning that human rights are a common responsibility with direct consequences for the way in which we live and interact with each other. It does not imply a one sided process only of gaining knowledge about human rights, it means also gaining skills and abilities to use this knowledge, to protect and to promote human rights.

We need not present in details the wide range of international documents in which human rights education is explicitly delineated as means to achieve a comprehensive culture of human rights. Suffice to mention only documents such as the Helsinki Declaration, the Moscow Document, the Istanbul Charter for European Security and many others. In all of these, particular stress is placed on the significance that education in human rights has in preventing conflicts and building a stabile and sustainable future. Such recognition is indeed very important and is a much required first step in implementing measures for human rights education in participating countries. However, as recent research and surveys have shown¹, implementation of human rights education in both participating and non participating States has not reached a desired level. Many measures have been taken in many countries, but much is yet to be done. A simple commitment to the stipulations of a declaration or a document is not enough if this commitment is not followed up by an effective strategy for implementation. And designing implementation strategies requires strategic thinking and strategic planning. In business ventures strategic and creative thinking has long been recognized as essential for ensuring success; it is time that the same type of future oriented thinking with focus on effectiveness and success is applied in the domain of human rights education.

In this respect the Norwegian Helsinki Committee would like to highlight the importance that the Compendium of Good Practice has for strategic thinking about human rights education and in this way link the working sessions 8 and 9 on human rights education.

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee more than welcomes this publication and deems it essential in the process of strategic thinking because it can, and hopefully will work as an incentive not only for the elaboration of implementation strategies of human rights education measures, but also for the actual implementation of these measures. Based on various works on strategic thinking developed in the recent years one can outline a number of core steps that can be taken by states, organizations, stakeholders and basically all involved parties to ensure a sustainable strategic process regarding implementation of human rights education.

1. Understanding the needs of the target groups

There are many target groups for human rights education activities and projects. Traditionally, human rights education has been directed mainly towards schoolchildren and youth in many parts of the world and in many areas this group continues to be the sole or main target group. Nevertheless, there is an increasing demand and recognition of the need to address other societal sectors as well, including therefore groups such as teachers, parents, prison officials, police force, judges and lawyers, social workers and the military.

In order to understand the specific needs of each group there is a need to elaborate a review and assessment of the situation regarding human rights and human rights education within

¹ See recent recommendations sent in to and coordinated by HREA.

each group. There exists a wide range of methods that can be used in order to achieve this, i.e. surveys, interviews, focus groups, informal feedbacks etc.

Sadly, such reports on the situation of human rights education within specific target groups or more generally within a society are quite scarce.

2. Involving all stakeholders

The success of all strategies and implementations is to a high degree dependent on ownership. It is therefore essential that when strategies for implementing human rights education measures are developed, all stakeholders are involved in the process. The UN in 1997 set forth some guidelines for national plans of action for human rights education within the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education and, yet today – after more than 10 years, it is still surprising that many countries have failed to draw up their national plan of action. It is hard to point to one particular factor for this situation, but it is reasonable to think that an overall acceptance of national plans rests on their acceptance from both the State and the civil society. It is much easier to accept something you have been directly involved in creating than something that is imposed from either above or below. States should develop their overall strategies and visions for human rights education and strive for a general understanding of how each actor's performance within this field is linked to the realization of the overall action plan.

We encourage a stronger cooperation between organizations pertaining to the civil society and state actors.

3. Benchmarking

The concept of benchmarking is taken from the field of business administration and it is here, in this process that the Compendium of Good Practice becomes so vital in the overall process of strategic thinking. Benchmarking – very briefly described – implies the comparing of costs, time cycle, effectiveness and quality of a process/activity to another that is defined as a best or good practice. This compendium (and other efforts at establishing norms and examples of how things can be done and how results can be achieved) becomes thus a central reference point that gives indications as to how long one has come in the implementation process of a particular measure in achieving a more comprehensive human rights education. By comparison to best practices one can develop recommendations, suggestions, make changes and improvements to action plans and processes.

4. Creating strategic opportunities

In order to strengthen human rights education States ought to create opportunity structures in form of legislatures and constitutions guarantees of rights related to human rights education. Depending on the situations on the ground, States should create mechanisms of inclusion such as a legislative framework for human rights education, mechanisms to ensure equal access to human rights education, processes for implementation of policies and mechanisms, i.e. human rights education trainings in several societal sectors as outlined above in the description of target groups.

Opportunities should also be present for activists, organizations and other actors to carry out awareness raising campaigns about human rights education and in this way strengthen and ensure mobilization, influence over institutions and the ability to hold authorities accountable for their actions. These elements are essential for a democratic society.

5. Operational effectiveness

Periodic consultations with stakeholders should be kept in order to ensure the involvement of all actors and in order to be able to make adjustments and revisions to the action plan. These

consultations can also provide an effective arena for benchmarking the overall implementation process for human rights education measures and can in this way ensure the measurability of the process.

Needless to say that in order to ensure the existence of such a strategic process, there are some prerequisites that must be in place among which we consider *commitment* to be quintessential. It implies commitment to lifelong learning and commitment to continuous improvement.