

Scientific Report on the Workshop of the Working Group on UN Human Rights Development Tools – 20 March 2009 – Antwerp, Belgium

A first workshop of the working group on UN human rights development tools took place on Friday 20 March 2009 in Antwerp, Belgium. Sixteen persons attended the meeting, among whom three representatives of the Secretariat to the European Parliament and two representatives of UN organizations (Brussels office).

Objectives and Format of the Meeting

This kick-off meeting of the working group was intended to decide on the priorities for the coming years. In order to be able to respond to the concerns and issues that are relevant to policy and practice, it was decided to invite policy advisors from within both the EU and the UN institutions. The following policy advisors gave a presentation and engaged in an exchange of ideas with the working group members:

- Ms Margaret Wachenfeld, senior policy advisor, UNICEF, Brussels Office
- Ms Nicola Harrington, UNDP, Brussels
- Mr Geoffrey Harris, Head of Human Rights Unit, European Parliament
- Mr Guido Van Hecken, Committee on Development, European Parliament

Issues addressed were, amongst others:

- the 'One UN' approach – good practices
- human rights based approaches to development, including national human rights institutes
- children's rights in the EU
- emerging new forms of human rights conditionality
- ...

A second part of the working group meeting consisted of a brainstorming and of an exchange of ideas on priorities for the future. The following topics were mentioned:

1. focus on the local level, not on the intergovernmental level; empirical and comparative case studies at the operational level
2. gap between policy and practice
3. the perspective of states: for which needs do they turn to external actors (UN, EU, bilateral donors)?
4. human rights based approaches to development (HRBAD) and country ownership: local impact; grassroots perspective
5. EU work on children's rights: participation, right to education
6. localising human rights methodology
7. conceptual issues: what is unique about HRBAD? What characterizes HRBAD?
8. human rights tool: measurement
9. implementation and monitoring machinery
10. has the EU much to offer to, or rather to learn from the UN?
11. the risks of bringing together human rights and development: perceptions of politisation of development work (with exception of children's rights)? Development funding used by EU as leverage for alignment of human rights positions in political fora?

Outcomes of the Meeting

Within the working group, there was a clear consensus to focus on **the local and operational** aspects, rather than on the intergovernmental policy-making issues. Central to the future work will be how UN and EU human rights and development policies work out on the ground, and which policy relevant conclusions can be drawn from that. Given the wide-ranging theme, it was felt that a measure of pluralism should be allowed in addressing the issues. It was also underscored that PhD students should be encouraged to participate in the group's work.

There was also consensus on the need to keep engaged in a **sustained dialogue with UN and EU policy advisors**.

When looking at local and operational aspects of the UN and EU human rights development policies and practices, three dimensions will be explored in particular:

1. questions of methodology and tools: e.g. the localising human rights methodology; measurement; national human rights institutions
2. conceptual issues: which approaches qualify as human rights based approaches? What does country ownership mean exactly, and how to ensure it (i.e. distinction between state and people; monopolisation of human rights initiatives by the state etc)
3. (human rights) accountability of external actors

Future Planning

The next meeting of the working group will take place at the AHRI annual conference in September 2009 (Nottingham). Members will present their current research and explain how that may be relevant for the purposes of/tie into the working group's work on the EU and UN human rights development policies and practices. This research is diverse and may deal with country studies, and/or conceptual or methodological issues. A project proposal prepared by Hugo Stokke will serve as an entry point to the UN human rights development tools and the questions they raise.

A third meeting of the working group will be scheduled to take place in March 2010.