

Report Working Group UN Human Rights Development Tools

Meeting II, Nottingham, 19 September 2009

The Working Group UN Human Rights Development Tools held its second meeting at the AHTI/COST Nottingham Conference on Partnership and Reform. Given the public nature of the conference, participation in the working group was much broader than COST eligibility for funding. This led to an interesting discussion on possibilities to include non COST eligible colleagues from academic institutions and non-governmental organizations, in particular from the South, into the work of the working group.

Hugo Stokke presented a shopping list of topics that could be addressed. In the subsequent discussion, both the substantive orientation of the working group's activities and more practical matters were discussed.

I. Substantive Orientations

At the end of the first meeting in Antwerp, some basis orientations had been agreed upon. It was decided to focus on **the local and operational** aspects, rather than on the intergovernmental policy-making issues. Central to the future work would be how UN and EU human rights and development policies work out on the ground, and which policy relevant conclusions could be drawn from that. When looking at local and operational aspects of the UN and EU human rights development policies and practices, three dimensions would 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

The option to focus on the country level was reconfirmed during the current meeting. More in particular, it was decided to focus on **empirical country studies** in which **impediments** to human rights implementation will be studied. A non-exhaustive list of impediments of a more structural or fundamental nature was suggested: power relations; erosion of state legitimacy; country ownership. It was also suggested that the assumptions of HRBADs on empowerment, accountability, social transformation need to be tested empirically. A typology of states (e.g. authoritarian states, post-conflict states, ...) could be applied. In the country studies, attention would be paid to some cross-cutting themes. A research protocol needs to be developed, so that all country studies are informed by a common framework.

Recent reform of the UN development architecture has dealt mainly with more coordination at the country level of all UN agencies, funds, programmes and offices that are active in the field. The One UN idea (one leader, one programme, one budgetary framework, one house) is currently being tested in a number of pilot countries. UN human rights activities on the ground are oriented towards the introduction of a human rights based approach in UN programming and the strengthening of national human rights institutions. The results in the pilot countries and the EU practice in relation to the the One UN pilots and HRBAD more generally should equally be studied.

Some participants gave some preliminary indications as to how they might tie in and contribute to the group's working programme.

II. Practical Issues

Three practical issues were addressed in particular:

1. how to consolidate the composition of the WG in an inclusive way: partnership with individuals and institutions who are not eligible for COST funding? Academia and NGOs?
2. opportunities for additional funding, in order to fund substantive research, and in order to be able to include partners from the South
3. expected output: academic (joint book publication; special issue of a journal?) and more accessible output (website)? Interface with practitioners?

III. Way Forward

- next meeting: 18-19 March 2010 (with possibility of flying out on 19 March): common framework for country studies – initial submissions on potential contributions
- venue: Kopenhagen (Denmark)