

Intervention: The role of international institutions in supporting sustainability of citizenship and human rights education

International institutions have a number of important opportunities to support the sustainability of human rights education.

In the context of the World Programme for Human Rights Education, the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) convenes a UN Inter-Agency Coordinating Committee (UNIACC) which includes eleven UN agencies and the World Bank.

Among the United Nations agencies are UNESCO, UNHCR, ILO, UNDP and UNICEF. Through their specific mandates, in particular, relating to education and reform of education systems, UN agencies are able to support sustainable human rights education. The World Bank, given its specific mandate, is also in a very good position to support the implementation of the World Programme through its engagement with governments on reforms of the education sectors.

The Council of Europe, as already mentioned, has a key role in the implementation of the World Programme in Europe, and works very closely with the UNIACC.

Phase 1 of the Programme 2005-2009 focused on the implementation of the human rights education (HRE) in primary and secondary schools. The evaluation of phase 1 is currently on-going and the questionnaire was sent out by OHCHR to governments. Results of the evaluation will provide valuable information on the state of implementation as well as sustainability of human rights in primary and secondary schools.

The data for the 47 CoE member states and the review of implementation in European schools systems in terms of policies, curriculum, teacher training and monitoring mechanisms will provide very useful inputs to the development of the next phase of the CoE programme on Education for Democratic Citizenships and HRE – and thereby the implementation and sustainability in Europe of the World Programme.

This kind of work, with a long term perspective to orient the vision of education towards a Human Rights framework and in particular in Europe, towards the CoE values of democracy, rule of law and human rights, is very important in laying the foundation for a sustainable human rights education.

At the same time, there are projects, for example, the European Commission's annual poster-making contest on the Rights of the Child, which gives human rights education a public visibility. It appeals to children and young people's sense of fun, creativity and competitiveness. At the same time, it provides them with information and education on children's/human rights as defined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as in the European Charter on Human Rights and other related instruments.

It will be useful for projects such as this to be linked to mainstream human rights education programmes in schools. And where HRE has not yet started in a school, or is weak, projects such as this can provide impetus for developing the local HRE programme and thus implementing a long-term and sustainable human rights education.

Human Rights Education could and should also be used to address difficult problems and issues related to violations of human rights, especially in school settings. In this regard, international institutions, given the nature of their organisations and mandates, are in good positions to assist in breaking some grounds and challenging cultural assumptions that impinge on and violate human rights. For example, access of girls to education or inclusive education for Roma children and other minorities. Invoking the right to education of every child is a powerful argument, not only to make the case for girls' education and education of Roma children, but addressing the issue is an equally powerful tool and opportunity for teaching human rights.

In conclusion, sustainability of citizenship and human rights education is important to ensure the full development of a culture of human rights and of societies grounded on democratic principles. And international institutions have important roles to play in supporting this.

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