

# The Implementation of Human Rights: Some Thoughts on Multi-Dimensional Approaches

R.E.S. Tanner\*

## Abstract

*Ethical issues such as human rights can perhaps only flourish in situations which have evolved through their own cultural development or successful national politics overall. They can agree to the implementation but there may be little return other than psychological, political and religious satisfaction as it may be felt that they have already done all that they can in this direction; it may be no more than a face saving exercise. Multi-disciplinary approaches at a non-ethical level are likely to disclose not only the plain facts that abstract human rights do not exist independent of their social environment but that their implementation would create an equally wide range of other barriers to their implementation. Rapid social change whether just occurring from factors independent of human agency or through attempts at enforcement almost invariably raise further issues of corruption and simony quite independent of national interests. The multi-dimensional approach to the implementation of human rights is an ethical necessity but a practical impossibility as the specialisation of professionalism handicaps time-consuming cooperation. Multi-dimensionality is best applied to the study of small communities in which such implementation might be negotiable.*

## Introduction

Human rights as an international aim initiated by the United Nations at the end of World War Two are a global hope of Western origin come from the personal understandings of thinkers and politicians about the standards governing their own lives. In this they were no different to religious leaders who have framed codes of hope to be applied to the lives of all believers. In this moral, political and social optimism the problem was and is to extend the realities of its potential coverage beyond this relatively small group with no material worries to the generality of mankind. There are serious inter-disciplinary problems over the realities about any form of universality involving human behaviour.

Firstly there is the problem of the extent to which any general value can be applied to societies ranging from the effectively bureaucratised ones with extensive well-funded and efficient welfare systems to societies which have little existence beyond diplomatic recognition and are divided by civil wars, limited financial independence or ability to implement its own laws.

Secondly the ability to engineer the implementation of such general rights depends on the acquisition of adequate knowledge about their absence and a multi-disciplinary understanding of what is involved.

Thirdly the need for a similar multi-disciplinary approach for the creation of social situations in which human rights can be implemented or enforced.

Fourthly the dimensions of the reality that the majority of mankind live under perennial conditions in which there can be no realistic potential for the fulfilment of human rights except as an ideal.

---

\*Institute of Missiology, University of Nijmegen, Netherlands

We see in this the basis for inter-disciplinary approaches to the problems of such a global issue since it can only be studied and implemented on the bases of many different social and political environments. It would be prudent to keep in the forefront of our minds for any multi-dimensional approach that as recently as 1975 in Cambodia in three years there was the organised political killing of 1.5 million citizens 'no other country has ever lost so great a proportion of its nationals in a single politically inspired hecatomb brought about by its own leaders' (Short.2004:10) and that as well the Ruanda tribal genocide of 1994 in which possibly as many as one million were killed (Mamdani.2001)

### **A Hierarchy of Possibilities**

Maslow (Maslow.1970) developed a hierarchy of individual needs from the lowest one of just being able to stay alive to the fifth and highest state of sophisticated individualism. These levels do not adequately cover the gradations of societies from ones in which overall conditions make human rights an irrelevancy as in Chad and Myanmar to those in which human rights are a possibility beyond a limited number of its political, social and economic elite as in Uganda and Afghanistan.

Each individual and the environment in which they live and in some cases just manage to survive are compositions of every conceivable experience and influence. Probably in all cases there are regular as well as opportunistic issues which are dominant in their influences at different levels and at different times.

Thus in any multi-dimensional approach has to be in terms what is needed to enable the majority of any population whether children, men or women to have practical access to the rights enshrined in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights Let us look at what is needed in any such approach at various levels of application.

### **The Fear of Starvation**

Many populations of subsistence farmers live on the edge of disaster from natural causes of flood and draught and civil disruptions and even in good years their food may be adequate for the months following harvesting and then progressively declining until the next one. The Gogo of central Tanzania expect one year in five to be disastrous.

There are whole communities handicapped by prolonged droughts in Eastern Africa, floods in Bengal, earthquakes in China and in inaccessible parts of Kashmir as well as hurricanes in Myanmar. The refugees from the Ruanda genocide in Ngara Tanzania created a camp larger than any city in that country In some urban areas malnutrition is common amongst unskilled daily workers and the poor generally.

In such situations a wide variety of professional expertise are required to evaluate the extent of such disasters and the priorities of giving any help; management and logistic specialists who are able to implement the giving of material aid and to control the personnel administering aid.

### **The Fear of Death**

In many societies life has become so insecure that most people live continually in fear. This is the case in Darfur where self-styled Arabs with Sudanese government support have been seeking to drive Africans into Chad. The fearful tensions in Palestine and the Gaza strip which have now lasted for generations as well as civil wars in Chechnya, Eritrea and Yugoslavia.

Here there are the need for experts in political understandings investigating causes and possible as well as probable solutions who have the ability to negotiate with peace keeping forces of many nationalities; economists with an understanding of the arms trade and the prevalence of uncontrolled small-arms ownership as well as the cross-cultural ability to negotiate through interpreters.

There is also the need for psychologists who might mitigate the inter-communal tensions which have gone on for so long as to be almost describable as protogenetic. The hostility in the Balkans between Christians and Muslims and that of Hindus and Muslims which antedate the colonial period. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century experts refer to the dominance of fear in the Balkans and we have seen its eruption in Chechnya in the break-up of the Soviet Union.

The need for expertise for the understanding of how little can community wide violence be controlled by the reluctant importation of peace-keeping forces so that there is a need for negotiators of local rather than probably ineffectual national agreements.

### **The Fear for Continuing Livelihoods**

Most people would like to have assured futures as far as they might possibly be known and in this the success of the Western societies to reach high standards of average living are the marker for the hopes of many outside their boundaries and the line along which most planned migration takes place; it is there in that stability that the implementation of human rights can become a seeming or at least a possible reality.

This hope is always handicapped by economic fluctuations and there is a need not for more multi-dimensional forecasting but for the development of small scale variability to cope with the social and economic realities of small scale societies reducing their dependence on fluctuating global markets.

We see among the Sukuma of Tanzania the steady destruction of their savanna forest and the progressive enlargement of both the Gobi and Sahara deserts. There is also the problem of overpopulation in both China, India, Egypt and Pakistan for which small scale multi-dimensional studies might be able to work out more local solutions enabling human rights to become established norms.

### **The Fear of Supra-Family Organisations**

As the size of the population unit to be considered for the implementation of human rights continues to expand, it becomes more important to study the social units within the national boundaries whose varying customs make human rights issues more difficult or easy.

Multi-dimensional studies of such endogamous communities as the American Amish and Hutterites have found out what these groups have worked out for themselves. They would only be able to sustain their materially and socially satisfying lives by ensuring that their conformism continued by making life inside better than life outside and certainly not by educating their children to enable them to leave their communities rather than contribute to community needs. Such multi-disciplinary approach to communities such as these might well conclude that any further efforts to implement human rights would disrupt such societies.

### **National Stability and Accumulated Reserves**

Ethical issues such as human rights can perhaps only flourish in situations which have evolved through their own cultural development or successful national politics overall. They

can agree to the implementation but there may be little return other than psychological, political and religious satisfaction as it may be felt that they have already done all that they can in this direction; it may be no more than a face saving exercise. However multi-dimensional research may disclose in even the most developed of contemporary states such as the United Kingdom the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has not been fully implemented (Pawson and Tanner.2005).

Such a multi-disciplinary approach shows that there are several necessary aspects to the care and development of children; the motivation for care, the physical capacity to provide care, the skill of the carer, the responsiveness of care to actual situations and the consistency of care. These will all constantly deviate from the possibilities of any national conformity to this Convention as families and localities will always differ as in the current British concern for the forced marriages of Pakistani and Bangladeshi girls born in Britain. The obvious deficiencies in developing societies catch media attention but there are nevertheless gaps in both the policies and practices of developed nations which are disclosed by research (Saxena et al.1999. Chinn and Rona 2001).

### **National Stability and the Accumulation of Social Impetus towards Change**

Ethical issues can flourish best in situations in which those involved through their own actions or successful national policies, are able to put into practice which may bring little direct return other than psychological and religious satisfaction. The difficulty over human rights is not that we do not know enough about their absence since there has been publicity from multi-dimensional sources might that their implementation is likely to upset social and economic balances.

When families have little access to social welfare support and are dependent on subsistence farming or hand to mouth urban employment, the work of their children is essential to their survival and both they and their families know this. Any multi-disciplinary study of such situations would disclose the almost disastrous results of any changes giving rights to children independent of their parents needs and equality rather than symbiosis for the relationships of men and women.

Such research has found that in some societies men have had to concede equality at middle income levels when they had to depend on their earning capacities although the women had only been educated to the primary level. At higher levels an educated woman brings prestige to her family and this can be used as a useful counter in arranging marriages and as an asset in cross-cultural inter-communication; her earning capacity is not an asset to her husband.

Many countries have legislated against the employment of under-age children for reasons connected with their international standing but with little intention of implementation for which there are neither the resources or political will. In India politicians are dependent on voting for which there would be no popular support, the police have the primary duty to prevent and detect crime and they would see no asset in any such campaign to publically criminalize the employment of children. Finally social welfare agencies cannot provide any alternative support for families deprived of the earnings of their children.

Multi-disciplinary approaches at a non-ethical level are likely to disclose not only the plain facts that abstract human rights do not exist independent of their social environment but that their implementation would create an equally wide range of other barriers to their implementation. Rapid social change whether just occurring from factors independent of human agency or through attempts at enforcement almost invariably raise further issues of

corruption and simony quite independent of national interests.

As the standard of living rises the possibility of children going to school rises but that again relates to what return education brings. Education is no doubt a human right but any multi-dimensional study would show that most children in Korea as much as in Kenya see it not as a valuable asset in itself but as a means of earning more and escaping from the drudgery and uncertainty of their parents' lives. Population growth and the fact that industrial development depends more on reliable machines than on unreliable people makes this no more than a remote possibility. Such multi-dimensional approaches would show that in Kenya as generally development can only take up a very small proportion of people and that education beyond what the Amish have decided long ago as the minimum required for maintaining their existing social system, is a programme for social disarray. Multi-dimensional approaches would show up the disadvantages of any wholesale application of the right to education for children and the prohibition of their employment.

### **The Use of Multi-Disciplinary Approaches Concerning Human Rights**

There are three important aspects to a multi-dimensional approach to the understanding of any problem. Who assesses it as a necessary and reasonable approach to a problem as funds and personnel are always limited and in this there are always short-term immediacies and some long-term internationally acceptable priorities such as food before rights which require the agreement of local political elites.

There are always problems as to what is meant by a multi-disciplinary approach. In medicine those involved would accept the need for cooperation between all the other branches of medicine within the charmed circle of 'hard' science with its widely accepted professional requirements but to go beyond this requires a different mind set and the factor of rationed time which is easier in primary groups than in mass applications.

The disciplinary structure does not promote cooperation except at the abstract ethical level. In previous centuries in many countries there were an elite class of generalists who either financed themselves or worked within the patronage of the powerful and wealthy; they saw themselves as interested in the world around them in a very general way. These multi-discipline generalists no longer exist or when they do they are seen as amateurs and the only way to professional recognition is specialisation. In this there are no advantages in seeking cooperation with those in other specialisations except when it is necessary for their own work.

Increasingly new expertise has become so complicated that it has become divided and sub-divided. There are university departments for various forms of expertise in which it is not that they do not talk to each other but there is no particular advantage in doing so when they are in competition for staff, research opportunities and funds. Each discipline has its own linguistic code, are socially and geographically separated self contained and even marry endogamously. If it takes ten minutes to walk to another department then cooperation is less and less likely. Cooperation between disciplines is time consuming and any specialised field of work is severely handicapped by any diversion which almost invariably leads to time wasting in committee work arguing about possibly insoluble differences rather than on the lowest common denominators of agreements from which they would gain few benefits. Each discipline starts from its own definitions of reality and thus find it difficult to accept the premises on which other disciplines are founded. Professor Karl Popper has stated that 'the triumph of social anthropology is the triumph of a pseudo-observation, pseudo-descriptive

and pseudo inductive generalising methodology and above all marking the triumph of a pretended objectivity and hence an imitation of the methods of natural science' (Banton.1964:99). No doubt harsh words but probably no more than what professionals feel to some degree about the premises on which other disciplines function in any required cooperation.

From the earliest days known historically the division of labour has worked against any holistic approach to the understanding of human behaviour except on a religious level of understandings. Historically the care of human suffering was holistic and as part of mankind's intellectual development aided by literacy, care became more and more specialised and then returning to the multi-dimensional holistic need from which it started.

Are the results of any cooperation between disciplines likely to have any greater influence than each one separately. The heads of universities who have achieved some eminence in their own specialisations no longer have any personal or professional needs, see that over-specialisation may detract from its value from its self-imposed isolation; if it is going to have any general use for the benefit of mankind, it has to interact widely particularly for the seeking of financial support.

The world of donors is not in general seeking to expand specialisations and what might seem to them to be no more than esoteric knowledge and wants to use their money for wider general interests. In this they may be guided by both the intellectual and popular mass media and the collective multi-dimensional sensibilities of the committee deciding the issues.

The seekers for funds whether in the field of humans rights or not are couching their applications in what they anticipate to be the wider results of their research. Donors and universities will take a more distant view of the public interest and will not want money to go too much in one direction.

Power holders and decision makers are always faced with the filtering process of immediate needs and this is not always a rational evaluation. Could we not conclude that human care from its ethological beginnings has always been holistic, so that we have always tried to be multi-dimensional. Perhaps the problem is that a multi-dimensional approach can only be achieved in primary groups and with any increase in the size of populations in which it is employed becomes increasingly difficult; applying human rights to a family of three is likely to be easier than to a community of three hundred and virtually impossible to a community of three thousand.

### **The Realities of Multi-Dimensional Approaches**

There can be no doubt that the implementation of human rights at whatever level requires the involvement of virtually every profession. This obvious need carries with it a number of difficulties.

Professionals whether philosophers or psychologists are brought up by their training to be specialists in their particular work. This is a competitive environment in which each profession is under threat from other professions for both funds and opportunities.

Professions are organised to be distinct and to maintain those distinctions by departmental structures and institutions. In this they are automatically part of the many dimensions of any issue whether the protection of refugees, the rights of women and children or the provision of health facilities. The realities of intellectual life prevent this involvement.

Each profession bases itself on base-line definitions which tend to be consciously or unconsciously exclusive. There is only the theoretical acceptance of the base lines of other professions since their professional and social lives keep them apart.

An expert employed on a project which requires a multi-dimensional approach has to be single-minded in their use of time and funds. Any requirement even as a necessity involving other professions is a potential time waster in committee work to get agreements; there is always a shortage of time and negotiations over professional boundaries is always difficult.

As the range of social and political involvement increases, the status and influence of any multi-disciplinary research may decline. The policy implementers in any society have very little time to read research reports unless they have caught the attention of other members of the political elite. Myrdal's report as an unbiased Swede on the practical effects of colour discrimination in the United States (Myrdal, 1944) had an effect on the national conscience and it allied itself to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights promoted by the winners of World War Two. There are few if any comparable multi-dimensional works on a national scale which have had similar effects.

Indian intellectuals in a multi-dimensional sense recommended that the Indian government should not introduce legislation requiring places in higher education and the public services to be in proportion to caste population totals rather than be determined by merit but the Congress party pushed this through because of its significance for their voting majorities.

The reality must always be that a multi-dimensional approach is an obvious necessity in any approach to the implementation of human rights but its organisation is both complex and difficult. In this reality of competitive differences it might be better for power holders to weld their work together and to make the necessary decisions than to require specialists to reach their own interdisciplinary agreements on some level of parallel equality.

Politicians may have a wider vision of what they want to achieve but unless they are committed ideologues or ego-centric dictators, they are dependent on popular voting support. It seems likely that this will be governed by their immediate needs and they are not likely to have any interest in human rights unless it is to their advantage to do so. From whatever angle political life is approached these power holding men and women live complex over-full lives dominated by their immediate relationships with their colleagues and more distantly with their constituents.

We have established that there is an obvious need for a multi-dimensional approach to any problem including the implementation of human rights but that such an approach varies in its possibilities with the political, social and economic urgency of the environments in which it is to be applied. This involvement is more likely to be successful in its understandings and possibilities when a multi-dimensional approach is circumscribed by smaller objectives.

## References

1. Banton, M.(1964). 'Anthropological perspectives in sociology'. *British Journal Sociology*. 15: 95-112.
2. Chinn,S & Rona,R.J.(2001).' Prevalence and trends in overweight and obesity in three cross-sectional studies of British children'. *British Medical Journal*. 322:24-26.

3. Mamdani, M. (2001). *When victims become killers: Colonialism, Nativism and the genocide in Ruanda*. Princeton University Press. New Jersey.
4. Maslow, A.H. (1970). *Motivatrion and Personality*. Harper and Rowe. New York.
5. Myrdal, G. (1944). *An American dilemma. The negro problem and modern democracy*. Harper and Bros. New York.
6. Pawson, C.J. and R.E.S. Tanner. (2005). 'The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: Implementation in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain'. *Global Bioethics*. 18: 1-15.

\*\*\*\*\*

*“Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”*

- Abraham Lincoln