

# *Reclaiming Our Dignity,*

# *Reasserting Our Rights*

*8th Global Annual Learning and Learning Program on Human Rights-Based Development*

*1-10 December 2009*

*Zenderen and Amsterdam, The Netherlands*

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*The more people learn about and embrace the holistic vision of human rights and development, the better.*

*Ton Waarts*

*Chairman of the Board of Directors, Dignity International<sup>1</sup>*

## **Overview of the Global Learning and Linking Program on Human Rights-based Development**

Human rights and development<sup>2</sup> worlds have run parallel to each other—each has its own history, constituency, strengths, weaknesses, successes, and failures. The more recent advances, such as the greater recognition of not only legal justice but also economic and social justice combined with increased work around economic, social, and cultural rights by the human rights community on the one hand, and the recognition of poverty as a human rights issue by the development

community on the other, have brought the two seemingly parallel worlds closer together.<sup>3</sup>

A step in this direction are the Rights Based Approaches (RBAs) which can be viewed as an attempt to initiate conversation between the two worlds of human rights and development. Given the similarities in the longer-term human rights and development visions to achieve human dignity for all, and in anticipation of future evolution of human rights and development work, it is possible to envision these two seemingly parallel worlds coming even closer.<sup>4</sup>



Mr. Jeral Joseph, Capacity Program Officer of Dignity together with the team of facilitators, gives a brief introduction of the program during the first day of the training.



Aye Aye Win, Executive Director of Dignity and Ton Waarts, Chairman of the Board, talk about the history and background of the host country, The Netherlands.

In early 2002, realizing the hunger for knowledge of human rights and how human rights relate to poverty eradication, Dignity partnered with quality and organized institutions to organize a learning program at a global level on economic, social, and cultural rights. Then, over the years, it provided more emphasis on the links between human rights and development, as it particularly tried to meet the growing demand for capacity building on human rights-based development.

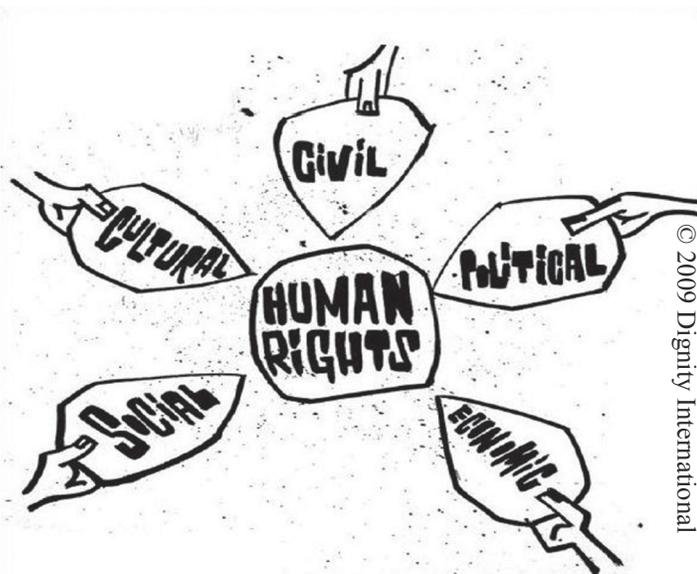
Now on its eighth year, Dignity has become an instrument to producing “global change makers.” Out of 400 applications from around the world, twenty-

two participants representing 19 countries (Armenia, Australia, Brazil, Burma, Cambodia, Egypt, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa, Spain, Uganda, Ukraine, United States of America) were accepted by the 8<sup>th</sup> global program, which took place on 1-10 December 2009 in the Netherlands (Zenderen and Amsterdam). All came from various organizations and government offices that were involved in addressing issues concerning human rights, poverty, housing, health, discrimination, gender sensitivity, and education. This author, representing the Asian Federation Against Involuntary Disappearances (AFAD), was one of the twenty-two participants of the program.

The 10-day intensive training proved to be an enjoyable learning experience. Delegates were equipped with the knowledge of the key elements of human rights-based development through practical application. It fostered a sense of commitment among all participants to continue working for the development of human rights, onwards the vision of human dignity for all.

### Program Methodology

The program was a learner-centered, creative, and participatory process. Drawing from the various experiences and expertise of the participants/learners, the program was also a multi-cultural exchange, engaging both learners and facilitators to bring out and understand the human rights basis to development. The general view is that these two realities (human rights and development) run in parallel but not together, and therefore, the aim was for the program to facilitate the participants’ deeper appreciation of the meaning of human rights and see its integration in development work that would translate it into concrete strategies



The Human Rights Flower clearly illustrates that human rights is indivisible and are all interrelated with each other.

and development programming at the grassroots and regional levels.

Dignity's training manual was divided into 13 modules:

- Module 1 Welcome and Introduction (Part 1 – Ice Breakers, Part 2 – Introductions, Part 3 – Program Methodology)
- Module 2 Understanding Human Rights
- Module 3 Understanding Development
- Module 4 Human Rights-Based Approaches: Links to Human Rights Standards
- Module 5 Human Rights-Based Approaches: Links to Human Rights Obligations
- Module 6 Human Rights-Based Approaches: Accountability and Redress
- Module 7 Human Rights-Based Approaches: Non-discrimination and Attention to Vulnerable Groups
- Module 8 Human Rights-Based Approaches: Participation
- Module 9 Human Rights-Based Approaches: Empowerment
- Module 10 Globalization, Development and Human Rights
- Module 11 Human Rights-Based Strategies
- Module 12 Human Rights-Based Programming Cycle
- Module 13 Conclusions and Closing

### From Poverty to Dignity

Throughout the whole program, the work and interests of each participant have been used as bases for understanding development work and the need to link this work with human rights. Module 3 was designed specifically to understand and uncover these links and to understand the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of poverty. This module also gave *Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, Empowerment, and Linking* to human rights standards (**PANEL**) a new meaning and the participants were able to associate theoretical concepts and the realities on the ground. **PANEL** are the key elements of a human rights-based approach to development that would address the multiple layers of poverty.

The team of facilitators headed by Dignity's Capacity Program Officer, Jerald Joseph, made the program all the more enriching and engaging. They had made the dialogue and exchange between and among the participants simple and unique. They were able to extract diverse answers and solutions based on their knowledge of human rights.

One key feature of the program is a day of field visit to expose participants to the struggles of people living in poverty or facing discrimination. This year, the participants were divided into two teams. One team travelled all the way to Belgium to visit two organizations—Recht-Op, Antwerpen<sup>5</sup> and Antwerp Institute for Community Development<sup>6</sup>. The other group was fielded in Utrecht and visited Street News (Straat Nieuws) Utrecht<sup>7</sup> and The Tussenvoorziening<sup>8</sup>. It was another opportunity for the participants to gain experience and be able to see poverty in Europe—a place where they think it doesn't exist. Most of the organizations that were visited hoped to offer people living in poverty the chance to re-enter society by helping them develop a sense of responsibility. The participants were impressed by the way the communities were empowered. They have seen indicators that these people showed efforts to get out of poverty without asking for charity.

As final project, the participants were asked to draw up a campaign or project proposal based on a real case study. They were divided into 5 groups and each was



One of the members of the Board of Dignity reads a copy of the Street News during the participants' field trip in Utrecht. (© Inas Abdelatif)

given different case studies to work on. Each campaign was presented in a plenary session. All participants had the chance to act as a member of the Board of Directors who either approved or denied the proposed campaigns. The activity proved to be interesting as it reflected how much of the issues and ideas learned during the course were absorbed by the participants; more importantly, how they were able to implement the human rights-based approaches in their daily work.

The program culminated with activities for the International Human Rights Day. The participants started their day by attending an international roundtable on the "Global Financial and Economic Crisis—A Human Rights Perspective."<sup>9</sup> The roundtable was opened by Professor Louk de la Rive Box, the Rector of International Institute of Social Studies. The speakers included Dr. Manuel F. Montes, from the United Nations; Prof. Dr. Nico Schrijver, Member of the UN Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; Mr. Arjan Hamburger, Dutch Human Rights Ambassador; and Ms. Liesbeth van der Hoogte of Oxfam NOVIB.<sup>10</sup>

In the three hours of rich inputs and interventions, the roundtable highlighted the social, environmental, and human rights impact of the crisis of people living in poverty in Europe as well as in the global south. Ms. Quinta Ansem of the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) shared the impact of the crisis on the poor in Europe while Ms. Prossy Jonker of Raising Voices in Uganda focused her intervention on the impact of

the crisis on primary education programs in Uganda. Mr. Zeyar Lin of Foundation for Education and Development highlighted the worsening situation of migrant workers with examples from Thailand and Burma. Mr. Joy Tudu of the Church of North India outlined the human rights and environmental impact of the crisis on the indigenous communities and how these communities have become the "structural victims of internal colonialism."<sup>11</sup>

After the roundtable, the EAPN-Netherlands, Dignity International and the participants of the program joined many other organizations to convene at Parliament Square in The Hague to celebrate the International Human Rights Day. True to the event's theme, "Reclaim our Human Dignity and Reassert our Rights," representatives from each continent—Africa, Asia, Americas, Oceania, and Europe lit the Human Rights Torch that symbolized justice around the world. Each also shared short solidarity and inspirational statements clinging to the hope that human rights bring and anticipating the challenge ahead to make this a reality. The happy crowd sang and danced to the pulsating music of BrotherHood4Real Band, which resonated throughout the square.<sup>12</sup>

The group was welcomed by Mr. Coskun Cöruz of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament, who pledged his commitment to do what he could to ensure that "all human rights become a reality for all, everywhere." Mr. Cöruz pointed out that the present Dutch government puts highest priority on human rights

in its foreign policy, not just in actions and diplomacy, but also by directly supporting human rights organizations and activists in many places of the world.

The Human Rights Day celebration was concluded with a social evening in Resto Van Heart<sup>13</sup> where the participants ate and danced with members of the EAPN-Netherlands.

### Conclusion

My journey in the human rights highway is still too short and fresh; there are still a lot more for me to see, learn and discover. Nonetheless, this training gave me an unparalleled experience. I will always treasure all the new feelings



Dr. Manuel F. Montes (left) from the United Nations in New York, gives his take on the human rights perspective on the global financial and economic crisis. (© Dignity International)



Participants of the training prepare for their march on the way to the Parliament Square in The Hague to celebrate Human Rights Day. (© Hazel Bolanos)

6 Advocacy channels for foreign people living in poverty in Antwerp and the Flanders.

7 Founded in 1994, its goal is to offer a daily spending activity to the homeless. The daily paper is edited in cooperation with the poor people. Its vision is to offer chances to re-enter this society by helping them to create a working experience by selling the newspapers.

8 Initiated in 1993, it is an innovative not-for-profit organization in Utrecht (The Netherlands). It provides shelter, support and assistance to homeless, roofless people and other marginalized groups.

9 For more information on the roundtable, visit [http://www.dignityinternational.org/dg/RC/Dignitydocs/2009/roundtable\\_flyer.jpg](http://www.dignityinternational.org/dg/RC/Dignitydocs/2009/roundtable_flyer.jpg).

10 Dignity International news <http://www.dignityinternational.org/dgi/news.php>

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 An independent organization who invested in social cohesion of the Dutch society. The goal of the restaurant is to help people to get out of social exclusion and to enhance the level of social cohesion within the neighborhoods and their cities.



and approaches the training offered me. Not only did I acquire new ideas and skills in training and in human rights and development concepts, but I also did become a different person—more aware of the world, its peoples, and their intrinsic diversity. For that, I owe immense gratitude to Dignity International and its outstanding organizing committee, the EAPN, the AFAD and to all the participants, who are now my newest friends.

Together let us reclaim our dignity and reassert our rights!

1 Dignity International was founded in October 1999 largely by communities directly experiencing poverty and social exclusion who felt that there is a need for a global human rights movement that will promote and defend economic, social and cultural rights on par with civil and political rights – a human rights movement that will defend the human rights of the poorest and most vulnerable in our societies. Its aim is to empower the affected communities through human rights awareness and enrich the contents of human rights with their input; work with and affect change in the lives of the poorest communities through local, global campaign action; and advance the human rights framework in the overall debate on globalization. To know more about Dignity International, visit their website at [www.dignityinternational.org](http://www.dignityinternational.org).

2 Development has meanings in several contexts and there is no universally accepted definition. There has largely been an emphasis on economic development and the human dimension was not always present. In the program, development is understood as holistic and multi-disciplinary - encompassing human development, social development and sustainable development. In short, it is the enduring development of livelihoods and greater quality of life for human beings.

3 Dignity International, Hakijamii Trust, Nairobi, and People's Movement for Human Rights Education. *Information document: A New Global Linking and Learning Program on Human Rights in Development*. Accessed 1 February 2010 from [http://www.pdhre.org/HRD\\_InfoDocumentFinal.doc](http://www.pdhre.org/HRD_InfoDocumentFinal.doc).

4 Ibid.

5 One of the associations that have been established in Flanders that describes itself as an association in which the poor take the floor. It consists of groups of poor people and poor families that meet together with volunteers and, in some cases, also with professional social workers. Together, they organize leisure and cultural as well as educational activities. They work together to improve their situation, to better inform the broader public of their situation and to influence those people who can help them solve their poverty problem (social workers and policy-makers).

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