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Human rights based approaches to science and technology

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Abstract
Human rights-based approach to science, technology and development seeks to place a concern for human rights at the heart of how the international community engages with urgent global challenges. Above all, a rights-based approach to science seeks to create the conditions for equitable participation in the global science community and fair access to scientific information and goods.
A human rights-based approach recognizes that science is a socially organized, human activity which is value-laden and shaped by organizational structures and procedures. The present paper focuses how governments and other stakeholders can create and implement policies to ensure safety, health and livelihoods; to include people's needs and priorities in development and environmental strategies; and to ensure they participate in decision-making that affects their lives and resources.

Keywords: human rights, science & technology and environmental strategies

Introduction

Documents that include or centre around human rights-based approach to science, development, and technology, and their key principles:

Universal declaration of human rights (article 27): Affirms everyone's right to participate in and benefit from scientific advances, and be protected from scientific misuses.

UNESCO recommendation on the status of scientific researchers — 1974 (article 4): Affirms that all advances in scientific and technological knowledge should be solely geared towards securing well-being for global citizens, and calls upon member states to develop the necessary protocol and policies to monitor and secure this objective

UNESCO declaration on the use of scientific knowledge — 1999 (article 33): This states, "Today, more than ever, science and its applications are indispensable for development. All levels of government and the private sector should provide enhanced support for building up an adequate and evenly distributed scientific and technological capacity through appropriate education and research programmes as an indispensable foundation for economic, social, cultural and environmentally sound development. Declaration on the Use of Scientific and Technological Progress in the Interests of Peace and for the Benefit of Mankind (1975) and Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005) are two other important land marks.

Two-way street

- Good science, and a respect for human rights, rely heavily on each other.
- In addition, science and technology can cause serious harm to the social and ecological systems on which life depends. Military technologies, for example, can be used to undermine liberty and justice; and new technologies, such as nanotechnology or geoengineering, may even call into question what it means to be human. Human rights approaches can shed light on the ethical implications of new technologies and examine how policy can keep up with rapidly developing science.
- On the other hand, science and technology also bolster development and even the fulfilment of human rights. This extends to information and communication technologies (ICTs) as tools that potentially facilitate access to scientific knowledge. ICTs are rapidly influencing democratic practice through e-government and social networks

Geospatial Technologies

- Another way in which science and technology intersect with human rights issues is the use of technologies such as geo-spatial, satellite imagery, and geographic positioning systems to identify and track human-rights violations. They offer access to remote parts of the world, providing both new information and a powerful way of communicating it for advocacy, policy debates or litigation.
- Amnesty International, for example, has created the Science for Human Rights Project where geo-spatial technologies are actively used to access conflict zones and gather visual evidence in novel ways.

Relationship to ethics

- The right to science and its benefits are not yet central to the ethics of development
- But the bigger issue is whether, and how, a human rights-based approach should inform development ethics. Whose rights does the term refer to? Can the focus on individuals be adapted to the realities of development work at the community level?
- However, the UNESCO declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights is an important landmark in bringing human rights based approaches to bear on the ethical implications of rapid technological transformation.

Conclusion

Certainly, science, technology, and development are central to the industrial and post-industrial revolution of the 21st century. And, even with their limitations, human rights are central to discussions on how science, technology, and development can promote human well-being. Human rights are also rights to sustainability, serving to protect the poor and vulnerable from the excesses of market-driven science and technology.

However, these techniques are not exclusively human rights-based. Indeed, one of the great obstacles to developing good human rights-based practice is that the approach can encompass everything, thus risking being nothing at all. Also, consultation and dialogue do not necessarily guarantee consensus, let alone firm implementation.

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