

Module 8

Inequality and Global Justice

Values and Human Rights

1. Definitions

- Values are a set of norms and standards that describe something or actions that are best to do or live upon
- Human Rights are the moral principles or norms that describe certain standards for human beings and which are protected (or should be) by law or legal entities.

2. Introduction

Humanity has been governed from its beginning by global values (sometimes called absolute) that determine the best conduct of people towards themselves, other human beings and their surroundings. Such values or norms have not varied between cultures and civilizations. Such values simply describe actions or things as “good” or “bad”. For example, telling the truth is “good” and lying is “bad”, while being honest is “good” and stealing is “bad”, etc. These unwritten codes are universal and agreed upon globally and are deeply imbedded in humanity. However, when it comes with dealing with others, issues become more complicated. Throughout time, the definition of fellow human beings was governed by cultural and power aspects (economic power, material power, etc.). Many codes of conduct were – and still are – present that govern the way one treat others. However, several questions automatically have to be answered in order to follow a certain behavior. For example, am I dealing with a man or a woman? One who is rich or poor? White, black, Asian, Indian or other race? Is he/she from my class? From my country? From my city? What is his/her religion? And many other questions.

Even before writing was discovered, the absolute values and rights were appreciated and dealt with most of the time by the guidance of religion. Most religions have codes of equality and rights in general. However, the first written code of rights or laws (even though debated) is the one written by Hammurabi (Figure 1) around 2000 BC.



Figure 1: An inscription of the Code of Hammurabi

The other written charter of rights was issued by Cyrus (Figure 2) around 500 BC. This was also debated as it did not represent global human rights and was just propaganda to win the mind and heart of the defeated locals. Nevertheless, the fact that it was written and gained acceptance verifies the fact that equality and rights are deeply rooted in human beings minds and souls.



Figure 2: The Cyrus cylinder of Cyrus the Great, founder of the Achaemenid Persian Empire

3. Methodology

These questions show that there is a problem in our perception of human beings and hence their rights. This has led to the issue of equality where many barriers have been erected to create inequality among human beings and bar many from the achievement of their rights. These barriers include:

- Gender
- Race
- Religion
- Class and rank (economic or other type of classes)
- Geographical location (country or part of one)
- Age

There are many other classifications that depend on culture and society, such as position and education, and each should be discussed by students with examples given. Also, a discussion should be held to evaluate these classifications of humans and their rights, whether it is “good” or “bad”.

Students will be asked to evaluate human rights in various locations in the world and cite examples.

Students will differentiate between the commonly used terms equality and equity as well as justness and fairness and explore what these terms mean to them.

Basic values will be defined and students will be discuss how these values guide them in evaluating their own behavior along with the behavior of others.

A list of the basic human rights will be worked out.

A definition and evaluation of the social (and possibly legal) responsibility individuals should uphold to provide a just and equal society for all on the globe. Also, students should discuss if this is possible.