

Chapter 11

E-Government for Social Inclusion?

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims at examining the relationship between two concepts which at a first glance appear as irrelevant; on the one hand, it is the effort to achieve social inclusion—as part of a wider anti-poverty perspective—and, on the other hand, it is the notion of e-government, as a modern side of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs). In the first part of the chapter, it is explained that anti-poverty strategies and policies are in fact trying to facilitate access to human rights and to a series of goods which are necessary for life in dignity. In the second part, the theoretical foundations of e-government are examined and there are also given some first views on how e-government might eliminate social exclusion and facilitate social inclusion. The third part is a synthesis of the previous two; it is devoted to the fundamental notion of access which appears as an aim and outcome of both anti-exclusion policies and e-government policies; if there is access, there is inclusion and if there is e-government, there is access. This means that e-government can, under certain circumstances, promote inclusion. The whole chapter is underlined by the concept that human capabilities for access are mainly understood as access to capabilities.

THE NATURE OF ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGIES

This part of the chapter aims at providing a short overview of the most recent evolutions and theories having to do with the eradication of poverty. This overview will be used to show

that anti-poverty strategies are in fact anti-social-exclusion and pro-human-rights policies, which have at their epicenter the development of human capabilities. As far as human rights in particular are concerned it will be shown that all of them are related with poverty and exclusion, but that it is mainly social and economic rights which do have such relationship.

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The Nature of International Anti-Poverty Strategies

Nowadays, the United Nations' (hereinafter UN) effort to eliminate poverty is guided by the so-called "*human rights approach*." This approach was initiated in the late '80s. It was officially introduced by father Joseph Wresinski, founder of the non-governmental organization ATD Fourth World, who in 1987 presented in the French Economic and Social Council a report entitled "*Grande Pauvreté et Précarité Économique et Sociale*" (Wresinski, 1987). This text was the first initiative to address poverty under a human rights perspective and made the Human Rights Commission of the UN engage with the issue this way, by adopting its resolution 1989/10 on human rights and extreme poverty.

In 1993, the *Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action* (A/CONF.157/23) recognized the indivisibility and interrelatedness of all human rights (Part I, par. 1 and 5) and stressed the relationship of their enjoyment with the problem of poverty (Part I, par. 14). Two years later, the Copenhagen Declaration, adopted by the *World Summit for Social Development* (A/CONF.166/9) emphasized the connection between social development—social justice and respect for human rights (Par. 5). In the following years, the reports submitted by the special rapporteur (Leandro Despouy) and independent experts on extreme poverty and human rights (Lizin, 1998-2004; Sengupta 2005-2008; Carmona, 2008) have continuously highlighted the relationship between human rights and the effort to combat poverty and exclusion. In 2000, the *Millennium Declaration* set as a primary responsibility of the international community (Goal 1) to halve by 2015 the proportion of people who suffer from hunger and the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day (A/RES/55/2) and ten years later it was affirmed that "the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger has a direct impact on the achievement of the rest of Millennium Development Goals"

(A/RES/65/1), e.g. primary education, gender equality, and public health. It is very important that the first Millennium Development Goal, namely the eradication of poverty and hunger, is said to reflect customary international law (Alston, 2005) which is binding upon all members of the international community.

Moreover, as far as the effort to adopt *Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights* is concerned (2006-2012), it was again stated that "it is an urgent matter to put the realization of all human rights at the center of efforts to eradicate extreme poverty" (Sepulveda, 2010, p. 4). In this vein, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has already been working for a long time on "*human*" and "*inclusive*" development. The attempt to achieve human development has set away the link between development and economic growth, according to which the increase of income is the final objective of development and *Human Poverty Indexes* enlist the main deprivations, other than those of income, that affect quality of life. On the other hand, inclusive development means that the social results of development should be distributed as widely as possible and that everybody is able to realize the development of one's desired life plan (Madon, 2004).

One can easily understand that the human rights approach to poverty is now internationally prevalent. This approach is closely connected with *relative poverty* and *human capabilities*. The notion of relative poverty has to do with the way of measuring the phenomenon of poverty and is the opposite of absolute poverty, the latter implying income lower than a certain amount of money, e.g. the suggestion of a poverty line of \$1 per day. Relative poverty can be expressed either as lack of those goods which in a given society represent sociocultural norms or as a certain percentage in the scale of income distribution in a given society (Sengupta, 2005). This measurement has the advantage of not defining poverty in an abstract way but with reference to the socioeconomic position of an individual in a certain society and

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