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Human Rights as Cornerstone of Resilience and Empowerment in Addressing Poverty in Asia in the 21st Century

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Abstract

From the economic potential perspective, the 21st century is often referred to as the 'Asian century'. This is because the economic power houses of the industrialized west have been in relative decline while the economic growth in the Asian region has outstripped all other regions of the globe. On the other hand, Asia also has a large population and a high population growth with large sections of the population still living in poverty. The growth that we are addressing in this chapter is not evenly observable within countries or between countries. Poverty may therefore be in general decline but it is not eliminated and inequalities within countries may have worsened in countries like Peoples Republic of China. Improving economic circumstances is good for human rights as in this chapter poverty and inequalities are regarded as human rights issues. Economic growth alone, however, does not always correlate with improvement in the human rights situation. Some of the leaders in the region have argued that the region needs economic growth and not human rights as understood in the western countries. The 'Singapore model' is such an approach that favours creating wealth while regarding granting human rights as a threat to rapid economic growth. There are also other threats to human rights in this Asian century including the treatment of minorities, religious intolerance and armed conflicts. In this chapter we explore the challenges and opportunities in addressing the issues of human rights and poverty in Asia in the 21st century. The

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social work profession is committed to human rights and has an advocacy role for the disadvantaged and voiceless in society. Supporting and empowering the marginalised contributes to building resilience for the community to demand human rights and a dividend in the economic growth.

The Asian Century

It is now widely accepted that Asia has become a powerhouse of economic growth and development while the European and North American countries have been experiencing a slowdown in their economies. The 21st century is described as the Asian century and it is expected that within only a few years Asia will be the world's largest producer and consumer of goods and services (Australian Government, 2013). There is excitement within the Australian government and business community then at the prospects of being able to sell goods and services to a thriving Asia, expected soon to be home of the majority of the world's middle class. The transformation of heady economic growth and transformation in Asia is described as 'staggering' and includes the following critical features:

- People's lives are being transformed in this region that is rich in cultural, social, political and economic diversity and is transforming the globe as well in the process.
- Hundreds of millions of people have been lifted out of poverty and health has improved in terms of infant mortality and life expectancy.
- Policies and institutions are being transformed as well to meet the challenges in the high performing economies.
- There have been huge investments in people as well as creation of a climate favourable to capital investments.
- Jobs have been created for the highly trained young people.
- Open global trading systems and infrastructure to reduce transport costs have assisted in global and regional integration.
- There has been greater acceptance of global systems of rules that have allowed for greater stability and increased levels of interdependence. (Australian Government, 2013).

The Asian middle class is estimated at 500 million and expected to rise to 1.5 billion by 2020 (Mahbubani, 2014). The stress that will put on the environment is enormous especially if the western consumption patterns are followed. The economic growth is phenomenal and unprecedented but it is also challenged by others who feel it is too early to declare an Asian century despite the progress being made.

The other side of this scenario is that approximately 700 million people in Asia and the Pacific live on less than US\$1 a day and of these 400 million live in urban areas (ADB, 2014). Asia also needs the rest of the world for sustained growth and development. Despite its decline, the United States of America is still a major economic and military superpower. Dollar (2007) has argued that the total economic output from Asia is dwarfed by the United States' output and even though China has experienced a rapid growth it is from a very low base. Dollar further argues that the natural resources limitations, growing inequalities and internal tensions are likely to limit the extent of China's growth and more importantly, cooperation between China and the United States is important for each other's growth. The conclusion is that we are more like to see a multi-polar century. It is also important to remember that Asia is not homogeneous and the developing patterns within and between countries is vast. Dollar notes that China has been growing very fast (at about 10 per cent) with India on a moderate four per cent and what he calls 'the rest of developing Asia (RODA)' at a world average of 2.7 per cent.

Whether one talks of an 'Asian century' or a multi-polar world, the fact remains that the emerging status of the Asian region as a major player in the world economy is a reality. This rise can be traced back to the 1990s when the 200 years of Western dominance was challenged and continues to be challenged by globalisation and a fast developing Asian region and other developing countries (Dollar, 2007). If China and India keep growing as they are, it is predicted that China could overtake the United States economy in size by mid this century and India could equal it (Sachs, 2004). Even if that happened, the per capita incomes in the United States and other western countries would still remain considerably higher. Sachs also notes that the growing integration of the Asian economies and cooperation between the Asian countries and argues that this is an important step in reducing animosities between states. This is critical as war often leads to major violations of human rights in addition to taking resources away from economic development.

Economic Growth and Development

The economic development in Asia is acknowledged but it is important to remember that it is very uneven both within and between countries. Sen (1999) suggests that there is a difference between growth and development. Growth is regarded as the process of the expansion of the Gross National Product (GNP) as well as personal incomes while development is the process of improving the standards of living and

economic wellbeing as well as expanding the real human freedoms that people enjoy. Sen acknowledges that the economic growth can play a major role in this. Economic growth provides the state with the means to invest in infrastructure and welfare programs but the relationship is not a linear one as it is dependent on the policy choices the state and individuals make. Sometimes the process of economic growth can come at the expense of freedom and welfare of the people that it is meant to benefit if the state chooses not to prioritize policies geared towards the improvement of the wellbeing of the people. Thus poverty can coexist with economic growth when there are no policies in favour of wealth redistribution, infrastructure improvement and respect for democratic processes.

Poverty is regarded here as the 'deprivation of basic capabilities, rather than merely as lowness of incomes, which is the standard criterion of identification of poverty' (Sen, 1999, p. 87). This is not to reject the concept of poverty as inadequacy of income to provide oneself with the capabilities to achieve minimal functioning in the society in which one lives. Rather than that it is to assert that there is more to poverty than incomes. Sen's concept of basic capabilities has led to the development of Basic Capabilities Index that identifies poverty that is not based on income but using indicators like percentage of children reaching fifth grade, child mortality and proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel (Social Watch, 2007). The index is highly correlated with social development and allows for comparison between countries or within same country over time. The index shows low and deteriorating scores in some countries in Africa, East Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean. The advantage of this approach is that the indicators are associated with capabilities that all members of a society should have and which would also mutually interact towards achieving higher levels of individual and collective development, particularly for the youngest members of the society.

The dominant economic ideology guiding economic development in the world, including Asia, is neo-liberalism. Ideologically, neoliberalism aims at economic and social transformation led by the free market and is characterised by competition, choice, entrepreneurship, individualism and promotion of for-profit companies (Connell, Fawcett and Meagher, 2009). The thinking behind neo-liberalism is based on the supremacy of the market as the determinant of economic and social policy:

The whole point of neo-liberalism is that the market mechanism should be allowed to direct the fate of human beings. The economy

should dictate its rules to society, not the other way around [and] ... this doctrine is leading us directly towards the “demolition of society” (George, 1999, p. par. 6).

The proponents of neo-liberalism present it as the natural and inevitable economic and social system and the failure of Stalinist communism in Eastern Europe in the 1990s only strengthened their case (Shutt, 1998). The thinking behind this approach to capitalism is not new and could be traced to earlier periods in history but from the 1970s the growth of transitional corporations, the decline in the role of the state in making national policies, the closer relationships between countries, also called globalisation, has been on a relentless upward swing. This has led to unprecedented economic growth at a global level and while initially the major corporations were from the Western countries, now some of the major global corporations are from Asia—particularly Japan, South Korea, China and India. Neoliberalism is the new face of capitalism and comes with advantages in boosting productivity. There are also problems in that it creates social inequalities with winners and losers and overall it is transforming the Asian region in a dramatic way. The quest for fast economic growth leads to rapid exploitation of natural resources and threatens environmental degradation if strict regulations are not put in place.

Poverty Despite Economic Growth

While Asia leads in economic development, it is also home to a lot of very poor people and increasing inequalities in countries like China and India are causing concerns to the governments. With the adopted neo-liberalism policies, however, such an outcome is unavoidable and there is growing resistance to growth without concern for the welfare of the people (Purcell, 2008). The argument in favour of rethinking neo-liberalism is based on the evidence that growth in the economy that leads to a small number of super rich in a sea of poverty is not sustainable and ultimately threatens stability, peace and human rights. Economic growth and development has to be based on the welfare of the people as Amartya Sen has argued:

What people can positively achieve is influenced by economic opportunities, political liberties, social powers and the enabling conditions of good health, basic education and the encouragement and cultivation of initiatives. The institutional arrangements for these opportunities are also influenced by the exercise of people's freedoms, through the liberty to participate in social choice and in

the making of public decisions that impel the progress of these opportunities (Sen, 1999, p. 263).

There have been arguments presented by some of the leaders in Asia that a paternalistic state knows best and this is in keeping within the Asian values. This is best exemplified by what is referred to as the 'Singapore model'. In this model it is argued that:

non-Western states must have the autonomy to establish their own codes of conduct suitable to their unique economic, political, social and cultural circumstances which emphasize the state, society and family relationships and duties and which presume economic growth as their basis (Chew, 1994, p. 937).

The 'Singapore model' which has delivered tremendous economic benefits to the people of Singapore has not worked for other countries where authoritarian regimes have been bedevilled by corruption, nepotism, cronyism, economic stagnation, unrest and despair. The regime in Myanmar is a good example of elite control without delivering either economic or social development (Perry, 2007). Although there have been recent changes in Myanmar, Perry documents corruption, mismanagement of resources, endless wars against minority groups such as the Karen and pervasive political repression that has done great harm to the people and the economy over the years.

The United Nations leads in the effort to eradicate poverty in the world. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were adopted in the Millennium Declaration of September 2000 as a global agenda to end underdevelopment. Reducing poverty and hunger were recognised as crucial to development and designated as the first goal. The objective is to halve the incidence of hunger and poverty between 1990 and 2015 by improving the basic services and uplifting the lives of millions of poor people around the globe. While the goal was of halving extreme poverty by half was achieved five years ahead of deadline, there are still a lot of people living in poverty in the Asia Pacific region and the world. By 2010 the extreme poverty in Asia and the Pacific affected around 900 million people, half a billion people experienced persistent hunger and one in six people suffered from malnutrition (Chatterjee, Mukherjee and Jha, 2010). These findings demonstrate how challenging it is going to be to achieve long-term and sustainable development in the region. Some countries like Thailand have already found that after achieving middle income status they are caught in a 'middle-income' trap and achieving high income status has become like a mirage (Warr, 2011). Warr argues that lack of adequate investment in people or human

capital appears like the major bottle neck and improving education for all as well as addressing issues of corruption and governance will be key to further development. There are clearly salutary lessons for the other countries aspiring to high income status such as China, India and Malaysia.

Human Rights Issues in 21st Century

In an era where all the major grand theories and ideologies are being questioned, the concept of human rights stands out as one area of agreement on acceptable moral values for our shared humanity. Human rights are the most fundamental rights a person can have and they are universal and apply to all people without qualifications (Bailey, 2012). The struggle for human rights is probably as old as humanity and can be identified in all cultures in some form. The modern human rights era, however, began with the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) 1948 which was approved by the UN General Assembly on 10 December 1948, following the conclusion of World War II (Bailey, 2012). Bailey argues that with virtually all nations being members of the UN the UDHR is a very powerful platform in making claims for rights and it is considered part of international customary law. The UDHR has also generated two covenants, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the three documents together form what is informally known as the International Bill of Rights. While they were not the first to be concerned with human rights, they have created a platform that has led to other covenants and conventions and clarified many issues regarding human rights. There are now many national and regional treaties and bodies that have been set up to promote these aspirations contained in the International Bill of Rights. There is no regional treaty for Asia but there are efforts that are similarly aimed at promoting human rights in a regional area such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Charter (Bailey, 2012). Most of the criticism against human rights have emanated from the region in the past.

There are three fundamental criticisms against the concept of human rights. The first one is based on legitimacy or that as moral values they are not enforceable in court; the second one is on coherence and argues that they sound good but are not coherent; and the third one is the cultural critique that says they are different from the Asian values (Sen, 1999). Similar to the issue of Asian values, other commentators have

questioned the appropriateness of human rights in non-Western countries, given the perceived Western-bias in the framing of human rights (Aziz, 1999). It is important to have the questions asked as we continue to explore ways of making human rights more meaningful and relevant.

On the issue of legitimacy it is true that not all rights can stand in a court of law since moral values are not enforceable. It is also true that one of the major weaknesses of human rights, as codified by the United Nations, is enforcement as many developing and developed countries continue to breach them with impunity. Nevertheless, with UDHR being widely recognised in international law and used in informing domestic laws where the primary responsibility for implementation lies, there are grounds for optimism (Bailey, 2012). By ratifying human rights Conventions (Treaties), countries commit themselves morally and in international law to implement international standards and this gives lawyers and activists grounds to press for observation (Skegg, 2005). It would be much harder to campaign or make arguments in favour of human rights without these established international standards.

On the issue of coherence it is fair to say that human rights are drafted in a manner that makes them widely adaptable without spelling out the minutiae of how they should be implemented. Those details should appear in the process of domestication by the member states (Bailey, 2012). Ife (2012) suggests that it is important that human rights, even as expressed in the UDHR, are not regarded as static but as discursive. By this Ife means that they will vary over time and in different cultures and political contexts. Rights have been developed over many generations and struggles and it is important that they are adapted and made relevant at domestic level, but guided by the universally accepted standards and that is how they can be made coherent.

With regard to Asian values, it is important to point out that the main proponents of these arguments of human rights being contrary to 'Asian values' have been the political leaders in power. Those in power then argue that Asian values are essentially authoritarian and their arguments appear to be based on selfish distortion of Confucianism (Sen, 1999). African dictators make similar claims when they want to justify oppressive and tyrannical rule. Not surprisingly, they never consult anyone when they make those claims. The western leaders also use this convenience of 'Asian values' or 'African values' to ignore human rights abuses and support dictators as they claim unwillingness to impose 'western values' on other cultures. The issue of cultural

relativism in human rights is, nevertheless, one that needs to be addressed given the past domination of the West under colonialism and domination over non-western nations and cultures through cultural imperialism (Said, 1993). Culture is a fundamental worldview statement about social reality and influences the major factors that affect social welfare policy debates, development and value orientation (Schiele, 2000). To implement human rights without considering cultural factors would risk, not only meeting with resistance, but could open human rights workers to charges of human rights abuse. However, given that elements of human rights concept are found in most cultures, it seems erroneous to view human rights as a western concept and amounts to a condescending attitude towards non-western people (Ife, 2012). For this reason, Ife argues that social workers need to be culturally sensitive but also notes that human rights transcends cultural and national boundaries and are the basis of global citizenship.

Human Rights in a Globalised World

Given the interconnectedness of the world under globalisation it makes sense to evaluate the values that govern such a 'global village'. The argument that western countries are individualistic while the Asian and African societies are communitarian, as championed by Dr. Mahathir of Malaysia, has been the source of difference in interpreting the universality of human rights (Bailey, 2012). This is not an argument that has much currency at present as there is recognition of need for fundamental individual rights in Non-western countries and the West also recognises there are rights, such as the right to a clean environment, which go beyond individual rights as they are matters to be addressed by whole societies.

Social workers who are in the forefront of working with victims of human rights abuses also need to develop a global awareness of the forces affecting the people they work with. As the power of the nation-states decline and globalised markets and corporations have greater impacts on people's lives, then ensuring that these private companies are accountable is a major challenge in the 21st century. There can be some advantages in globalisation as the case in Bangladesh where poor women have found employment in garment factories, thus diversifying the women's source of income and challenging the myth of men as the sole 'bread winners' (Kabeer and Mahmud, 2004). The 2013 reports of deaths in factories in Bangladesh highlighted a number of health, moral, ethical, economic and human rights issues (French and Martin, 2013).

One of the major concerns is the poor conditions in those factories that pose major potential health hazards for the workers. The moral issues include the exploitation that takes place to guarantee cheap products in the West. The economic aspects include the relationship between the poverty in Bangladesh and the affluence in the West. The violation of human rights can be made in reference to entitlement to fair wages and 'just and favourable conditions' UDHR (Article 23). Other conclusions could be drawn but one fundamental one is that the buyers in the West have some moral responsibility in such tragedies and should use buyer pressure to ensure better conditions for the workers in poor countries. Social workers have an ethical duty to expose such exploitation and support the exploited workers claim their human rights for fair wages and safe and healthy working conditions.

Human Trafficking as a Manifestation of Poverty and Human Rights Violation

The horror of transatlantic slave trade taking African slaves mainly between 1525 and 1867 may be behind us but the new slave trade in the form of human trafficking is a growing concern. It is a global problem but Asia is the most affected region and women and children are the main victims, as noted by Huda:

Trafficking in persons especially women and children, is a reflection of many of the complex social issues facing the global society today. Recently, growing concern about violence against women worldwide has put "trafficking" on the international agenda and its connection with the sex industry, bonded and exploitative labor, HIV/AIDS and other forms of human rights violations has added urgency to global anti-trafficking efforts, particularly in Asia. Asia is seen as the most vulnerable region for human trafficking because of its huge population pyramid, growing urbanization and ever-present poverty. (Huda, 2006, p. 377).

Hard and reliable data are difficult to find because of the clandestine nature of this business (Laczko, 2005). Huda estimates that up to 1–2 million women, men and children are trafficked every year and 225,000 are from South Asia. Huda adds that up to 30 million Asian women and children could have been trafficked over the last 30 years. Poverty, conflicts, social and natural disasters and social and gender inequalities create ideal circumstances for recruiting. The vulnerability of the victims and the buying power of the users of sex slaves and slave-like labour make trafficking a profitable business locally and overseas.

Trafficking has no unanimous definition but there is agreement on the fact that it is a global criminal activity that seriously violates human rights. Trafficking is recognised by the UN as an urgent and global problem and the *United Nations Protocol to Prevent and Suppress Trafficking persons, supplementing the UN Convention against Transnational organized Crime* adapted by the UN General Assembly in 2000 recognises how it involves intricate falsifications, deceptions, abuse of power and exploitation of vulnerable groups (Laczko, 2005). There are various national and regional conventions that are also concerned with combating the problem. Since trafficking is such a multifaceted problem, there is need for interdisciplinary research so as to include a range of different perspectives including migration, human rights, health and law enforcement (Laczko, 2005). Social work is particularly well suited to be part of research in trafficking given the discipline's commitment to human rights and social justice. Huda (2006) correctly notes that trafficking is both a cause and a consequence of human rights violations and thus should be addressed from a human rights perspective, especially the human rights of the victims.

The Rights of Minorities

One of the fundamental areas of human rights concern in the Asian region is the human rights of minorities and vulnerable groups. Under ICCPR, states are expected to report how they are making progress on minority rights under article 27. Most of the countries in the region are multiethnic but with different sizes and numbers of minority groups. It is also not always clear what constitutes a minority group. Is it ethnicity, language, religion, sexual orientation, ability/disability, caste, or nationality? Castellino (2006) notes that reports from the region are varied but South Asia is rated as having the best mechanism for the protection of rights in the Asia region. South East Asia opted to stay out of the UN human rights reporting mechanism but there are some domestic legal mechanisms for minority rights protection. China in East Asia stood out in this study as having the better legal and institutional minority protection mechanisms. While this analysis focuses on what is self-reported to the UN, most of the abuses are not reported.

The abuses range from outright expulsion from the country as the case of the ethnic Nepalese in Bhutan and armed conflicts as in Sri Lanka. Bhutan is an interesting example as it appears such a peaceful place where the King proclaims 'Gross National Happiness' as the goal of the state rather than the materialist Gross National Product. Despite this the law allows for deprivation of citizenship under certain circumstances:

The Citizenship Act of 1985 states that any citizen of Bhutan who has acquired citizenship by naturalisation may be deprived of his or her citizenship at any time if that person has shown by act or speech to be disloyal to the King, country or people of Bhutan (Lang, 2011, p. 36).

Despite declaring its commitment to the human rights principles, Bhutan has gone ahead to discriminate against ethnic Nepalese and as a result they sought refuge in Nepal and many have now been resettled in United States, Europe and Australia. The favoured groups from Northern Bhutan were being resettled on the lands formerly occupied by those who fled to Nepal (Lang, 2011). This ensures the impossibility of those who were forced to flee ever returning or if they returned they would be destitute and landless. While some records indicate that the early Nepali settlers could have settled in Bhutan as early as 1624, the majority seem to have migrated between 1890 and 1920 (Saul, 2000). Saul argues that the Northern Bhutanese fear of the growing Nepali population in the south of the country led to repression of cultural difference and democratic dissent, contrary to Bhutan's professed commitment to protection of universal human rights.

Colonialism and its aftermath could explain, at least in part, the difficult situation that many minorities find themselves in. South Asia has a history of bloody communal, religious and ethnic conflict that has cost many lives since 1947 when the British colonialism came to a messy end (World Directory of Minorities, 2008). The South Asian countries have significant religious, ethnic and caste minorities and while in theory there are protection mechanisms in place, de facto discrimination against minorities continues to create considerable tension in the region (World Directory of Minorities, 2008). While there are regional treaties on treatment of minorities and optimism with cessation of hostilities in Sri Lanka, a lot will need to be done to reduce the potential for future flare ups of communal and ethnic conflicts.

The case of Myanmar probably demonstrates the tragic outcome of ethnic-based oppression best because of its terrible impact on the people. Human Rights Watch (2013) has documented the extent of the problem created by the armed conflict between the government army and the armed militias of Karen Buddhist Army and the Kachin Independence Army. The government forces are accused of violating international humanitarian law by using anti-personnel mines, use of forced labour, torture, beatings and pillaging of property. Sexual violence against women and girls is also reported to be widespread. Use

of child soldiers continued despite government undertaking to curtail the practise. The use of prisoners as porters for the military is a common practise and they are subjected to extreme abuse including being used as human shields and to clear land mines. The conflict has resulted in an estimated 500,000 people being internally displaced and 140,000 are in camps in Thailand. Minority Muslims from Myanmar are also in Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh with about 28,000 in the camp and another 200,000 in makeshift settlements or mixed with the local population. While social workers intervention is likely to be in supporting people in the refugee camps, it is important to be more active in peace initiatives to prevent the problems arising in the first place or escalating where they have started.

Peace and building peace is not rhetoric but something that is essential to the future of the human species. Clements (2013) argues that to achieve peace and reconciliation we need to build trust, confidence and respect between peoples. These are values that are familiar to social workers yet social workers don't consider themselves as peace agents. Clements also observes that the 21st century is going to be a challenging one in terms of population pressures, climate change, resource constraints, water and food shortages, urbanisation and militarism. Rising inequalities and conflicts carried over from the last century will continue to pose further challenges. Social workers and others committed to the wellbeing of fellow human beings will need to act more proactively to promote peace and not just react to the aftermaths of conflicts and subsequent suffering.

Realizing Human Rights and Ending Poverty

It is heartening to know that the United Nations take human rights seriously and in its preamble it declares the determination to 'save succeeding generations from the scourge of war' and 'reaffirms faith in human rights, justice and social progress' (Charter of the United Nations Preamble). A cynical view of this would be that none of these things have been achieved given the wars we have seen around the world, the flagrant abuses of human rights around the globe and the squalor that prevails in slums of poor or 'developing' countries. However, it is important to note that these are long-term goals and aspirations. The same applies to human rights in general. No nation can claim to have full human rights for its citizens but the international bill of rights can always be used as a measure to show us where we are aiming and where we fall short.

Social work identifies itself as a profession that works towards realization of human rights and social justice. One of the areas where social workers can further the course of human rights is in community development. This is where theory and practice come together. Freire (1996) discusses the concept of 'praxis' as learning and doing. This is an approach that can benefit the human rights discourse as this is how we need practice human rights in social work (Ife, 2012). Being at the frontline and seeing the oppression first hand, social workers need to use theoretical knowledge of human rights to practice a human rights-informed or human rights-based social work.

In the healthcare services it makes a difference whether programs are developed with people or for the people without involving them. (de Vos *et al.*, 2009) support the idea of community development in health that is based on community participation that aims to involve the members in decisions that relate to the improvement of the social, economic and political conditions that affect their health and wellbeing. Governments will sometimes talk of involving the people but what they mean is getting them into cost-sharing and reducing resistance to the projects. A human rights framework is important here in framing the peoples' right to health and the crucial role of the state in respecting, protecting and promoting the right to health.

A human rights framework is also important in the work with children and child poverty. Children living in poverty experience material deprivation in addition to the deprivation of the spiritual and emotional resource they need to thrive and realize their full potential and participate as equal members of society. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, offers a clear guidance on the definition of the child and the best practice principles in protecting children. UNICEF (2004), in a global report, notes that hundreds of millions of children cannot realize the promise of the convention due to poverty, armed conflicts and HIV/AIDS that threaten their survival and development. Children living in poverty are deprived of shelter, sanitation, safe drinking water, information, food, education and health. The report notes that today's world is interconnected through economic and knowledge exchange (among others) which all have implication on child poverty and on potential for addressing it. Even in developed countries there are many children living in poverty. In Australia, for example, children of asylum seekers are put in prison-like detention centres (Briskman, Zion and Loff, 2010). The Indigenous people and their children in Australia also live in poverty despite the country being wealthy (Cechanski, 2002). In affluent communities there are pockets

of child poverty and abuse. Social workers have an important role to play in supporting these children and their families and contributing to finding solutions through research and advocacy.

Special Groups and Human Rights

Even though human rights are rights for all and should apply equally to all human beings, it is not contradictory to argue for special rights for marginalized groups. Ife (2012) argues that this is a matter of social justice aimed at conferring equal rights to the historically disadvantaged groups such as women, children, people in remote rural areas, marginalized castes, refugees or people with disabilities. These special rights ensure that the disadvantaged groups are enabled to realize their full humanity, and this is consistent with the principles of human rights and do not violate other people's rights (UDHR, Art, 25(2)). Women being subjected to gender-based violence and discrimination, for example, are common problems in Asia and other parts of the developing world and special rights to offer them protection is clearly an urgent human rights issue.

Providing special recognition for the disadvantaged not only advances human rights but is also good for the economy and alleviation of poverty as human potential is wasted when sections of a particular society are unable to realize their potential. Dreze and Sen (2013) have argued that India has neglected women, despite making rapid progress in overall economic development. Dreze and Sen, in this new book, argue that the state taking an active role in providing education and health services is one way to ensure that disadvantaged women and children do not fail to achieve their potential due to poor health or lack of education. Economists argue that investing in quality education is one way of unlocking the potential of those who could make valuable contribution to the economy in the middle-income countries in Asia (Warr, 2011). The dream of the Asian countries achieving first world or high-income status would be hastened by improving the quality of life of the neglected groups such as landless farmers and slum dwellers and thus achieve multiple benefits of realizing human rights, alleviating poverty and enhancing economic development.

Human Rights Hope and Resilience

Human rights principles represents universal values and hope that human beings can live together in peace and harmony. Oppressed individuals and communities have a basis for making their claims to be treated fairly

and as equal human beings. It is indeed everybody's responsibility to claim their rights. The history of claiming rights by slaves in the United States, colonised people around the world and women under the banner of feminism demonstrate that there is hope for those who struggle for their rights.

People who are poor are faced by huge challenges but often show resilience and determination to survive and thrive. Social workers have a responsibility to support people in these circumstances as support is crucial in engendering resilience. Refugee women for example have demonstrated resilience and resourcefulness where they have been provided with support (UN women 2001; Pulvirenti and Mason, 2011; Lenette, Brough and Cox, 2012; Lenette, 2013). At the broader policy level, development programs that focus on the poor and alleviation of poverty are consistent with human rights principles.

Economists refer to human capital to refer to the abilities and skills that could be enhanced in improving their welfare. To enhance resilience of the marginalised groups, it is important for governments to invest in their education, employment and welfare. Investing in education and creating employment opportunities for the marginalised are the proven ways to create resilient individuals and communities and reduce inequalities that are evident in the growing economies of Asia (Zhuang, Kanbur and Rhee, 2014). Some countries in Asia are doing this at commendable rates but poorest ones are also the ones that are not having such human capital development strategies.

Conclusion

Asia is a large and complex place that no other word other than diverse could summarise. The diversity is in people, religion, economy, geography and climate. Diversity need not be seen as a problem but something that could be harnessed for good. The emerging greater cooperation between the countries offers grounds for hope that the future will see more peaceful engagement and mutual support between countries. Cooperation is also based on the realization that no nation can be self sufficient and the prosperity of one country or region could be undermined by others that are left poor and war torn. Neglecting the poor countries and individuals will find ways of manifesting itself through problems of refugees, terrorism, piracy, irregular migration, pollution that knows no borders and crime. There is therefore welcome self-interest involved in ensuring the welfare for all. In addition, helping the poor upholds human rights and creates potential future markets for

goods and services that ensure a more dynamic economy and a secure future for all including the well off.

There are Clear signs that progress is being made towards reducing poverty and greater respect for human rights. China is a more open country and fully engaged with the world and its neighbours than it was during the time of Mao—1949 to 1976. India and Pakistan are cooperating more than they did in the past decades though Kashmir and Afghanistan remain potential flash points. The threat of large scale wars is therefore receding but predicting the future is a fraught exercise due to the unpredictable and random events or ‘black swans’ (Taleb, 2008). The threat of increasing tension brought about by other issues like inequality and marginalisation of minorities remain as significant challenges. The observations of human rights remain the best antidote to forestall flare-ups based on real or perceived denial of human rights.

Observation of human rights may not by itself bring about prosperity as human rights do not provide a blueprint for economic development. However, abuse of human rights is certain to threaten prosperity. Prosperity in Asia as people’s standards of living and education rise is likely to lead to people who are more assertive in demanding their human rights. Recent examples where people in China have protested against location of polluting industries in their neighbourhoods and forced the government to change plans is indicative of a more assertive generation on the rise and they will be able to stand up for their rights. Human rights have no meaning if people do not stand up and claim them.

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This year's Alberta Alternative Budget was written in collaboration with individuals in the nonprofit sector, labour movement and advocacy sector. It provides a wish list of spending initiatives, along with a plan to finance them. Save to Library. It rejects the popular approach of Line of Poverty. The book discusses social, ideological, political and justice aspects of national economies and concludes with the fiscal theory of one-tax system – the taxation based on taxing the wealthy at higher scale and distribute the revenues equally among all citizens. HR can create the right environment for such programs by creating the excitement required to persuade the leadership. How to design the best salary and benefits programs? Often designing the right salary and benefits programs becomes difficult for the HR managers. Without the right salary and benefits retaining the best talent is difficult. It is an area that requires special attention because salary and benefits are critical to employee motivation. These are some of the main challenges faced by HR in the 21st century. However, several other challenges also exist. Technology is giving rise to new needs and HR function itself needs to remain up to date in this area. The topic of Human Rights in Asia is one that encompasses an immense number of states, international governmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations. All these institutions contribute a variety of services and perspectives towards human rights, covering topics including the enforcement, monitoring, and criticisms of human rights in Asia. There is no single body that covers all of human rights in Asia, as such a diverse and widespread region requires a number of institutions to properly