Democracy versus basic needs fulfillment in development economies, which one is the prerequisite for sustainable development?

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Abstract

While it is true that democracy is the roadmap to attaining good governance through accountability, equity and transparency, it still remains a puzzle as to whether, with the levels of illiteracy, poverty, maladministration and corruption prevailing in developing economies, it is really possible to guarantees free and fair elections. From practical experience, elections are mere guises of legitimising power to the ‘chosen ones’ at the expense of retarded development for the majority poor. The paper therefore argues that effective participation in the electoral process as a way of instituting true democracy and thus expediting sustainable development can only make sense if all the stakeholders are empowered morally, socially and economically. The paper concludes that the rights to have free and fair elections, freedom of expression and demonstrations can never supersede the right to enjoy decent living recommending the basic needs approach as a moral, political, economic and social obligation. Hence, those who enforce civil and political rights should first enforce the fulfilment of basic needs to all as a prerequisite.

Key words: Democracy, participation, development, basic needs

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Basic needs fulfilment encompasses social, economic, political and religious interests. As such, apart from the provision of basic needs being an equitable social policy that offers investment in the human development of the absolute poor, it can also have economic benefits as well. Owing to this importance, basic needs are enshrined in both the United Nations Universal Human Rights Declaration (UHRD) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), as a way of inciting governments to realise the obligation of providing basic needs as a human right. On specific terms, Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights
1948 (UDHR) clearly defines the basic needs items to be fulfilled, while Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) commits members states to recognise and implement such rights. For the sake of precision, these two provisions are quoted below.

Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UNDR) states that:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of himself and family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond this control.

Article 11(1) of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966 (ICESCR) proclaims that:

The State Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond this control.

Just as in the case of other basic needs, healthcare is also recognized as a human right. Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of 1966 requires the State Parties to recognise individuals’ rights to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health by ensuring that:

• rates for stillbirths and infant mortality are reduced and continuous child health development is guaranteed;

• all aspects of environmental and industrial hygiene are improved;
• epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases are prevented, treated and controlled; and
• all medical services and medical attention in the event of sickness are provided.

On water, apart from being embodied in Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UNDR) and Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966 (ICESCR), Resolution 11 of the 1977 United Nations Water Conference (reiterated at the 1992 Earth Summit) and Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 all portray the importance of water supply. The landmark of the struggle for the right to water is Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UNDR), which states that:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services…

Resolution 11 of the 1977 United Nations Water Conference (reiterated at the 1992 Earth Summit) states that:

all people whatever their state of development and their social and economic conditions have the right to have access to drinking water in quantities and of a quality equal to their basic needs.

Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 states that:

combat disease and malnutrition … through, inter alia, … the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking water
In 2002, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, a supervisory body to ICESCR, came up directly with a declaration concerning the right to supply water in its General Comment No. 15, which states that:

… the right to water clearly falls within the category of guarantees essential for securing an adequate standard of living, particularly since it is one of the most fundamental conditions for survival.

On education, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966 (ICESCR) adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) of 16 December 1966 entry into force 3 January 1976, in accordance with article 27. Article 13 proclaim that:

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

2. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that, with a view to achieving the full realization of this right:

(a) Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all;

(b) Secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education;

(c) Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education;

(d) Fundamental education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education;
(e) The development of a system of schools at all levels shall be actively pursued, an adequate fellowship system shall be established, and the material conditions of teaching staff shall be continuously improved.

3. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

4. No part of this article shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principles set forth in paragraph I of this article and to the requirement that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

Currently, especially after the dismantling of “the Eastern block” in the mid 1980s, the Western World has come up with immense pressure to force all countries of ‘the Third World’ to abide to their philosophy of political pluralism. At the beginning, they used the ‘carrot’ to induce countries with financial support but as time goes on the ‘stick’ now is vigorously applied to the extent of even training and arming rebels to destabilise and topple the governments that are seen not to abide to the democratic style appreciated by the West.

Although proponents like Gounder (2004) believe that for nations to benefit from economic liberalisation policies, such policies must go hand in hand with democracy, and political and civil rights by citing the example of Fiji and Indonesia where IMF liberalisation programmes failed unlike South Korea and Thailand following the 1997 Asian crisis. Still, the existence of unequal distribution of benefits to its people amid political intriguing and ethnic identity and economic affirmation actions coupled with military rule, created the uncertainty in economic diversification and under-utilization of resources that reduced the level of economic security. Greenville (2004: 91) explains it better that ‘the economic events (in Indonesia) were
being played out in the event of a political crisis, under which good economic policy may have been simply infeasible.’

From such developments, Navaratnam (2003:51) questions the unbalanced approach that the international community tends to take by putting more emphasis on civil and political rights while at the same time sidelining the economic, social and cultural rights. He feels that the majority of the people in the developing world suffer far more from the deprivation of their fundamental economic, social and cultural rights and basic needs rather than from the limitations of their political freedoms. In his view, civil and political rights can only be enjoyed and become important in the developing world if the basic needs to live and survive have been fulfilled to offer an adequate standard of living.

For example, it has been further observed that public support for agriculture in developing countries has decreased while the support from developed countries including credit facility from the international financial institutions also dropped affecting the livelihood for 70% of the world’s poor (El Sherbini 1986). As a result the target set in 1996 (to reduce by half the global figure of more than 800 million people experiencing hunger by 2015) will be met 45 years behind schedule because the number of undernourished only falls by 6 million per year instead of the targeted 22 million. Holding the same view, Khan (1994:17) believes that among the contributing factors to global poverty is the unfair global economic order that totally ignores that fate of the poor citing the examples of the debt burden and the policies of developed countries to subsidise their own farmers while imposing trade barriers against third world exports.

Nobody denies that political instability retards economic and social development. Eissa and Elmagboul (2004) state that it even hampers the solicitation of foreign capital and contributes to the wastage of financial and human resources, Gounder (2004) gives the crisis
story from Fiji; cases from Mindanao in the Philippines, Timor and Aceh in Indonesia and southern Thailand still give more insights. The issue at hand is whether introducing political pluralism without addressing the inherent root cause of poverty first, can curb the crises in these countries taking into consideration of the claims of people like Al-Roubaie (2004) who claims that poverty is manmade due to wrong doings such as greed, injustice, exploitation, ignorance, unequal opportunity, corruption, social divides, gender imbalance, mal-distribution of income, laziness, disease, war, usury, oppression, political, social, environmental and economic factors.

On analysing the root causes of poverty, Hashim (2003:57) views it from the perspective of human rights, by advocating for a balanced approach to the enjoyment of all human rights. He goes on to say that lack of equal access to resources and opportunities such as, unequal access to education, healthcare, a clean environment and water, and also the access and control of productive resources, particularly land and housing, is a denial of rights, which results in the perpetuation of poverty for the marginalized group (Schubert 1994).

Hashim (2003:58) further emphasises that since the provision of basic needs is a matter of human rights recognised under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the responsibility for the implementation of the human rights is vested in the member national states. The government is obliged to guarantee the right to an adequate standard of living requiring provision of adequate food and nutrition, clothing, housing and the necessary conditions of care. Likewise, Gereffi (1993) feels that it is the role of governments to establish business environment that is conducive, which would eventually contribute to the peoples’ welfare.
Even McNamara (1980:3) holds governments responsible for making sure that access to essential public services particularly, basic education, primary health care, clean water, better shelter and nutrition is possible for all to ensure that disadvantaged individuals in society are brought into the development process. He argues that since individuals who are enslaved in abject poverty are handicapped by malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, low life expectancy, and high infant mortality, they can neither contribute nor benefit from the entire development efforts. It is therefore imperative that governments must intervene and safeguard the interests of its entire people who must be fully involved in the development process.

The Report on the World Social Situation 2003 further stresses that, under the status quo, not all people are included as the disenfranchised, the powerless and the voiceless are still relegated to the periphery. Thus, governments have the obligation (morally, socially, politically and economically) to these forgotten, invisible and ignored billions of poor people, to ensure that they too are included in and integrated into the development process as a matter of course and right. Milanovic and Yitzhaq (2002) express that the national governments should be held to task since any other agency or world government cannot substitute the government’s role of fulfilling its obligation to develop a nation; foreign national authorities care more about their own people, first and foremost, because foreigners are not their voters, and, because of both the psychological and physical distance between people in different countries, it is not easy for foreigners to comprehend the suffering of other people far away.

The government is also supposed to build an equitable judicial system to ensure that legal institutions can uphold the political rights of citizens and curb the capture of the state by the elite. Such a move will equalise economic opportunities by protecting property rights for all, ensure non-discrimination to the market, provide greater equity in access to land through providing
greater security of tenure for poorer groups (redistributive land reforms) and ensure fairness in financial and labour markets.¹

Navaratnam (2003) therefore finds no consolation in attaining civil and political rights when one is impoverished, suffers from malnutrition and is unable to survive because, after all, enjoyment of civil and political rights is a reflection of the stage of development of a country. Further, he stresses on adequate access to the basic needs rather than just having facilities pertaining to the fulfilment of basic needs as not having access to basic needs is tantamount to not having the basic needs at all; deprivation includes suffering from poverty and adult illiteracy.

2.0 WHY BASIC NEEDS

The basic needs approach to development refers to giving priority to meeting the basic needs of all the people. In evaluating its effectiveness, the basis is in terms of the extent to which they satisfy the requirements of those most in need in terms of food and nutrition, drinking water, basic health, shelter and basic education, among others (Nyerere 1976; Haq 1977; Streeten 1980:7; Stewart 1985). Added to this list are items like clothing, employment, participation and political liberty, economic freedom, security and equality (Hopkins and Hoeven 1982). Siddiqi (1988) introduces an Islamic perspective that includes items like fuel, electricity, transportation, marriage allowance, repayments of debts, etc. In essence, the objective of the basic needs approach is to strengthen the position of the marginalized, disadvantaged and vulnerable poverty stricken members of society who are neither able to afford the basic necessities of life nor seek solutions to overcome such problems.

¹ Refer to the World Development Report 2006.
The idea here is not to advocate for total equality but to impress upon the initiatives of ensuring that equity prevails so that the basic needs of the people are met at their best and avoid subjecting certain individuals in society to the worst state of the inequality trap. When defining the basic needs (BN) approach, Stewart (1985:1) states that it is the one which centres on prioritising the provision of basic needs to all the people. That is, for development to be meaningful it must first give priority to the eradication of absolute deprivation and improve the conditions of life. Emphasis should be put on providing certain standards of nutrition like food and water, universal health and education services, material needs such as shelter and clothing, and non-material requirements like employment, participation and political liberty (Stewart 1980:9).

Here, the assumption is that certain minimum human needs will be focused upon. Definitely, the justification for selecting a particular bundle of needs gives room for relative choices since the selection is society specific (Hasan 1997:8-11). According to Elazar (2003:17), the needy in society are those who, due to lack of sufficient material resources, endure hardships that are avoided by most members of society. In his opinion, meeting basic human needs contributes to the values of respect and self esteem because the needy often face moral censure for their failure to be self sufficient and thus endure certain kinds of deprivations which are themselves debilitating and potentially humiliating.

Among the various dimensions of poverty is the income approach that Huq (Primanik) (1998) introduces as the failure to reach a certain level of money income enough to meet the needs of a well-defined basket of goods and services at the prevailing market prices. Thus, those earning less than that desired level of income are subjected to income poverty. However, recent studies subscribe more to the definition of poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon. They
look at the measure of poverty based on the level of income alone as inadequate because it ignores important dimensions such as longevity, illiteracy, etc. In light of that, the UNDP puts forward the notion of human poverty that arises out of deprivations in literacy, health and purchasing power.

Alternatively, the Human Development Index (HDI) can also be used to measure poverty (Human Poverty Report 1997). A lower value of HDI manifests more human deprivation, hence more human poverty. This UNDP definition goes with the reasoning that education is important because a high level of illiteracy hinders awareness of one’s rights and in a situation where health services are poor, it is difficult to overcome curable and preventive diseases. Although with lower purchasing power it is not easy to afford goods that fulfil the biological needs of life-sustenance, it is still argued that even if you avail everyone with the level of income sufficient to purchase all the basic need requirements, as long as there is a high level of illiteracy and the health conditions are unsatisfactory, poverty will still prevail.

As expressed in the Report on the World Social Situation 2003, when poverty is considered in its true perspective of a multidimensional affiliation, over and above income poverty, it forms the central component of social exclusion that is again more closely related to the concept of relative, rather than absolute poverty and is, therefore, linked to inequality. Equating poverty to social exclusion combines the aspects of social deprivation and lack of voice and power in society. It includes exclusion from participation in the political process and decision-making; exclusion from access to employment and material resources; and exclusion from integration into common cultural processes.

McNamara (1980) points out that when public services reach the poor, it helps them to alter their personal circumstances so that their own inherent potential can be more fully realised.
He argues that apart from investment in the human development of the absolute poor being an equitable social policy, it also has economic benefits as well. In line with the BN approach, Hopkins and Hoeven (1986:1) construe development objectives to be mainly people oriented and express other objectives such as growth, industrialisation, increased trade etc., as merely secondary.

Streeten (1980) gives a more straightforward definition of the approach defining it as the one that is concerned with removing mass deprivation designed to improve the income earning opportunities of the poor, to make sure that the public services reach the poor, the flow of goods and services meet the needs of all members of the household, and the poor participate in such a way that their needs are met. He cautions that a basic needs strategy takes full cognisance of differences in human and physical resources, the technological base and political constraints available in countries and cannot be generally applied to all countries in the same way.

By putting emphasis on food provision, Annan (2002) associated hunger with poverty because hunger prevents people from realising their potential, makes them more vulnerable to diseases and hence rendering them too weak and lethargic to earn much and provide for their families. He fears that unless effective actions to contain hunger are put in place, its devastating impact will keep on repeating generation after generation. In the same paper, Diouf\(^2\) is reported to have said that fighting hunger makes economic and social sense because it has negative effect on the economies of those countries it inflicts by causing an estimated one percent per year loss in the rate of economic growth through reduced productivity and nutritional diseases. Moreover, those deprived through hunger form a very large potential market, which if empowered will increase the effective demand by big margin.

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\(^2\) Jacques Diouf was then the Director-General of the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO).
Expressing absolute poverty as a state that demeans individuals to malnutrition, disease, illiteracy, low life expectancy and high infant mortality, McNamara (1980) was concerned that those who missed these basic needs, which are so important for survival or decent living, could hardly participate effectively in the economic progress in their own societies to enable them to contribute or benefit from the entire development effort. In that connection, housing has been given such great importance because access to decent shelter is vital for personal health and security. Substandard housing, overcrowding and inadequate provision of water, sanitation, drainage and garbage management could be the cause of many infectious, parasitic as well as respiratory diseases. Moreover, there are also health and safety costs of poor quality housing due to loss of income through days off work and also through incurring medical expenses. Hence, the quality of housing and the environment that surrounds it should also be a matter of great concern. The atmosphere must be conducive and safe for human living observing privacy, adequate space (even for families with young children) and ventilation, close to work and basic facilities etc.

General Comment No. 4 of the committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the Right to Adequate Housing emphasizes that the right to housing should guarantee the security, peace and dignity of the occupant. Security is in terms of a tenure that guarantees legal protection against forced eviction, harassment and other threats. The housing environment should observe health and sanitation standards to offer facilities like clean drinking water, refuse disposal, site drainage etc., guarantee the provision of power, energy, and emergency services, and give due respect to cultural dimensions of housing. Due to bad planning, there have been cases where low-cost homes have been allocated next to chicken farms, pig farms, quarries, rubber processing factories etc. Since the low cost homeowners do no have the luxury of
investigating the type of environment they will be living in prior to being allocated the homes, they have to bear with such allocations at the expense of a diminished quality of life (Abdul Kader 2003:128-130).

Education affects the capacity of individuals to engage in economic, social, and political life as it can help to prevent poverty, sickness and conflicts by helping individuals to reach their full potential as productive members of society, increasing their knowledge about how to stay healthy, and encouraging understanding and tolerance between people. Studies have also shown that it is countries that put greater emphasis on the development of human capital that perform relatively better. That is, it is the countries that have spent a lot on education that have made immense progress and not the other way round. Statistics profiles regarding education reveal that by the year 2002, 900 million adults remained functionally illiterate while 130 million children of school going age, two-thirds of which being girls, had not had access to schooling (Kim 2003).

Equity or fair distribution guarantees participation in development opportunities and eliminates the wastage of human potential because individuals are able to pursue a life of their choice that spares them from extreme deprivation. According to the World Development Report 2006, it is important to have institutions and policies that promote a level playing field – where all members of the society have similar chances of becoming socially active, politically influential, and economically productive, as a contribution towards sustainable growth and development. The Report perceives equity as being doubly good for poverty reduction through the potential effects on aggregate long-run development and through greater opportunities for poorer groups. Accordingly, equity must prevail because of the following reasons.
• Discrimination and stereotyping—mechanisms for the reproduction of inequality between groups have been found to lower the self-esteem, effort, and performance of individuals in the groups discriminated against, reducing their potential for individual growth and their ability to contribute to the economy.

• Unequal power leads to the formation of institutions that perpetuate inequalities in power, status and wealth that is typically bad for the investment, innovation, and risk-taking that underpin long-term growth. For a society to prosper, incentives must be created for the vast majority of the population to invest and innovate.

• Due to market dysfunctions in developing countries, resources may not flow where the returns are highest. For example, some highly capable children may fail to complete secondary school while others who are less capable may finish university. Where markets are missing or imperfect, the distribution of wealth and power affects the allocation of investment opportunities.

• High levels of economic and political inequality tend to lead to economic institutions and social arrangements that systematically favour the interests of those with more influence. Hence when personal and property rights are enforced only selectively; when budgetary allocations benefit mainly the politically influential; or when the distribution of public services favours the wealthy, both the middle and poor groups will end up with unexploited talents and society as a whole is likely to be more inefficient because of missing out opportunities for innovation and investment.

• The adverse effects are more damaging because economic, political and social inequalities tend to reproduce themselves over time and across generations in a phenomenon known as the inequality trap. For example, children from poor families
do not have the same opportunities as children from wealthier families to receive education. So these disadvantaged children can expect to earn less as adults. Because the poor have less voice in the political process, they – like their parents – will be less able to influence spending decisions to improve public schools for their children. And so the cycle of underachievement continues.

- Elites protect their interests in subtle ways, by exclusionary practices in marriage and the kinship system or aggressive political manipulation and explicit use of violence. Inequality traps can thus be rather stable, tending to persist over generations.

- Greater equity implies more efficient economic functioning, reduced conflict, greater trust, better institutions, with dynamic benefits for investment and growth.

The essence of providing basic needs is to remove mass deprivations so as to improve income-earning opportunities for the poor in terms of public services and the flow of goods and services to them together with their participation to enable them meet their needs at shorter time periods and at lower levels of income per capita. Since basic needs are among the human rights, everyone is entitled to enjoy them to get access to resources on an equal basis. It is a means of achieving social justice and empowerment for attaining sustainable human development, eventually contributing to the overall social and economic development (Streeten 1980).

3.0 THE CURRENT STATUS OF BASIC NEED FULFILMENT

Throughout history, the record with regard to the fulfilment of basic needs to all the people in the world has not been very encouraging. By 1980, World Bank president Robert McNamara admitted that despite handsome levels of economic growth the developing world had managed to
attain during the post World II era, absolute poverty still prevailed in alarming proportions (McNamara 1980). The proponents of growth, such as Hopkins and Hoeven (1986:1), allege that basic needs policies slow down economic growth and thus hamper industrialisation. Hence, during the early stages of development, the interests of the poor have to be sacrificed to give priority to building the capital, infrastructure, and productive capacity of the economy subjecting the poor to belt tightening. The assumption here is that the rich will use the accumulated wealth as an incentive for increased production and hence improve welfare (Streeten 1980:6).

Nevertheless, the resultant disorder in society of putting too much emphasis on growth have been found to outweigh their benefits by causing social, political and economic instability that culminates into social ills and vices that hamper economic development causing industries to be destroyed, social services to be abandoned, agricultural areas to be laid to waste and even bring the threat of famine. The resulting armed conflicts, political upheavals, and HIV/AIDS epidemics have led to a reversal in development indicators in too many countries (Ehorlich 1995). The Report of the World Social Situation 2003 further confirms that poverty and inequalities within and among nations are responsible for fuelling social tension and undermining the social cohesion needed to pre-empt and respond to emerging dangers manifested through civil strife.

The proliferation of such conflicts, increased mobility of populations, changes in family structures and the destruction of social support and governance, put civilian lives in danger and disrupt children’s education and the delivery of other social services, which often leads to internal displacement and refugee flows and further perpetuate the degree of poverty. According to authoritative reports on conflicts, during the last two decades of the twentieth century, there
were a total of 164 violent conflicts affecting 89 countries for an average of six to seven years.\(^3\) The World Development Report 2003, report that because conflicts tend to be concentrated in poor countries, more than half of all low-income countries have experienced significant conflicts since 1990 with the greatest impact falling in Africa, where virtually every country or an immediate neighbour has suffered a major conflict over the last decade; the conflicts mainly emerging within states rather than between states.

Kasozi (1996, 1997 and 1999) attribute the causes of instability in Uganda and Southern Sudan to poverty and distribution inequality between regions and ethnic groups (Also refer to UNDP 1996:37). In addition, the continued perpetuation of such injustices have led to the formation of the new republic of Southern Sudan after decades of poverty and distribution inequality and civil war that perpetuated even more poverty to the affected areas due to insecurity; similar sentiments pose a security risk in Tanzania as her Muslim majority feels excluded from the development process by their post-independence governments despite having played a major role in the struggle for independence (Barwani 1997, Said 1998, Njozi 2000).\(^4\) Huq (Pramanic) (2002:2) also gives the same reasons for the separation of Bangladesh from Pakistan.

Al Roubaie (2004) points out that a quarter of the world population, mainly in developing countries, is under abject/absolute poverty as 1.5 billion people are reported to live on less than US$1 a day: without adequate food, access to clean water, sanitation, and essential health care or basic education services. Khan (1994:19) perceives the on going discoveries in new technology to harm poor countries more causing many people to lose their livelihood in the process with no concrete arrangement for those affected to fit in the new breakthrough in technological

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\(^3\) Heidelberg Institute of International Conflict Research (HIIK), *Database KOSIMO (1945-1999)*, last updated 8 November 2002 (Heidelberg, Germany, University of Heidelberg) Available from [http://www.hiik.de](http://www.hiik.de)

\(^4\) Also Zinjibar ([http://www.Islamtz.org](http://www.Islamtz.org))
development. It is not surprising then that advancement in technology that has raised global food output at a level that is enough to feed everyone on earth, has not been able to wipe out hunger and malnutrition in both developed and developing countries.

The United Nations Report on the World Social Situation 2001 records that 800 million people in the developing countries and 24 million people in the developed world and transition economies suffer from hunger and malnutrition. At the same time, improvements in medical innovations, better diets and sanitation that have reduced morbidity and raised life expectancy in developed societies have not succeeded to improve the quality of life for the vulnerable and the poor in the world as 2.4 billion people are reported to live without improved sanitation, while over one billion people lack access to clean water (Ehorlich 1995). Furthermore, water related diseases are reported to kill 3.5 million people each day. This figure of water related diseases does not take into account deaths due to the impact of climate variability such as droughts, floods or storms.5

In terms of education, sources from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) show that the average person born between 1975 and 1979 in Sub-Saharan Africa has only 5-4 years of schooling as compared to 6.3 years in South Asia and 13.4 years in OECD countries.6 Poor or limited access to health services and education significantly determine earnings capacity and personal development.7 Deaton (2004) links the progress in economic growth during the twentieth century to improvements in health coupled with the globalisation of knowledge facilitated by the local political, economic and educational conditions. According to the World Development Report 2006, whereas individuals’ economic status can determine and shape the opportunities they face to improve their education outcomes

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and better health care in many ways, in turn, good health and good education are typically important determinants of economic status.

However, although education is among the human rights recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Rachagan (2003) laments that it is presented as a second generation right unlike civil and political rights that are regarded as those of the first generation. He gives the example of what he calls the *rhetoric* of compulsory education versus the requirement that children should be at school until they reach the minimum age of employment of at least 15 years of age. While in many countries only primary education is compulsory, the child may complete studies at 12 years of age and hence remain idle until reaching the age of majority. Rachagan suggests that the right to education is not necessarily putting all children in school but the right in education itself, urging all the schools and institutions to which children are sent to provide the best possible education if human rights are to be achieved through education.

The WTO, supported by the United States, Australia, New Zealand, the European Union and Japan, also wants to see social services like education, health services, water liberalised. Education will change status from being a public good to being a commercially transacted service. Such moves would definitely erode the capacity of national governments to make national policy and compromise the nations’ social objectives and conception of the right to education. The governments are made to surrender their rights to regulate and introduce new regulations on the supply of services in pursuit of national policies and objectives (Rachagan 2003).

Privatising the water supply means that water becomes an economic commodity, its allocation and delivery to be determined by market forces under the Transnational Water
Corporations (TNWCs) through agreements negotiated with governments. When water harvesting, processing and distribution are surrendered to the TNWCs, there are fears that because water conservation affects profitability it could be ignored. It is also feared that the granting of communal ownership to a monopolist may endanger national water security and force governments to incur more costs to compensate failing water privatisation schemes.8

And on shelter, 1995 estimate show that 100 million people in the world have no shelter at all and 72 per cent of urban dwellers in Africa live in slums.9 Cities in Europe and North America face the same problem in lower and lower middle-income households.10 By mid 1990, the homeless population in the United States was estimated to be between 500,000 and 750,000 (Henderson, Lickerman and Flynn 1999). In Germany, there was approximately one homeless person for each 900 housed people, while in the big Russian cities there were 580 to 980 homeless people per 100,000 (Westport, Connecticut, Bergin and Garvey 1999, Sanna and Zykov 1999). The foregoing issues add to the list of issues that rise to the concern for making sure that all the people in the world are provided with basic needs (Also refer to Hopkins and Hoeven (1986).

Al-Roubaie suggests that for trade to eradicate poverty, substantial investment is required to create economic stability through sustained economic growth because of many factors. First, the terms of trade in poor countries are persistently deteriorating, narrowing the degree of economic openness due to dependence on a limited number of commodities. In addition, productivity is low because human and physical structures are weak due to technological and economic incapability, and also the vulnerability of the economy due to changes in global trade.

8 Ibid.
As a result, liberalisation and privatisation are viewed as the cause of even wider income inequalities as in the cases of Bangladesh and Chile. Torres (2001) explains that the existing inequality is caused by individuals not participating equally in the globalisation process. Despite a sizable increase in average household incomes, incomes of the poor still stagnate, thus widening income inequality.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS

The provision of basic needs as a human right is so vital that without it being fulfilled first the other rights like the right of expression, right to have democracy, right to have demonstrations, rights to detentions with or without trial, etc., will make little sense. Since the provision of basic needs to all the people is a human right, then recognition should be given to all aspects of human rights beyond the popular struggles against the existence or absence of certain laws such as laws pertaining to issues like the right to have demonstrations and the rights to detentions with or without trial. Statistics document differences in the enjoyment of human rights requiring the marginalized group to get explicit attention in terms of the protection and promotion of human rights.

The essence of providing basic needs is to remove mass deprivations so as to improve income-earning opportunities for the poor in terms of public services and the flow of goods and services to them together with their participation to enable them meet their needs at shorter time periods and at lower levels of income per capita (Streeten 1980). Since basic needs are among the human rights, everyone is entitled to enjoy them to get access to resources on an equal basis. It is a means of achieving social justice and empowerment for attaining sustainable human development, eventually contributing to the overall social and economic development.
According to the *World Development Report 2006*, it is important to have institutions and policies that promote a level playing field – where all members of the society have similar chances of becoming socially active, politically influential, and economically productive, as a contribution towards sustainable growth and development. The *Report* perceives equity as being doubly good for poverty reduction through the potential effects on aggregate long-run development and through greater opportunities for poorer groups.

Inequality is damaging to society because first, it reproduces itself over time and across generations in a phenomenon known as the *inequality trap* that is difficult to eliminate. Secondly, it undermines the potential of those discriminated and thus impair their prospects for self development and participation in the economy. Unequal power perpetuates a healthy ground for more inequalities in power, status and wealth that discourage investment, innovation, and risk-taking necessary for long-term growth. High levels of economic and political inequality promote an economic and social framework that serves the interests of those with more influence leading to personal and property rights being enforced selectively, and budgetary allocations and the distribution of public services favouring those with either political influence or wealth. The resultant unexploited talents will create inefficiency in society that jeopardises opportunities for innovation and investment.

While inequality of opportunity is wasteful and inimical to sustainable development and poverty eradication, greater equity implies more efficient economic functioning, reduced conflict, greater trust, better institutions, with dynamic benefits for investment and growth. It is also argued that high levels of inequality make it more difficult to reduce poverty, creating the expectation that countries that experience higher rates of economic growth will reduce poverty much faster than those that grow more slowly.
A reduction in inequality today has a double dividend both currently and for the future. It is likely to contribute to a contemporaneous reduction in poverty, and it is also likely to make future growth reduce poverty faster. It is argued that in societies that experience lower living standards, meeting basic needs may have to be given more precedence over reducing inequality. That is, when the purpose is to reduce suffering, the basic needs approach scores higher than efforts to reduce inequality. Due to their lack of resources, poor people at or near the threshold of poverty are unable to withstand shocks since they are barely surviving, and any adverse event that reduces their income further can push them over the edge.

For example, poor farmers who depend on the export of primary commodities are highly vulnerable to the downward trend and volatility of the prices of primary commodities in the world market. To contend with price shocks, these poor farmers may have to take their children out of school and put them to work, cut back on their food intake or sell productive assets. Such measures have long-term negative consequences as they reduce investments in health and education for children, factors that can perpetuate the cycles of poverty and exclusion. In responding to crises, more often than not, governments would put in place economic reforms that have a disproportionate impact on the poor, such as cutbacks in public assistance, social protection and public sector employment.

Thus, as inequalities in education also contribute to inequalities in other important dimensions as well, the global position of illiteracy raises much concern. It is important to note that education at all levels ought not to be treated as a second generation right like what the situation is in many countries where education remains the privilege of a few who can afford it. Illiterate adults are more prone to poverty because they cannot seek well paid jobs that require academic qualifications. Likewise, the adult illiterates who are engaged in farming cannot take
advantage of modern farming techniques and increase their yield since such techniques can mainly be learned through reading brochures or attending courses. Moreover, illiterate mothers also pose a health risk to their families as they render maternal and child health care services less effective because they cannot read and then implement the instructions given.

Rachagan proposes that owing to the critical status that education has, there is a need to put the records straight regarding what the rights to education mean from both the domestic and global perspectives in terms of availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability. He feels that for education to really possess the importance it deserves, it must be enshrined in the law to give room for an enforceable legal obligation, as well as providing constitutional and statutory recognition. Hashim (2003:60) shares almost the same views when he argues that the right to education must focus on the availability, accessibility, non-discrimination, physical accessibility, economic accessibility, acceptability and adaptability. Huq (Pramanik) (1997) further suggests that education should be a means of imparting knowledge and skills for self-reliance and is not to be used as a screening mechanism for competitive purposes.

During the last two decades of the twentieth century, violent conflicts mainly affected poor countries involving more than half of all low-income countries, especially those in Africa. Since economic and social rights beget civil and political rights, when poverty and distribution inequality prevail in society, social cohesion, and political and economic stability will definitely suffer

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the foregoing observations and conclusions, the following fourteen recommendations are put forward.
i. Since all sorts of deprivation and marginalisation bar the affected members of society from participating in the development process, emphasis should be put on the basic needs approach, which is ideal for arresting such vices.

ii. Over-emphasis on improving growth without containing its far reaching consequences to the poor is a cheat and should be discarded especially in poor countries where the bargaining power of the majority of the people is weak. As election results in these countries do not reflect the level of satisfaction in meeting basic needs, we cannot rely on democratic means alone to bring the right change.

iii. Consequently, even though economic growth has not addressed poverty effectively, it still remains an important instrument for development. Efforts should therefore be geared towards achieving higher human friendly growth for a brighter future.

iv. There is also a need to introduce more egalitarian public policies so that development is translated into satisfactory social welfare for all.

v. The majority of the people in the developing world suffer far more from the deprivation of economic (including basic needs gap), social and cultural rights than they suffer from the limitations of their political freedoms. So, there is no consolation in enforcing civil and political rights to them when they are impoverished, suffer from malnutrition and are unable to survive as civil and political rights can only become important in the developing world if the basic needs to live and survive have been fulfilled.

vi. The world community should therefore reconsider their unbalanced approach of putting more emphasis on enforcing civil and political rights while acting soft on countries that fail to provide economic, social and cultural rights. If countries can be
sanctioned for breaking other human rights, the same could also be applied to
governments which fail to provide basic needs to their people.

vii. National governments should realise that they have both the obligation and the
responsibility to ensure that all their people are provided with basic needs to the
maximum, and that the international community cannot substitute this role from
them.

viii. The position regarding the supply of food, education and health services, and shelter
in all parts of the world is deplorable as hunger and malnutrition still persist, while
the quality of life is still poor; the handsome rates of economic growth have failed to
wipe out poverty. Since all these problems are socially oriented, efforts should be
made to ensure that the barriers that perpetuate such an unhealthy position are
eliminated.

ix. The move to privatise the social services should be geared at serving the poor much
better and should not be profit motivated. The justification should be offering better
services at affordable costs. Hence, even after privatisation, governments should still
look for means of ensuring that those who cannot meet the costs are facilitated.

x. The impact of illiteracy affects present and future generations and is even passed over
to the children, there should therefore be deliberate efforts to solve illiteracy as the
global numbers of 900 millions adults and 130 million children of school going age
are deplorable.

xi. Governments should uphold their moral and political obligation to offer social
services and deliberate on the idea of making them a right for all.
xii. In a bid to implement the BN approach, care should be taken to ensure that the taxpayers are not overburdened to the extent of making the whole exercise counter productive. However, in poor countries where government expenditure is essential to provide social services, such as basic education and health, provision of water services and sanitation etc., too stringent budgetary control measures aimed at merely keeping the government expenditure at the lowest could displace the goal of improving the basic needs fulfilment position of the people. It is important therefore to determine an optimum level that serves both interests.

xiii. For society to benefit from democratisation, there must be balanced approach on ensuring that economic, political, civil and cultural rights are given due recognition.

xiv. For civil and political rights to prevail, economic and social rights must be given preference over them as a moral, social, political and economic obligation, which national governments must spearhead.

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