
SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE MODERN WORLD

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ABSTRACT

Social inequality continues to be a critical issue in our modern world, impacting access to essential human rights such as education, healthcare, employment, and justice. Despite progress in international human rights laws and increased global awareness, disparities rooted in race, gender, economic status, ethnicity, and geography persist and often deepen. This paper delves into the intricate relationship between social inequality and human rights, examining how systemic discrimination, economic disparity, and political marginalization erode the principles of equality and dignity. It also looks at the roles of institutions, governments, and civil society in both reinforcing and combating these inequalities. The paper includes contemporary case studies from various countries, illustrating the global dimensions of the issue and the pressing need for inclusive policies and effective implementation of human rights frameworks. Ultimately, it advocates for a multidimensional approach that integrates legal reform, education, and social activism to effectively bridge the gap between human rights ideals and the realities faced by individuals. Inequalities and poverty have severe and far-reaching implications for the enjoyment of human rights, particularly social rights such as the right to health, the right to food, the right to housing, the right to education, and the right to water and sanitation.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, the pursuit of equality and human dignity stands as a paramount concern for societies everywhere. Despite remarkable advancements in technology, education, and governance, social inequality remains a persistent challenge, manifesting in various forms such as economic disparity, gender discrimination, racial injustice, and unequal access to resources and opportunities. These inequalities not only deny individuals their rights but also violate fundamental human rights, undermining the principles of fairness, justice, and equal treatment that are central to both¹ international declarations and national constitutions. Human rights are designed to guarantee freedoms and protections for all, regardless of background, yet they are frequently compromised by systemic barriers entrenched in historical, cultural, and political contexts. As nations endeavour to create more inclusive and equitable societies, tackling the root causes of social inequality and safeguarding human rights emerges as a crucial challenge. This introduction examines the intricate relationship between social inequality and human rights in the contemporary era, underscoring the urgent need for sustained efforts toward social justice and global solidarity. In the modern world, the discourse surrounding human rights and inequality is more vital than ever. As societies strive for progress, the stark reality of social inequality continues to impede the realization of human rights for millions. Inequalities whether based on economic status, race, gender, or geography directly impact access to essential services, opportunities, and protections that are fundamental to human dignity. Despite the establishment of various international human rights frameworks, systemic discrimination and entrenched social hierarchies persist, leading to the marginalization of vulnerable groups. This situation creates a gap between the ideal of universal human rights and the lived experiences of individuals who face barriers to their basic rights, such as education, healthcare, and justice. Moreover, the ongoing challenges posed by climate change, global pandemics, and economic instability have exacerbated existing inequalities, further highlighting the interconnectedness of human rights and social justice. Movements advocating for equality are rising worldwide, demanding accountability and systemic change to address these disparities. The struggle for human rights in the modern era must focus on dismantling the root causes of inequality, ensuring that every person, regardless of their background, can enjoy the rights and freedoms that are inalienable and universal. It is imperative to bridge the

¹ S. K. Kapoor, *International Law & Human Rights* 800 (Central Law Agency, Allahabad, 17th edition 2009)

gap between ideals and reality through inclusive policies, effective governance, and a commitment to social justice.

INEQUALITY AND SOCIAL CLASS

Inequality and social class are intricately linked, with social class serving as a significant determinant of an individual's access to resources, opportunities, and overall quality of life. Social class, often defined by factors such as income, education, occupation, and wealth, creates distinct divisions within society that affect individuals' experiences and outcomes. At the heart of this issue is the concept of economic inequality, which manifests in disparate income levels and wealth distribution. Those in higher social classes typically have greater access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, while individuals in lower classes often face systemic barriers that limit their potential for upward mobility. This concentration of wealth and opportunity reinforces the social hierarchy, perpetuating cycles of poverty and marginalization. Moreover, social class intersects with other forms of inequality, such as race and gender, compounding the disadvantages faced by certain groups. For example, women and individuals from racial or ethnic minorities may experience both class-based and identity-based discrimination, leading to even greater disparities in income and access to services.² This intersectionality highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to address inequality. The implications of social class extend beyond economic measures; they affect individuals' access to social capital, political influence, and even health outcomes. Those from lower social classes may struggle with issues like inadequate housing, food insecurity, and limited access to healthcare, culminating in a lower quality of life and impaired ability to participate fully in society. Addressing the challenges posed by inequality and social class requires systemic change and a commitment to social justice. Policies that promote equitable access to education, affordable healthcare, and fair employment opportunities are essential in breaking down barriers and fostering an inclusive society. Only through targeted efforts can we hope to create a more equitable future where social class does not dictate one's access to the rights and opportunities that should be available to all.

INEQUALITY BASED ON GENDER

Gender as a form of social inequality manifests through the differential treatment of women

² Walker, Dr. Charles "New Dimension of Social Inequality". Archived from the original on 21 January 2018

and men based on societal constructs of masculinity and femininity. This inequality divides labour, assigns roles, and delineates responsibilities, ultimately influencing the allocation of social rewards. Sex- and gender-based prejudice and discrimination, commonly referred to as sexism, are significant contributors to the perpetuation of social inequality. In virtually all societies, including those with predominantly agricultural economies, there exists a sexual division of labour. This division typically becomes more pronounced during periods of industrialization, highlighting how economic shifts can reinforce traditional gender roles. The deepening division of assigned roles for men and women is particularly evident in critical areas such as the economic, political, and educational spheres.³ Women consistently find themselves underrepresented in political activities and decision-making processes across numerous states, both in the Global North and the Global South. This lack of representation not only perpetuates gender inequality but also hampers progress toward more equitable societies. The emphasis on gender equality must address these disparities by promoting equal participation and opportunities for women in all sectors. To combat gender inequality effectively, society must challenge and dismantle the entrenched norms and stereotypes that contribute to sexism. Initiatives that promote women's empowerment, educate about gender biases, and advocate for policy changes are crucial steps in creating a more just and inclusive world. Only through collective action can we hope to achieve true gender equality and ensure that individuals are judged by their capabilities rather than their gender. Cultural ideals about women's work significantly influence not only women but also men whose gender expressions are viewed as "feminine" within their societies. This dynamic reinforces the restrictive and often damaging norms surrounding gender. Transgender and gender-variant individuals often navigate their identities through various modes of expression, including their appearance, the statements they make, and the official documents they present. However, within this context, societal expectations often termed gender normativity creates significant barriers and produce widespread devaluation of trans identities, homosexuality, and femininity. As a result, individuals who do not conform to traditional gender norms, particularly transgender persons, are frequently marginalized and viewed as socially unproductive or disruptive. This devaluation stems from a cultural insistence on binary gender roles and a reluctance to acknowledge the legitimacy of diverse gender identities. Such perspectives not only perpetuate discrimination but also deny trans individuals the recognition and respect they deserve. Challenging these cultural norms is essential to fostering inclusivity and acceptance. Promoting

³ Deji Olanike F (2011) *Gender and Rural Development*, London

awareness of gender diversity, advocating for the rights of transgender individuals, and celebrating varied expressions of gender can help dismantle the institutional and cultural biases that devalue those who do not fit conventional Casts. By doing so, society can move toward a more equitable landscape where all individuals are valued for their contributions, irrespective of their gender identity or expression.

ANALYSIS OF HUMAN RIGHT IN MODERN PERIOD

The analysis of human rights in the modern period reveals a complex landscape shaped by historical legacies, contemporary challenges, and a growing global awareness of fundamental freedoms. In the wake of major global conflicts and systemic injustices, the mid-20th century marked a pivotal moment with the establishment of the ⁴Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948. This landmark document aimed to set a universal standard for human rights, emphasizing the inherent dignity and equal rights of all individuals. However, the implementation of these rights has proven challenging across various contexts. In many countries, political repression, economic inequality, and social discrimination continue to undermine the principles enshrined in the UDHR. For instance, while significant strides have been made in promoting gender equality and racial justice, systemic inequalities persist, often exacerbated by globalization, which can lead to the marginalization of vulnerable populations. Furthermore, the modern period has seen the emergence of new human rights challenges, including digital privacy concerns, climate justice, and the rights of refugees and migrants. The rapid advancement of technology has created both opportunities and threats, raising questions about surveillance, data privacy, and the impact of artificial intelligence on individual freedoms. Civil society has played a crucial role in advocating for human rights, mobilizing grassroots movements, and demanding accountability from governments and institutions. However, backlash against these movements, including the rise of authoritarianism in certain regions, highlights the ongoing struggle for human rights around the world. In conclusion, while the framework for human rights in the modern period has laid a foundation for advocacy and protection, significant gaps remain. A multidimensional approach that addresses economic, social, and political complexities is essential for advancing human rights and ensuring that they are realized for all individuals, irrespective of their background or circumstance. As the world

⁴ Osberg, L (2015). Economic Inequality in the United State.

continues to evolve, so too must our understanding and implementation of human rights, adapting to new challenges while steadfastly promoting dignity and justice for everyone.

HUMAN RIGHTS CONVENTION

Human rights conventions are formal agreements among countries intended to establish and protect human rights standards at the international level. These conventions serve as crucial legal frameworks that outline the rights and freedoms to which all people are entitled, irrespective of nationality, ethnicity, gender, or religion. Here are some key human rights conventions:

1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁵ (UDHR) (1948) while not a binding treaty, this landmark document was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and outlines fundamental human rights and freedoms that should be universally protected.
2. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) (1966) This treaty commits its parties to respect and ensure the civil and political rights of individuals, including the right to life, freedom of speech, religion, and assembly.
3. International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (1966) As previously mentioned, this covenant focuses on ensuring the enjoyment of economic, social, and cultural rights, such as the right to work, education, and health.
4. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979) This convention aims to eliminate discrimination against women and promote gender equality in all aspects of life.
5. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) This treaty focuses on the rights of children, emphasizing their right to survival, development, protection, and participation.
6. Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) (2006) This convention promotes, protects, and ensures the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by persons with disabilities.

⁵ <http://www.un.org/about-us/universal-declaration-of>.

7. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) (1965) This treaty aims to eliminate racial discrimination and promote understanding among all races. Human rights conventions play a pivotal role in holding nations accountable for their treatment of individuals and in promoting global standards for human rights. They often require ratifying countries to adopt measures ensuring the protection of these rights within their own legal and political systems.

PURPOSE AND IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights conventions are vital instruments in the global fight for justice and equality. They serve several important functions:

1. **Set Global Standards:** These conventions establish universal norms for the treatment of individuals, ensuring that fundamental rights are recognized and upheld across different cultures and legal systems.
2. **Hold Governments Accountable:** By outlining specific rights and obligations, human rights conventions enable the international community to hold governments responsible for violations, encouraging accountability and transparency.
3. **Provide Legal Basis for Justice:** They offer individuals and groups a framework to seek justice for human rights abuses at both national and international levels, often empowering victims to challenge injustices in court.
4. **Promote Peace, Equality, and Dignity:** Human rights conventions foster an environment where peace, equality, and dignity can flourish, contributing to social stability and harmony worldwide. By ratifying these conventions, countries affirm their commitment to uphold and implement the rights outlined within them. However, realizing these commitments can be challenging. Many nations struggle with political, social, or economic obstacles that impede full compliance. Ongoing efforts, advocacy, and surveillance are crucial to ensuring that all individuals can enjoy their rights and that governments are held to account for their actions.

DISADVANTAGE OF BANNING DISCRIMINATION ON GROUND OF SOCIO ECONOMIC

Banning discrimination on the grounds of socio-economic disadvantage is an important step

toward fostering a more equitable society. Here are several points highlighting the significance and potential impact of such a ban:

1. **Promotion of Equality-Banning** ⁶discrimination based on socio-economic status helps level the playing field by ensuring that individuals from all economic backgrounds have equal access to opportunities, resources, and services. This promotes a fairer society where success is based on merit rather than financial status.
2. **Addressing Structural Inequalities-** Socio-economic discrimination often stems from systemic inequities that disadvantage certain groups. By enacting laws against such discrimination, governments can take steps to dismantle these structural barriers, promoting social mobility and inclusion.
3. **Improved Access to Services-** Legal protections can help ensure that individuals from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds have unhindered access to essential services, including education, healthcare, housing, and employment. This can lead to improved outcomes for these individuals and communities.
4. **Encouraging Diversity and Inclusion-**A ban on discrimination based on socio-economic status can foster a more diverse and inclusive environment in workplaces, educational institutions, and public services. This diversity can enhance creativity, innovation, and overall community well-being.
5. **Enhancing Social Cohesion-**Reducing discrimination helps to address feelings of resentment and marginalization among disadvantaged groups, contributing to greater social cohesion and harmony. It can lead to stronger communities with individuals who feel valued and included.
6. **Legal Framework for Advocacy-**Establishing legal protections against socio-economic discrimination provides a framework for individuals and organizations to advocate for their rights. It empowers affected individuals to seek justice and remedy for discrimination they may face.

⁶ Universal Human Right index

7. **Public Awareness and Education**-The process of implementing such a ban can increase awareness about socio-economic issues and encourage more discussions around poverty and inequality. Education on these topics can lead to broader societal change and acceptance. **Challenges to Implementation** While banning discrimination based on socio-economic status is crucial, several challenges may arise: **Defining Socio-Economic Status**: Establishing clear definitions and categories can be complex. **Enforcement**: Ensuring compliance with anti-discrimination laws may require robust enforcement mechanisms and resources. **Social Attitudes**: Changing public perceptions and attitudes towards socio-economic disadvantage can be slow and requires sustained efforts. Ultimately, a ban on discrimination grounded in socio-economic disadvantage is a vital step toward achieving social justice, enhancing individual dignity, and nurturing a more equitable society for all individuals, regardless of their economic background. There are commendable examples of governments banning discrimination based on socio-economic disadvantage. For instance, Canada's Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms of Quebec includes "social condition" as a prohibited ground for discrimination, and France criminalizes discrimination based on poverty in its Labour Code. However, such protections are rare, and discrimination against people living in poverty remains widespread. Economic inequality cannot be effectively addressed while discriminatory practices hinder access to essential services and benefits designed to promote equity. Discrimination not only perpetuates individual suffering but also reinforces systemic inequalities, denying individuals access to education, healthcare, housing, and employment. Importantly, States have a legal obligation under international human rights law to prohibit discrimination based on socio-economic status. Activists must advocate for broader anti-discrimination frameworks that include socio-economic status, ensuring that governments are held accountable and that all individuals can access the resources necessary for a dignified life. In summary, while there are positive legal frameworks addressing socio-economic discrimination, more work is needed to uphold the rights of those living in poverty and eradicate economic inequality.

WHAT LIES AHEAD IN THE FIGHT AGAINST INEQUALITY?

States have an obligation under international human rights law to create conditions that facilitate the progressive realization of economic, social, and cultural rights. This includes the

necessity for international assistance and cooperation to support these efforts. The international human rights system is uniquely positioned to offer guidance and support in fulfilling these commitments, helping nations implement frameworks that promote equity and access to fundamental rights. By leveraging global partnerships and shared resources, states can work towards ensuring that all individuals enjoy their economic, social, and cultural rights.

To effectively reduce inequality and advance ⁷Sustainable Development Goal, human rights mechanisms need to adopt a more comprehensive approach that incorporates various dimensions of inequality into their recommendations. This entails recognizing and addressing disparities not only between countries but also within developed nations themselves. Several Special Rapporteurs have highlighted the "shockingly high" levels of inequality in these developed countries, advocating for a higher level of scrutiny when evaluating their performance. The rationale is straightforward: developed states often possess greater resources and should, therefore, be held to stricter standards in their efforts to combat inequality. This heightened level of accountability within affluent nations is essential for fostering a more equitable global landscape where the principles of human rights are truly upheld for all.

For the High Commissioner's vision of 'human rights economies' to come to fruition, a fundamental reform of the international financial system is essential to address the root causes of inequality. This reform should align with states' international human rights obligations, including the commitment to international cooperation. Key elements of this approach include:

1. Strengthening Multilateral and Bilateral Cooperation: Enhancing collaborative efforts between countries to tackle inequality effectively.
2. Reinforcing Integration of Human Rights in Financial Institutions: Ensuring that international financial institutions incorporate human rights considerations into their operations and decisions.
3. Concrete Actions on Debt Relief and Fair Trade: Taking decisive steps to relieve debt burdens and promote equitable trading practices that benefit all nations involved.
4. Focusing on Equality of Opportunity: Prioritizing access to economic and social rights, particularly the right to education, to ensure that everyone has a fair chance to

⁷ The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung

succeed.

5. Discussion on Redistribution through Taxation: Openly engaging in dialogue about the need for progressive taxation policies that facilitate wealth redistribution.

6. Investing in Social Security Systems: Committing resources to strengthen social safety nets that protect the most vulnerable populations.

7. Eradicating Corruption and Illicit Financial Flows: Taking action to combat corruption and halt financial practices that undermine effective public service delivery. As the 2030 Agenda deadline approaches, it is crucial for the international community to heed the calls from economists and development experts to reassess the conception and measurement of SDG. Strengthening its targets and adopting indicators that reflect both wealth and income inequality, both within and between countries, will be vital. Achieving unity and coherence in policy across economic and human rights sectors is essential to fulfil our collective ambition of creating a more equal world.

CONCLUSION

In our increasingly interconnected and rapidly evolving world, the quest for social equality and the safeguarding of human rights are more critical than ever. Despite advancements in education, technology, and governance on a global scale, countless individuals continue to experience discrimination, poverty, and exclusion due to factors such as race, gender, class, religion, disability, or socio-economic status. These enduring inequalities not only erode individual dignity but also threaten social cohesion and global stability. Promoting social equality transcends mere fairness; it is about guaranteeing that everyone has the opportunity to live a life of freedom, dignity, and access to fundamental needs and opportunities. Embracing human rights principles including economic, social, and cultural rights is vital to realizing this aspiration. Governments, civil society organizations, and individuals all share the responsibility of confronting injustice, pushing for inclusive policies, and defending the rights of the most marginalized members of society. As we move forward, prioritizing social equality and human rights should remain central to global development and political decision-making. By tackling the root causes of inequality and bolstering protections for every individual, we can lay the groundwork for a genuinely just and humane society. In conclusion, addressing social inequality is essential for realizing the full spectrum of human rights in the modern world. The

persistent gaps in access to education, healthcare, employment, and justice highlight the urgent need for a comprehensive approach that encompasses legal reform, grassroots activism, and community engagement. By recognizing and dismantling systemic discrimination and economic disparities, we can foster a more equitable society where every individual can enjoy their fundamental rights and freedoms. It is imperative that governments, institutions, and civil society work collaboratively to implement inclusive policies that not only protect but also promote human dignity and equality. Only through concerted efforts and a commitment to social justice can we bridge the divide between the ideals of human rights and the realities faced by marginalized populations globally. Moving forward, a unified vision for social equality will not only enhance individual lives but will also strengthen the fabric of our global community, paving the way for a more just and inclusive future.