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Background

The first Human Development Report of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1999) examines the role of an empowering social environment in the enlargement of human choices and presents a new agenda for human development. Such an agenda calls for a package of structural reforms with political and economic development as its fundamental components. Along the same line, Iran's first Common Country Assessment (CCA) identifies several key challenges such as human capital development and improving economic performance. Under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) in the Islamic Republic of Iran for 2005-2009, to address these challenges, an emphasis is made on good governance, i.e. greater transparency and accountability, with special attention human rights and justice, as prerequisites.

This cluster project aims to contribute to *the enhancement of human rights and access to justice* (outcome 2.3), which is a twofold outcome under the UNDP supported Country Programme (CP) for 2005-2009 and intended by UNDAF. The main rationale for such a twofold outcome is that human rights and justice are two sides of the same coin and once protected, human rights will contribute to the service provided by the justice sector as a whole. Human rights establish the value framework, while the justice sector consisting of the various institutions at different levels interprets, enforces and implements these values.

For the achievement of such a twofold outcome, the support of the Government as a whole and the responsiveness of numerous national institutions are required. This outcome also calls for proactive involvement of civil society organizations that are directly involved in human rights and in the administration of or access to justice, either as part of the system (as providers of legal aid, etc.) or as independent monitors of legality and fairness. Together with those involved with provision of justice, national institutions (e.g. human rights centres of various universities and the human rights commission) and human rights civil society organizations, inclusive of NGOs and associations, serve as the backbone in the promotion, protection and realization of human rights and hence are the main partners in this cluster project.

It is in this context that the current project was formulated and is being implemented. The project is unique in some senses, because it has been able to bring together, for the first time in the country, eight key national human rights players to work jointly, as equal partners, for a common purpose. The eight national implementing partners of the project are:

| Project Summary | |
|---|--------------|
| Title: | |
| Cluster Project on National Capacity Building for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights for Greater Access to Justice | |
| Duration: | |
| 7/9 - 2005 until 31/12 – 2009 | |
| Partners: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Centre for Human Rights Studies, University of Tehran - UNESCO Chair for Human Rights, Peace and Democracy, Shahid Beheshti University - Centre for Human Rights Studies, Mofid University, Qom - Islamic Human Rights Commission of Iran - Centre for Training and Research of the Judiciary of the I. R. of Iran - Iranian Bar Association - Organisation for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV) - Association of Iranian Journalists - International Bar Association - International Federation of Journalists - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) | |
| Cost sharing inputs: | |
| UNDP TRAC | \$ 500 000 |
| UNDP DG TTF | \$ 150 000 |
| Government of Netherlands | € 600 000 |
| Government of Norway | \$ 42 000 |
| European Commission | €1 000 000 |
| Total Project Budget: | \$ 2 605 000 |

- Centre for Human Rights Studies, Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Tehran (which also serves as the Lead Agency and the Secretariat of the project)
- UNESCO Chair for Human Rights, Peace, and Democracy, Shahid Beheshti University
- Centre for Human Rights Studies, Mofid University, Qom
- Office of the Deputy Head of the Judiciary for Training and Research, the Judiciary
- Islamic Human Rights Commission
- Iranian Bar Association
- Association of Iranian Journalists
- Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (ODVV)

In the course of implementation, the project also involves other universities, civil society organizations and national institutions, as may be required or beneficial. The project is seen, at the national level, as a key national human rights capacity building initiative.

The project has also been able to raise bilateral, multilateral and international interest. The project is receiving support from the Government of the Netherlands and the Government of Norway at the bilateral level. At the multilateral level, the European Commission (EC) is supporting the project. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), at the international level, is also interested in the project. International professional associations such as International Bar Association have also expressed interest to become involved.

Provided that the project is able to take advantage of the opportunities, and deal adequately with the political and social challenges that come its way, it will be able to contribute greatly to national capacity building in the area of human rights and its promotion.

Project Design and Implementation

As a national human rights capacity building initiative, the project was formulated in a cluster form, meaning that several potentially separate projects have been combined to form a cluster project. This approach was adopted in order to maximize the impact and to foster cooperation among some of the key national institutions involved in the areas of human rights and justice. The project was signed by eight national implementing partners, each being as equal partners, though with different capacities and roles. Together they, along with UNDP, form the Project Management Team.

The project's major identified outputs/activities are as follows:

- Capacity development at institutional/organizational level to build and upgrade the facilities of the project's core national implementing partners in order to better undertake human rights work
- Capacity development at policy level for the promotion and realization of the Charter of Human Rights with an emphasis on Citizens Rights as well as formulation and implementation of the action plan for national human rights education programmes
- Capacity development through exchange of international learning experience/knowledge sharing, twinning arrangements, networking and mentoring
- Capacity development through expanding legal education; specialized human rights training courses offered to human rights defenders; basic human rights courses conducted for different

categories of target groups; and operational/applied human rights research and studies undertaken

- Advocacy and awareness raising campaigns on human rights issues

An important output of the project is to raise awareness on human rights by facilitating seminars, roundtables, workshops, and training courses. In this context, many training and advocacy workshops have been organized throughout the country engaging hundreds of human rights defenders, students, journalist, lawyers and government officials, among others. These workshops have been organized by the project's national implementing partners, collectively or individually. Some of the topics of these workshops included:

Training workshop on familiarity with the means for national human rights reporting under international human rights conventions:

- Seminar on "Women in the Arena of Public Law"
- Workshop on collective bargaining for the journalists
- Women's rights training workshops
- Conference on citizenships' rights
- Training workshops for human rights defenders:
- Training workshop on peace policies and human rights
- Human rights advocacy and capacity building initiatives in the provinces
- Workshop on Hotline telephone legal advisory and counselling services
- Training workshops on human rights and journalism profession
- Training workshops on democracy and electoral systems

The project supported the Fourth International Human Rights Conference: Human Rights and Religion, organized by Mofid University in Qom (16-17 May 2007). The conference was attended by leading national and international human rights experts and scholars, students and practitioners. The conference covered the following issues:

- Religion and bases of human rights
- Human rights and co-existence of religions and world peace
- Rights relevant to religion in the international system of human rights
- Religion and implementation of human rights

Scholars from Iran, United States of America, Italy, Ghana, Japan, Bosnia, Switzerland, Great Britain, Ireland, Belgium, France, India, Canada, Germany, Egypt, and Morocco presented their papers in person. There were also roundtable discussions after each session. All the papers submitted to the conference and accepted will be published in Farsi, English and Arabic. The project supports the publication of these papers as well.

Another key activity in the project, entrusted to the human rights centres of the University of Tehran, Shahid Beheshti University and Mofid University, is the preparation and publication of human rights texts Farsi and are in the process of publication. In this way, the project is playing a key role in making human rights literature available and accessible in the country.

The establishment and equipping of legal aid clinics by the project's national implementing partners is one of the key activities foreseen in the project. The purpose is to provide free expert legal advisory

services to the vulnerable groups and in the process provide the necessary practical training to the future legal practitioners. Currently, the legal aid clinics at the University of Tehran, Shahid Beheshti University, Mofid University, Iranian Bar Association, and the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence have been established and are active. In the year 2007, these legal aid clinics provided services to over 3,000 people. In order to better train law students in the area of legal aid clinics, Mofid University also undertook moot court sessions supervised by the law faculty professors.

Furthermore, the project provides support to students' human rights hubs in the universities. In this context, support is given to the activities organized by the hubs such as holding human rights seminars, workshops, and capacity building activities. In 2007, a total of 13 human rights events, on various subjects, organized by the hubs, were supported by the project.

The international exchange of knowledge and international exposure through research visits and participation in international and regional human rights events and gatherings are other important components of the project. In this context, individuals from the national implementing partners of the project attended the following:

- The Fourth Session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Geneva, March 2007 (as observers)
- Workshop on Making Governance Gender Sensitive, Manila, Philippines, June 2007
- Participation in the Thirty Eight Annual Study Session of the International Institute of Human Rights, Strasbourg, France, July 2007
- Regional Training Workshop on the Impact of Post-Conflict Situation on Vulnerable Persons' Rights, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, December 2007

The project also foresees provision of equipments, library resources, and documents for the project's national implementing partners to provide better services to the public and facilitate exchange of information. In this context, in 2007, a total of 914 volumes of human rights or related books were purchased for the project's national implementing partners. The books are in Farsi, English and French. The breakdown is as follows:

- Centre for Human Rights Studies, Faculty of Law and Political Science, University of Tehran: 40 volumes of books in Farsi and 70 volumes of books in English and French
- Centre for Human Rights Studies, Mofid University: 116 volumes of books in Farsi and 4 volumes of books in English
- Iranian Bar Association: 62 volumes of books in Farsi
- Islamic Human Rights Commission: 432 volumes of books in Farsi and 190 volumes of books in English (for the central office in Tehran and also for the offices in the provinces)

The activities mentioned above are just a few examples of the project's reach and depth. The project is helping to create a culture of human rights in the country, while simultaneously supporting institutional strengthening – a crucial aspect in the sustainability of any human rights initiative.

Project Results

The project has been able to create a national partnership and cooperation mechanism in order to promote and advocate internationally accepted human rights norms and standards. The project is also undertaking institutional capacity building efforts in order to ensure sustainability once UNDP exits.

Many people at various levels have benefited from the project. This includes university faculty members, university students, lawyers, journalists, civil society activists, human rights defenders and government officials. Another major category that has benefitted from the project is the more vulnerable groups, especially poor women and children. The project provides quality and free legal advisory services through the legal aid clinics established at the law faculties of the three partner universities and the Organization for Defending Victims of Violence (an NGO).

As a result of these activities, awareness has increased, institutions have been strengthened and partnerships have been fostered.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The project is managed by the Project Management Team (PMT), composed of representatives of the eight national implementing partners in addition to UNDP and the Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The PMT meets regularly throughout the year to decide on the issues related to the project and plan activities. The Secretariat of the project, established at the Centre for Human Rights Studies of the Faculty of Law and Political Science of the University of Tehran, is tasked with the detailed management and monitoring of the project under the supervision of the National Project Director and the PMT. UNDP also undertakes its own monitoring and validation site visits. With the experience gained and the trust and partnerships built, this type of cooperation can be replicated again in the future.

With the capacities built, the institutions strengthened, and the partnerships established, it is expected that the work will continue once the funding is exhausted and UNDP exists. This being said, one must be reminded of the fluid political situation in the country, the region and at the international level. These uncertainties might change the circumstances and create a situation that might not be very conducive for this type of work. Therefore, UNDP in consultation with its national partners should keep a close watch and make adjustments as they may be required.

For more information on our projects and activities please feel free to contact us on info.ir@undp.org