



FINAL REPORT

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Vilnius, Lithuania

16-17 March 2017





CONFERENCE IN BRIEF

The three-country Human Rights Activism Conference that ran for two days, on 16 and 17 March, 2017, in Vilnius, Lithuania, hosted 40 delegates of civil society organizations, coalitions and associations, initiative groups and partner-organizations that were part of the Programme for Democratisation, Human Rights and Civil Society Development in Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus supported by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The forum was the last in the chain of three-country events ran within the wider framework of the Programme, and was organized by the United Nations Development Programme in Ukraine (as the Ukrainian implementing partner) with contributions made by implementing partners from other countries, inter alia, the Danish Institute for Human Rights, East Europe Foundation in Moldova, and Pact Inc.

Thirteen hours of intensive discussions, presentations, group-work and experience-sharing were called to both take note of current developments with and through human rights in three countries and attempt at generating ideas for the way forwards. The event was built as a venue for open and honest discussions on what worked and what failed, as well as what the general outlook on the Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) application and civic literacy levels was in three country settings. Finally, the conference grounds became an important platform to reinforce links between human rights actors in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, and probe for future collaborations and cross-country information exchange.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

- To truly live up to the principles of human rights, it is important to remember that the work done is carried out by the actors *for* human rights; such activities are, also, carried out *rooted in* human rights standards, internationally-recognized pacts and conventions; finally, to be holistic, such interventions should be implemented *through* human rights.
- To overcome the risk of running into an evolutionary crisis of human rights thought and action, the human right community should go for systemic action, creative drive and solidarity with peers. People, citizens from outside of the organizations should become the glue that consolidates human rights organizations.
- Consolidation of the human rights community has to be purposeful and open to hearing or collaborating with parallel, dissimilar actors and structures constructively. Apart from consolidating around garnering citizen support, understanding and participation, consolidated efforts may be necessary in utilization of the human rights frameworks currently in existence – such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) or the values of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).
- The Human Rights Based Approach to operations of any civil society organization not only furthers the goal of human rights per se through advocating principles contained in key treaties and conventions, but also of living the human rights principles internally. However, HRBA should not be limited only to one “prescribed” framework, but instead needs to be popularized in a flexible manner, adaptable to the real-time needs of organizations and cannot be treated as a universal tool to solve all issues.
- Civic literacy stands for the knowledge of how to actively participate and initiate change in your community and the wider society. In that respect, it is a question how civic literacy (that could include diffusing information about human rights) is intersecting with human rights education and whether, in this case, it is not somewhat “diluting” the strictly human rights defence agenda.
- Innovative communication tools and strategies can stimulate and raise effectiveness of the rights activism. These include use of the visual animated or video instruments, utilization of crowd-mapping or map visualization tools, proactive outreach through social media platforms, working with volunteers, using thematic street art and performances, human rights film festivals and others.

HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM CONFERENCE

КОНФЕРЕНЦИЯ ПО ВОПРОСАМ
ПРАВООЩИТНОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ

16-17 March 2017, V

16-17 марта 2017, Вильнюс



START-OFF MESSAGES AND KEYNOTE SPEECH

10:00 – 10:45

Theresia Kirkemann Boesen,
on behalf of the Ministry
of Foreign Affairs of Denmark

Ihor Hutsuliak,
on behalf of UNDP Ukraine

Andrey Yurov,
Human Rights Defender

Conference deliberations began with presentation of a three-elemental model for applying the values behind human rights. In order to truly live up to the principles behind the notion and spirit of human rights, it is important to remember that the work done is carried out by the actors for human rights (i.e. attainment of rights enjoyment for the humanity); such activities are, also, carried out rooted in human rights standards, internationally-recognized pacts and conventions; finally, in order to be holistic, such interventions should be implemented through human rights. The latter foresees a deeper look into the internal workings of an organization, coalition or initiative group – to see whether what is being broadcast to the wider community in terms of principles and values is actually practiced internally by the organization itself. The Human Rights Based Approach to operations of human rights organizations, as well as literally any civil society organization (CSO) would essentially make that emphasis – of not only furthering the goal of human rights per se through advocating principles contained in conventions, but also of living the human rights principles internally. The core principles of such operation are transparency, accountability to oneself and the constituency, non-discrimination as well as inclusivity and participation.

At the same time, the operations of human rights organizations, coalitions and unions are not carried out in socio-economic vacuum, but are instead influenced by the logic and developments of their surrounding environment. And this environment grows ever more complicated and hybrid, while stimulating political populism and reinforcing societal fatigue. The media landscape and information space in general are rich in cases when perpetrators of human rights violations are masking themselves as victims of someone else's wrongdoing. In parallel, the human rights movement sometimes tends to victimize itself as well and close off in this shell that in a certain way may be beneficial, as it allows the victim to engage in unhindered action, relying on the privilege of the weak one.

Nowadays, in many areas the lines separating victory from failure become ever more blurry, as oppressive regimes and human rights violators start using the human rights language and terminology to excuse their wrongs. In this situation, one has to be ever more careful to separate the simulacra from real things and issues, and to probe the way forwards in the oftentimes muddy, uncharted waters, as the nations all over the world experience more and more dissatisfaction with complex constructs and uneasy, hair-splitting solutions. In this respect, we are doomed to be running against flourishing populism that seems to offer easy, clear-cut ways to cut Gordian knots – so welcome by the public.

In general, the human rights community all over the world seems to be running into an evolutionary crisis of human rights thought and action. There are dozens of examples of successful tactics in human rights work in the world these days, and such local victories are the source of inspiration. It is much more complicated with shorter-term, lower-level

strategies – but even there the level of uncertainty grows. The most problematic area, it seems, is the overall strategy for human rights that so far has not been consolidated. In essence, deliberation of such a strategy would entail answering some fundamental human rights questions. For instance, whether the growth of the human rights body, inclusion of additional rights, is to continue or, to the contrary, there shall be a move towards reification and return to the original lists of rights.

Whatever the future holds, and whichever way is chosen as aftermath of this evolutionary process, there are three factors that should characterize human rights action: systemic action, creative drive and solidarity with peers. No matter what developments lie ahead, these approaches and principles may help keep the faith and continue on the chosen path.



“IS IT POSSIBLE TO CONSOLIDATE CIVIL SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS AGENDA?”

PANEL DISCUSSION
10:00 – 10:45

Panellists:

Oleksandra Matviychuk,
Centre for Civil Liberties,
Ukraine

Ulad Vialichka,
International Consortium
EUROBELARUS,
Belarus

Galina Klimov,
Alliance of Organisations for Persons
with Disabilities,
Moldova

Evguenia Klementieva,
Danish Institute for Human Rights,
Denmark

Moderator:

Tetiana Pechonchyk,
Human Rights Information Centre,
Ukraine

- There is a difference in levels of success attained when monitoring human rights versus offering workable human rights solutions. In other words, the human rights defence community demonstrates significant skill and rigor when tracking actual human rights performance by the duty-bearers. At the same time, when time and opportunity comes to define workable mechanisms for preventing human rights violations with development of concrete mechanisms thereto, there is much less progress and energy. In this sense, consolidation to arrive at joint solutions while avoiding groupthink is important.
- In the given country settings (some more than others), there is no “work” on human rights – instead there is “combat” for human rights. This means that the challenges are many, time is little, and opportunities to calmly sit down and ponder responses to pending human rights challenges – a rarest of commodities. In this sense, capitalizing on the little time that may still be used is of crucial importance. One of the ways to intensify ideas-exchange and rapidly discuss practices is the format of an “unconference” that was successfully applied in Ukraine to human rights challenges.
- Yet another instrument for unofficial consolidation of human rights effort is a coalition of human rights organizations, “Human Rights Agenda” (<https://goo.gl/gBb4r9>) that works on monitoring and proposing legislation in line with human rights principles.
- Consolidation comes naturally through traumatic and painful events – such was the experience of the unofficial network “Maidan SOS” throughout the latest Ukrainian revolution. The network was effective mainly due to the support of ordinary citizens and pro bono lawyers. Citizens’ trust in the efficacy of the initiative was there exactly because they were part of the movement.
- People, citizens from outside of the organizations may (should?) become the glue that consolidates human rights organizations. But in order for this constituency glue to be in place, the human rights organizations and movements have to get out of their self-imposed human rights “ghetto” and discard the sometimes prevalent snobbism that positions human rights organizations somewhat above the citizenry.
- At the same time, as critical events pass, the human rights organizations start losing their constituencies and there is no “fresh blood” entering the ranks in relatively calm times. In this sense, more consideration has to go into seeking effective means of recruiting the new supporters and those who know and share human rights values. It seems also that human rights organizations may be more comfortable with foreign experts and international counterparts rather than the citizenry at large – and that has to change.

- At the same time, in such country contexts where the notion of human rights is heavily politicized, there is lower readiness of the society to engage with human rights organizations. On the other hand, part of such mistrust and alienation of the constituencies lies in the fact that human rights organizations are “old-school” in both their approaches and even the language they use to describe their appeal and values. There has to be collaboration and consolidation of efforts of human rights organizations to jointly reaching out to the constituencies, in producing attractive human rights content, delivering common messages in joint campaigns, and designing imagery and messages that would appeal to the emotional side of the citizens. The countries need their human rights heroes, and consolidation of thought could bring that about.
- While consolidation of the human rights community seems beneficial from all sides at the surface, it may nonetheless be detrimental in some aspects. In order to serve a common goal and assist progress, consolidation has to be around something or for a certain reason. Solidarity and consolidation usually begin with link-minded forces in the same field but with merger of the likeminded ones, we may be losing out on diversity and alternative approaches. Therefore, consolidation should, first and foremost, be purposeful and, secondly, open to hearing or collaborating with parallel, dissimilar actors and structures constructively.
- Apart from consolidating around garnering citizen support, understanding and participation, consolidated efforts may be necessary in utilization of the human rights frameworks currently in existence – such as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) or the values of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Consolidation of effort to promote these instruments and use them to their maximum level of effectiveness may be beneficial, even if the given instruments are imperfect.
- Yet another reason to consolidate efforts of human rights organizations is the understanding that you as a large well-resourced entity may still run into a situation that you have all but one case, story, skill to make the quality quantum leap and become more effective. Consolidation, predictably, is the search for such capacity “missing puzzles”. This happens, on the other hand, only if you have reached a certain degree of self-knowledge as an organization, and you have matured enough to be able to assess your strengths and weaknesses realistically.
- The position of the donor community is yet another crucial point in the consolidation agenda. Some may foster consolidation and nudge organizations to join forces – which not in all cases brings sustainable or at least high-quality results (when organizations cooperate while gritting their teeth due to a shared funding pool). The reverse side of ►



the coin is when the donors and international development partners stimulate unhealthy competition and organizational feuds. For instance, instead of pooling resources and supporting a consolidated alternative report to an international human rights mechanism, different donors support different organizations producing a dozen alternative reports rather than agreeing with the peer-donor to unite. The donor-driven consolidation as well as competition activities is therefore an issue with significant impact.

- An additional pre-requisite for consolidation of civil society in the realm of human rights is the openness to listening to what the other actors have to say and refraining from pushing through only the narrow agenda that may be of interest to this particular organization.
- Finally, collaborations and consolidation of the human rights community may bear either positive or negative fruit depending on many situations. Yet, definite recipes for failure include consolidation "at gunpoint" when an external actor demands that, or if the coalition is established artificially from within from day one.





“CIVIC LITERACY IN BELARUS, MOLDOVA AND UKRAINE”

PRESENTATION OF THE
SURVEY RESULTS AND
PANEL DISCUSSION
REFLECTIONS

14:00 – 16:30

Presenter:

Daryna Pyrohova,
Kyiv International Institute of
Sociology, *Ukraine*

Discussants:

Mikhail Doroshevich,
Baltic Internet Policy Initiative,
Belarus

Yuliya Tyshchenko,
Ukrainian Centre for Independent
Political Research,
Ukraine

Mariana Buruiana,
East Europe Foundation,
Moldova

Svetlana Zinkevich,
Office for European Expertise and
Communications, *Belarus*

Moderator:

Maksym Klyuchar,
United Nations Development
Programme, *Ukraine*

Main highlights of the study “Civic Literacy in Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus: An Account of the Representative Public Opinion Survey Carried out in three Countries” (full text in English: <https://goo.gl/OLg0Cq>, Ukrainian <https://goo.gl/JQkcgM> and Russian <https://goo.gl/t3esAU>) were presented as a starter for the discussion by the panel. A brief account of the research results and some comparisons may be viewed here - <https://goo.gl/8CTQzl>.

- The conducted research is first of its kind and, if it is to become something more than a solid baseline, then its methodology might have to be perfected, as there seems to be no guarantee that the people are actually replying to the question that was being asked. While the questions originally designed for the Belarus context were then taken into the Ukrainian and Moldovan contexts and tested prior to roll-out, there is indeed a slight difference between questions used in Belarus versus Moldova and Ukraine. Finally, the difference in answers to questions may also be triggered by the trust of the respondents to the interviewer, the purpose of the interview, and intrinsic opinions or apprehensions connected to the theme being discussed. In this vein, additional focus groups could be beneficial to clear out the pending issues.
- In a wider perspective, as regards civic education as a whole, it is important to be responsive to the needs of the society (such as informal education, foreign language knowledge, media-literacy, business-skills) and to clearly delineate these from the “pure” civic education. If a country situation is such that a large number of people do not want to partake in civic education and note about this openly, it would be wrong to disguise civic education as business-training or other formats. This may generate ever more protest. An even starker distinction seems to be present in terms of civic education and human rights. It is a question how civic literacy (that could include diffusing information about human rights) is intersecting with human rights education and whether, in this case, it is not somewhat “diluting” the strictly human rights defence agenda.
- It would be good to take an even wider approach to comparing the levels of civic knowledge and competences in the post-Soviet countries and other states that allocate much more attention to civic literacy. On the other hand, this survey should not be carried out too often, not to become a regular “monitoring” but rather have an ability to have such a snapshot over some time-periods. It would also be important to make the raw data available for possible cross-country and cross-variable comparisons.
- Civic literacy (or rather civic knowledge) is only one aspect of the overall picture. We may allocate much time and effort to instilling the awareness and factual knowledge, information about different

methods, tools and instruments, but more attention has to go into actual practicing of the approaches learned. In many of the countries, civic education begins with formal educational settings, and it would be interesting to see how much informal education may influence something that has already been put in by the formal systems.

- The results received from the research also have to be filtered through the prism of the information landscape prevalent in the countries. This is a factor, as it elaborates on how the media communicate with citizens, how the CSOs carry out their communication, etc.
- The research conducted also demonstrated the need to probe into the correlation between the answers that citizens give and their declared values (as well as understanding of these values), as in some cases it seems that a strange mix exists – with simultaneous existence of a free market and strong government regulation.
- The research per se calls yet another question into discussion. An image of an “ideal” citizen is constantly being crafted by each polity, adapted to the needs of the time and with reference to the present “historical moment”. There also is the issue of what is projected in the society as an ideal citizen and what is actually expected of the citizenry. The values of an ideal citizen are seen as necessarily coinciding with the values of the state (both declared and deeply espoused). At the same time, the state shall give its citizens the genuine right of choice – whether to be ideal or not.







“WAYS TO CONSOLIDATE CIVIL SOCIETY FOR PROMOTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS AGENDA”

WORLD CAFE SESSION
16:30 – 18:00

Session hosts:

Volodymyr Shcherbachenko,
Justice for Peace in Donbas Coalition,
Ukraine

Rodica Frecautanu,
Caroma Nord,
Moldova

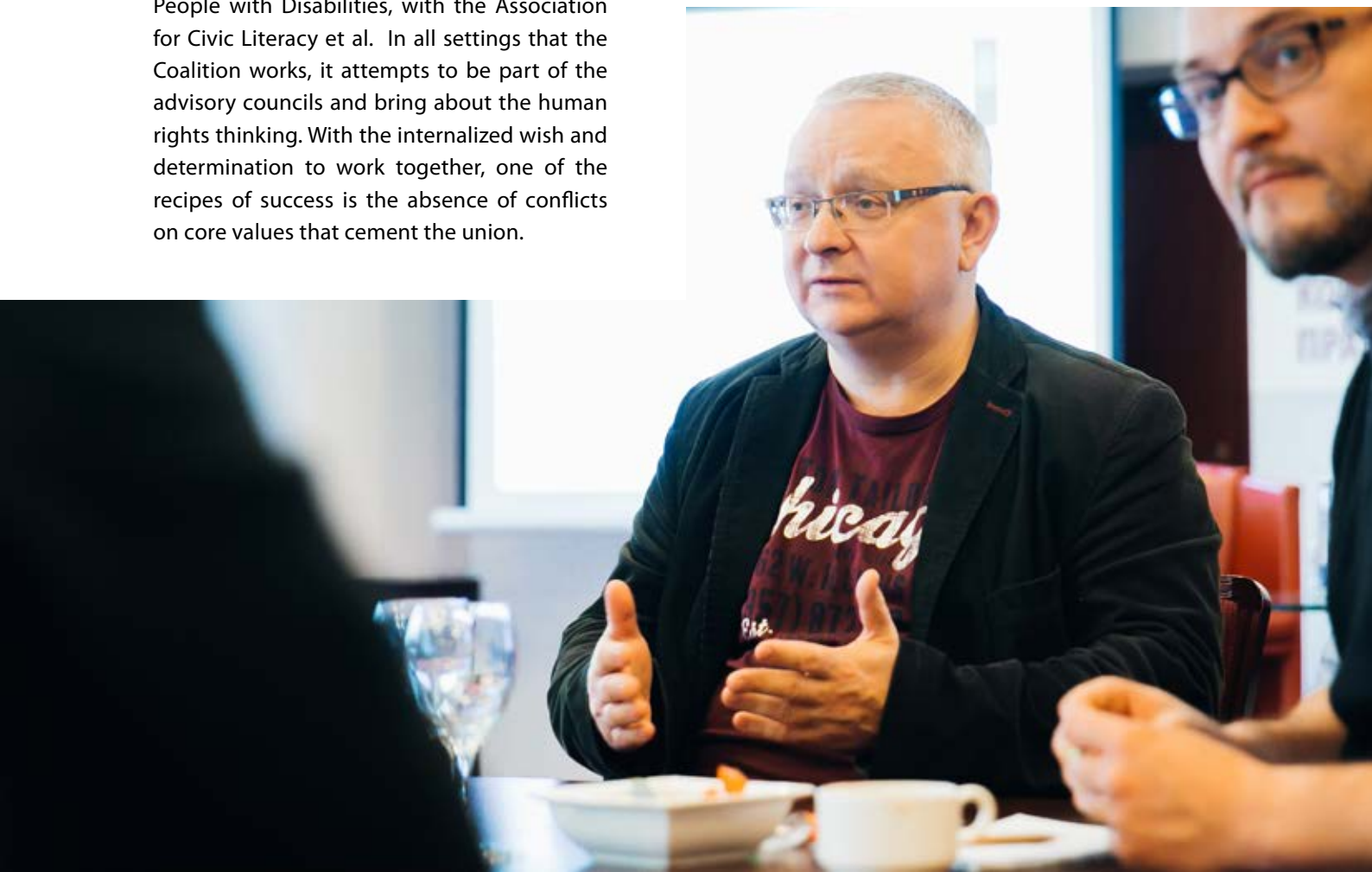
Aleh Gulak,
Belarus Helsinki Committee,
Belarus

The session considered three country snapshots both through the prism of consolidation (as discussed in the namesake panel earlier in the day) and from the point of view of concrete coalition examples.

- The example from Moldova showcased activities of an organization that facilitated the dialogue between various local structures, working to build bridges between the local government bodies and civil society. The activities resulted in mobilizing 300 local citizens to improve the quality of local democracy and solve problems faced by the local community. As a result, two initiative groups were registered as CSOs and 5 projects were implemented. Mass media became one of the driving forces for making this happen. Some of the successful practices of consolidation include establishment of clear ground rules and code of conduct. While the coalition may not necessarily be shaped as a registered alliance, there is need to discuss in-depth and agree to the ground rules. Coalition-based participation in consultative collegial bodies with government entities is a beneficial strategy too, as it works around a topic of interest to many stakeholders. All in all, experience from Moldova shows that coalitions are productive in those situations when the topics for collaboration are of interest to a large number of stakeholders. In that case, one would be able to observe involvement of media, discussion platforms, communities originally shaped in Facebook and civic coalitions per se.
- The Ukrainian example showcased a human rights defence coalition that deals with documenting human rights violations perpetrated in the east of the country in or adjacent to the conflict zone. The coalition “Justice for Peace in Donbas” has 17 member-organizations and over 2 years of operational experience with part of the organizations working at the all-Ukrainian level, and part – dedicatedly from Donetsk and Luhansk areas. The coalition is built as a union of equals and runs a common database of violations that are documented. The two dedicated donor partners (UNDP and the International Renaissance Foundation) as well as other donors support various coalition projects on human rights violation documenting as well as trainings and opinion polls. All of such activities involve civil society organizations, select and train individuals from the Donbas region to engage in coalition activities. A number of submissions to the international court are the result of such work. Despite the successes, there are a number of challenges that arise when working in coalitions. First and foremost, it is complicated to find consensus with large and experienced organizations which believe that they are the top league unlike everyone else. In addition, there is no final vision where the Coalition is headed – so far it follows the tried and tested path of doing what it knows to do best, and there are no long-term strategies for further development of the Coalition. Furthermore, there are oftentimes discords in the Coalition, as

many of its member organizations have been directly touched by conflict events and are taking certain aspects emotionally through their prism of understanding. Finally, as far as formalization of the Coalition goes, there are main principles spelled out in writing, a Charter of the Coalition that envisages internal rules of procedure, and the Coalition Council that is elected through a secret ballot and comprises 5 persons. A formal strategic plan is designed every year for the Coalition to move forwards.

- Despite the simmering authoritarian regime in the country, human rights organizations have been able to operate in this environment, and have established a Coalition of 12 organizations that foresees division of labour in thematic areas. Each year, there is a gathering to revise the agenda and to determine the best possible response to the new activities, initiatives and trends in the government. The Coalition attempts to work in such areas where the human rights agenda is lacking but is of importance – for instance, with the Green Alliance, with the Coalition of People with Disabilities, with the Association for Civic Literacy et al. In all settings that the Coalition works, it attempts to be part of the advisory councils and bring about the human rights thinking. With the internalized wish and determination to work together, one of the recipes of success is the absence of conflicts on core values that cement the union.



“STRATEGIZING FOR EFFECTIVE CIVIC EDUCATION”

WORLD CAFE SESSION
16:30 – 18:00

Session hosts:

Vasili Kukharchyk,
Pact Inc., *Belarus*

Olena Ursu,
United Nations Development
Programme, *Ukraine*

The session intended to look deeper into the issue of civic education in three country settings, determine commonalities or divergent features, and arrive at some “bird’s-eye-view” considerations and recommendations for a more successful civic education approach, stemming in part from the findings of the three-country survey.

- The core characteristics for successful civic education programmes are simplicity and easy comprehension, relevance of contents for the end-user and embeddedness into their context (localization instead of generic solutions), attractiveness and unexpected formats for bringing the information to the audience.
- Prior to designing a civic education programme, it is important to define which knowledge and competences we want to shape – this may be achieved through attentive study of needs that exist with different target groups that have to be involved in dialogue for shaping these priorities.
- One of the keys to effectiveness of educational programmes is the selection of truly motivated participants. It is important to be honest about the scarce resources that we have, and concentrate on those who already want to see the change. It is impossible to “galvanize” everyone – this is a fact of life that we have to accept.
- High-quality civic education is not about transferring a certain volume of knowledge to individuals but rather about making these individuals act. In this vein, civic education programmes that embed an action-oriented element tend to enjoy greater popularity. Instead of merely relaying the information, they offer participants an opportunity to test out their capacity to improve the life in their own community or country by tackling tangible challenges. In this vein, it is important to offer the citizens not only a one-off educational opportunity but rather constant support (mentorship, consulting, peer-support) to catalyze evolution of knowledge into action. Civic education may even refrain from using certain terminology but actually engage in quality process of nurturing citizenry.
- The persistent question remains regarding the value of knowledge (as retained, internalized information) versus the competencies that have been learned and practiced. On the one hand, civic knowledge in the contemporary digital world is akin to other types of knowledge where information may be easily sought on the internet. On the other hand, availability of large volumes of information at your fingertips by no means translates into someone actually seeking out that information and memorizing it. Hence, the individual is still to have a basic volume of knowledge on one’s rights, on the functions of the state, on ability to appeal for protection of rights and assistance. This, of course, has to be accompanied by the critical thinking, values, skills and abilities that may be honed in the process of civic education.

- In terms of balancing the demand and supply, the civic literacy area shows that the supply brings about the demand – as in a lot of cases the potential beneficiaries may even be unaware of the knowledge that they are lacking.
- On the other hand, civic education cannot and should not be limited to only “vertical” relations of person and state. Instead, the topic should be tackled first and foremost from the point of view of person-to-person relations. Basic knowledge of the duties of a person and citizen also have to be nurtured, as the rights of one person are inherently limited by the rights of the others.
- A different side of civic education lies in channelling the acquired skills “for the good”. Skills and competencies may be used for attaining constructive or destructive goals. In this respect, formal and informal education, leadership-building events and other capacity-building initiatives are used for destructive purposes. This, once more, necessitates close attention to the selection of participants and making sure that the knowledge they receive is used for positive purposes of supporting and strengthening their communities.
- Yet another crucial element is media-literacy. People have to be trained in being critical and attentive to the information that they receive, be able to filter it, select the important core messages and analyze them.
- Returning to the issue of limited resources, one has to keep in mind that with an extremely wide target group (in essence, the whole society!), a smart approach has to be sought to having an effect from the education we provide. This means that throughout such education we have to engage with smaller leadership groups that represent different strata in the society and are then able to become change agents in their own micro-groups that together constitute a realistic model of the society. Since we are investing in potential leaders in their societal groups, it is important not to lose the link with them after the engagement is over.



“INNOVATIVE COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND STRATEGIES FOR RIGHTS ACTIVISM”

WORLD CAFE SESSION
16:30 – 18:00

Session hosts:

Viktor Koroli,
Alianta INFONET,
Moldova

Alyona Laptенок,
Viasna Human Rights Defence Centre,
Belarus

The session was called to present, share, and discuss some of the tools that could effectively be used for human rights work in all three country settings. While not all of the instruments presented here may effectively be deployed in all country settings, the initial listing of the tools and subsequent brainstorming of additional practices deployed in different country settings allowed to summarize the following tool-list.

- Use of the visual animated or video instruments, including animated videos, short thematic films, video-tutorials and cartoons for dissemination of core messages and skill-building. These video-products then could be used in a wide spectrum of locations and modalities: starting from YouTube and Vimeo uploads to Facebook or other social media re-posts to striking an agreement with the transportation authorities and / or advertisers to demonstrate the materials for the passengers. Another well-known example of using video-art is the travelling documentary festival Docudays.
- Utilization of crowd-mapping or map visualization tools that do not require knowledge of programming and are hosted for free (such as the Ushahidi platform: <https://goo.gl/XbSRqb>). Such mappings have already been used in order to pinpoint both existence of election precincts and crowd-sourced reports on election-day violations therein. Another example is the interactive map of human rights violations in Crimea.
- The popular VoIP (voice over internet) instruments such as Skype, Viber or similar, can be used to provide online video-consultations, sessions and at-distance discussions.
- Proactive outreach through a number of social media platforms (Facebook, VKontakte, Instagram) is becoming a “must” in order to maintain (and quantify) the audience and communicate to peers and the constituency in real-life mode.
- With a transition away from traditional print booklets and publications, there is a growing trend to use online publishing platforms and stacking services such as Issuu to integrate online libraries onto the websites of the organizations –making content searchable and available “all in one place”.
- A counter-instrument to digitalization of publications (especially as the outreach to the non-IT-savvy audiences becomes necessary) is a method of purchasing a whole “special edition” of a registered newspaper, buying out the whole print run and disseminating that.
- Working with volunteers as channels of communication may also be beneficial and a well-prepared volunteer corps is a way of minimizing media risks. Thus, for instance, asking your volunteer body to brainstorm most perilous and uneasy questions that they

may be asked and then collectively crafting responses thereto is not only a way of educating them about intricacies of your organization's work but also making sure that journalists or other interested parties receive well-structured responses actually owned by the volunteers.

- It has increasingly become traditional to use "performances", street art or installations to attract attention to issues of social importance or human rights considerations. Examples are many, and include use of open-theatre-like methods to parody demonstrations or flash-mobs.
- Finally, instruments that are becoming more wide-spread and could assist the human rights movement is big data as well as user-generated data, with the latter being able to fill in some of the gaps in official statistics where these persist.



“HUMAN RIGHTS BASED APPROACH IN BELARUS, MOLDOVA AND UKRAINE: REGIONAL STUDY AND PRACTICAL GUIDANCE ON THE APPLICATION OF HRBA BY CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS”

PRESENTATION
OF THE STUDY AND PANEL
DISCUSSION REFLECTIONS
10:00 – 11:30

Presenter:

Cornelia Rauchberger,
Fresno, the Right Link, *Spain*

Discussants:

Olesea Tabarcea,
University Legal Clinic, *Moldova*

Aleh Gulak, Belarus Helsinki
Committee, *Belarus*

Ruslana Burova,
“MART” CSO, *Ukraine*

Moderator:

Olena Ursu,
United Nations Development
Programme, *Ukraine*

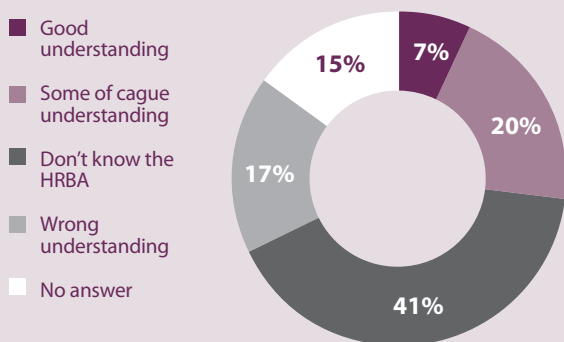
Main highlights of the study and compilation of practical tools on HRBA, “The Human Rights-Based Approach in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine” (full text in English: <https://goo.gl/q7uxUO>, Ukrainian <https://goo.gl/n7Zb5x> and Russian <https://goo.gl/UuwizT>) were presented before the deliberations at the panel. The main issues that were highlighted in the presentation – including core data highlights, comparisons and recommendations may be found here: <https://goo.gl/GoqkcQ>.

- In terms of HRBA, those organizations and individuals who really know the approach in theory and in practice, do not speak out about it widely. In parallel, certain organizations that think that they know the approach are in fact mistaken and literally unaware of their ignorance.
- HRBA is, or at least should lie in, assessing the issues that you want to tackle from the perspective of human rights, implementing your activities with due awareness of and regard to human rights standards and deeper, underlying human rights causes, and being reflexive of human rights issues in your own operations (meaning the internal aspect of organizational setup and behaviour). This degree of HRBA application is not observed anywhere in the civic sector.
- One of the reasons behind the much less than universal application of the approach is the ambiguity around the motivation for application of the approach. In other words, is it only the right thing to do or is it maybe also the smart approach to utilize? And if the second one is true, then what do these smarts lie in? One can, of course, apply the approach out of the “sheer love of art” but it is highly unlikely that it will work. Instead, real examples of how the approach increased effectiveness of operations need to be gathered, distilled and widely shared. Some of the examples widely circulated are out there, but they mostly deal with situations of extreme poverty or deprivation. Once demonstrated to the three country contexts, the usual response is “we are not in that situation, this is a very different setting – show us something applicable, something local, a story to relate to”.
- One of the reasons why HRBA is not applied by the civil society organizations widely may be attributed by the donor factor. Thus, the donors demanding wide HRBA application with their non-governmental partners oftentimes are lacking the same principles in their activities – starting from the very programme / activity architectures that they apply to request HRBA from the CSOs. Rather, the HRBA language may be present in donor documents, statements and overall discourse. At the same time, the operational, lower level of implementation may not fully align with the HRBA practices. Without reciprocity in HRBA application, chances of truly integrating the approach into everyday practices of the CSO counterparts will be elusive.

- The HRBA application in the internal operations of an organization may be a good starting point: by conducting an unbiased review of how the work is being done, where internal challenges lie and where changes may be necessary. Such activities have already been stimulated by a series of trainings on HRBA ran by Ukrainian CSO-leaders in the regions (so-called regional hubs). The handbook used throughout the trainings may be viewed and downloaded here (in Ukrainian): <https://goo.gl/QysP76>
- Finally, it is important to understand that the ways and approaches in the realm of HRBA should not be limited only to one “prescribed” framework. Instead, the approach is to be popularized in a flexible manner, adaptable to the real-time needs of organizations and cannot be treated as a universal tool to solve all issues. Instead, the approach could be seen as a toolbox that is open and constantly accumulates new ways, instruments and techniques – rather than being the “one-size-fit-all” framework.



Levels of understanding of the HRBA aggregate for three countries



Overall conclusions:

- Big potential scope of applying HRBA in the three countries
- Low levels of real understanding of HRBA: most CSOs do not know how to apply the approach
- Applying HRBA as a mainstreaming tool (with internal adherence to HRBA principles): has most potential for effective HRBA implementation by CSOs in the region
- Underlying social norms hamper a full integration of HRBA principles into some CSOs and distort the focus of situation analysis of most CSOs



HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISM CONFERENCE

КОНФЕРЕНЦИЯ ПО ВОПРОСАМ
ПРАВОЗАЩИТНОЙ ДЕЯТЕЛЬНОСТИ

16-17 March 2017, Vilnius

16-17 март 2017, Вильнюс





“SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES IN APPLYING HRBA BY THE CIVIL SOCIETY”

EXPERIENCE OF BELARUS
11:30 – 13:00

Moderator:
Vasili Kukharchyk,
Pact Inc., *Belarus*

- The first achievement for many of the organizations is the simple fact that they learned about the tool, have assessed its applicability to the work they do and have tried out some of its elements. On the other hand, the civil society has had very limited opportunities to find out about this approach and to learn its intricacies. It is only in the last half-year that the information about the tool started spreading, and there seem to be still no comprehensive strategies on integrating the tool into everyday practices of CSO operations.
- On the other hand, one may definitely say that separate elements of the approach are in place and some of them very much integrated into CSO work, while comprehensively it is not yet common practice. At the same time, some of the practices prevalent at this point of time are seen as wrong – for instance the unnatural separation of gender mainstreaming and HRBA – as it is perceived that HRBA covers everything (including gender equality and non-discrimination).
- Some of the examples where HRBA elements were integrated into organizational operations include principles of internal organizational democracy (when each person is given the opportunity to serve as a leader for some time), development of a gender policy after consulting the needs of the target groups, adapting the website to the needs of persons with visual impairments, introducing an internal checklist of issues to be verified before an event.
- In terms of the HRBA foundational principle of transparency and accountability, the organizations would have to strive for producing reports each year. While it may not be possible to publish all of the work being done (including for reasons of physical security), a way should be found to still make the exercise meaningful – despite the fact that much work is also done without much publicity (such as negotiations or lobbying).
- Internal democratic principles of rotation in organizational leadership (refraining from one-person unelected or unchanged leadership) bring benefits to the organization. When you start implementing HRBA, the “painfulness” of power transition is mitigated a lot. When plans are adopted, they are adopted not single-handedly but by the group. Many organizations work with multiple target groups and rotation in leadership brings about opportunities for attracting new groups into work.
- At the same time, the application of the approach harbours some challenges. First and foremost, one needs a good explanation of how HRBA can work. Secondly, the very term “human rights” may not have the necessary positive connotations. It could be important to “sell” this to others with minimum negative emotion. The whole

arsenal has to be put into action for the organizations to start practicing the approach (regardless of the name per se) – persuasion, explanation, nudging and even coercion. The main thing is for them to start using it.

- The core recommendations in this respect are that the donor organizations that propagate the use of the approach have to start using it themselves. There is also a pressing need for having special programmes / learning modules for promotion of HRBA and a mechanism to track effectiveness of its application. Many CSO spheres do not have experienced leaders / experts who would be able to push the approach through – training and nurturing is key in this respect. Introduction of HRBA also has to be spread to the state entities. Finally, it is important to set up and maintain a regular dialogue platform on HRBA application and dissemination.



“SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES IN APPLYING HRBA BY THE CIVIL SOCIETY”

EXPERIENCE OF UKRAINE
11:30 – 13:00

Moderator:

Olena Ursu,
United Nations Development
Programme, *Ukraine*

- There has to be a differentiated approach to those organizations and activists who had benefitted from HRBA training, and those who had not. With those who had had this exposure, it is worthwhile organizing multi-stakeholder learning events: beyond civic activists or organizational functionaries, one would have to include newly-elected members of the community councils, public officials and other stakeholders – to discuss how they would cooperate keeping in mind the context of decentralization. It is also important to run such events jointly for duty-bearers and rights-holders and throughout the event they could produce micro-projects with potential seed funding for their implementation. Attention would be best allocated to the sub-national level (at least in the Ukrainian context of the ongoing decentralisation reform).
- In dealing with those who had not had the experience of working on HRBA, it is important to empower the existing platforms to offer them HRBA exposure (such platforms as Civic Space, GURT, Ukrainian Peace-building School, All-Ukrainian Programme Understanding Human Rights). It would be nice to design an HRBA module guideline (akin to the one on anti-discrimination) – in order to run a self-check to determine whether you already are implementing this approach. In addition to this, it is important to educate journalists on human rights issues and include them into the journalist network on human rights.
- Alongside these considerations, one would have to note the difficulties that persist in the sector. Thus, the in-flow of new individuals wanting to join the human rights defence movement is drying up. There also is lack of a full-fledged programme that would make it its purpose – to bring a new person into the community. It would therefore be important to design a multi-stage system to involve new people into the human rights defence: such as a series of workshops or introductory courses. This would be an opportunity for the organizations that work with volunteers.
- An interesting practice is the network of defenders of the right to access to information. This is a low-investment instrument and a self-sustaining one, including the Facebook group and the listserv. There usually is one meeting per year to renew the contact and to “put a face to the name”. This annual event is usually prepared very well with interesting content to feed the work of the network.
- With regards to decision-makers, it is important to keep them in the loop, conduct closed meetings and negotiations and increase their awareness through study-visits and experience exchange.
- Learning for the journalist community (and not only for it) would have to talk about multiple issues (minority rights, discrimination, stereotypes) but in a very plain language and with simple, life examples rather than theoretical considerations.
- The cross-roads with formal education, on the other hand, gives an opportunity to introduce human rights lessons into the existing school system.



“SUCCESSSES AND CHALLENGES IN APPLYING HRBA BY THE CIVIL SOCIETY”

EXPERIENCE OF MOLDOVA
11:30 – 13:00

Moderator:

Mariana Buruiana,
East Europe Foundation,
Moldova

- With regards to the ways of promoting HRBA, there are several important considerations that have to be taken into account. First and foremost, there is need to first reach and then promote a unified understanding of HRBA – so that the unified terminology and shared understanding can facilitate joint work.
- The earlier suggestion to gather stories and examples of HRBA application (to bring these stories closer to the context) may be strengthened by launching a digital platform for the region to share examples, best practices and tools on the approach. Tools for the CSOs to inspect their internal documentation as it aligns with HRBA principles would also be a beneficial addition to this platform.
- Another tool to promote awareness of human rights principles and values would be to develop a Code of Conduct or other symbolic document, a pact or agreement of sorts, including both the CSO community and the government. This could also facilitate the understanding and implementation of HRBA by the duty-bearers.
- Either existing civic oversight bodies or new ones have to be put in place so as to oversee the inclusion and practical application of the human rights principles in the process of policy implementation by state actors. Coalitions and CSO platforms may be an effective way of influencing the state stakeholders in this way (as coalition members enter the oversight and consultative bodies). The whole arsenal of consultative methods – such as hearings, consultations, commenting platforms – should be utilized in this respect.
- There should be clear and understandable examples for the citizens to claim their rights “by analogy” (following the steps that were undertaken in a sample situation). In order to let the rights-holders know about such examples or even about the fact that a certain situation is a violation of their right, extensive public awareness campaigns need to be launched nation-wide. In turn, the CSOs that espouse the HRBA principles should do what they can, i.e. consult their beneficiaries enlighten them, frame their experiences in the HRBA terms and – based on the feedback received – shape their advocacy priorities.



“CIVIL SOCIETY FOR ENHANCED DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE REGION: WAY FORWARD”

SUMMARY
OF THE SESSIONS AND
CONCLUDING REMARKS
14:00 – 15:00

Moderator:

Maksym Klyuchar,
United Nations Development
Programme, *Ukraine*

The closing remarks of the forum were organized as an offer to the participants to think of what they would do, upon completion of the conference, at three levels of action: “for themselves”, “for the organization”, as well as “for the country-level or wider community”. The proposals and symbolic “resolutions” of the participants included a variety of themes and committed actions. Amongst them were:

- contributing to the development of a common guide / manual / handbook / compilation of checklists or seeking out an existing one – so that one could rely on the previous experience in implementing HRBA;
- improving the existing feedback mechanism with organization’s beneficiaries;
- working at the national level to strengthen the ability of organizations to come together and promote HRBA instruments together;
- looking into translating the existing practical learning materials (as the one newly developed in Ukraine for instance) into other languages (including Russian);
- offering my own organization and other organizations to look deeper into internal procedures to check them against HRBA principles;
- offering offices of international organizations working in the countries to exchange information about HRBA integration strategies and helping the civil society take up the approach;
- investing more effort into creation of a network and developing a strategy for the network to develop and thrive;
- practicing better self-reflection, as many organizations may implement some of the discussed approaches without knowing that they are doing it;
- seeking out platforms that will continue uniting the human rights communities in Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine to continue exchanging information, stories, approaches and lessons learned.





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United Nations Development Programme in Ukraine

1 Klovsy Uzviz, Kyiv, Ukraine

Tel.: +380 44 253 9363

Fax: +380 44 253 2607

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