

# REALLY USEFUL KNOWLEDGE

FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF WORK  
OF HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS



**A11\***  
initiative for  
economic and  
social rights

Belgrade, 2019.

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# IMPRESUM

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## DESIGN AND PREPRESS

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## PRINT RUN

300

## PRINT

New Image, Beograd

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The document was produced within the project "Operationalisation of Human Rights - from policy to local level" which A 11 - Initiative for Economic and Social Rights implemented with support of British Embassy in Belgrade.

The views expressed herein are those of the A 11 - Initiative for Economic and Social Rights and do not necessarily reflect the views of the British Embassy.

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# INTRODUCTION

This publication is primarily aimed at activists and all those engaged in the protection of human rights through the work in non-governmental organizations, local initiatives and other activist groups. The goal of the publication "Really Useful Knowledge for the Improvement of Work of Human Rights Organizations" is to offer new ideas for thinking about the improvement of work of human rights organizations and to present fresh views on advocating for the promotion or protection of human rights, empowerment of individuals and communities that demand better protection of their human rights, as well as monitoring of the implementation of the state obligations in regard to respect for international treaties that guarantee human rights.

Having in mind that improvement of the situation in the field of human rights, both in Serbia and in the world, is closely related to the work of civil society organizations, the speed of adapting to changes occurring around us and innovative approaches in work, we want to open up the space for discussion about the improvement of our joint work and exchange of ideas on examples of successful struggles for the realization of human rights. The examples in this publication point to some of universal tendencies in the work of civil society organizations in the field of advocacy and empowerment of individuals and communities for better protection of human rights, as well as to monitoring of the implementation of state obligations stemming from ratified international treaties related to protection of human rights. Finally, due to their universality, the examples given in this publication can be interesting to different organizations, regardless of the area in which they operate.

## SPEED AND INTENSITY OF CHANGES

Over the past few decades, we have been living in the time of constant changes. Their speed and intensity are growing exponentially and elusively. The circumstances in the world are changing drastically for better and for worse, and the fight for respect and implementation of human rights should keep pace with them.

Good news bring a myriad of new challenges. Humankind certainly has never been more educated and connected, but poverty and inequality are still grinding down the vulnerable and unprotected. Inequality among developed and stable nations on one hand and poor on the other is growing, while the number of forgotten and vulnerable people within the countries, either developed or not, is getting higher.

Cities are growing and by 2050 two-thirds of the world's population will be living in them, while migrations are becoming more intense. The world is getting warmer and natural resources are depleting. Democracy and civic society are before the judge of time and there are more and more currents which do not see them as an adequate model which provides safety and well-being.

Protection of human rights must keep up with these changes, particularly because the number of those interested in investing in them seems to be decreasing. The WJP 2018 Rule of Law Index indicates that respect for basic human rights and freedoms has decreased in almost two thirds of 113 countries included in the research, and the number of authoritarian regimes and the degree of non-respect of international obligations is on the rise.



## CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society often seems to be changing slower than other social actors. The complexity of the application of human rights prevents civil society organizations, especially local (grassroots) CSOs, to look more ahead. Limited resources prevent long-term strategic planning, which makes many changes and innovations that would otherwise contribute to their efficiency, go unnoticed, or at best end up in a “drawer for later”.

But the world, as well as Serbia, is full of examples that prove the opposite. There are a plenty of organizations and individuals going ahead of time, risking and seeking new perspectives. From slight changes in how we will measure the success of a project, how we will hear and appreciate the opinion of citizens, to our attempt to transform the cities into a living driver of human rights.

Civil society organizations in Serbia have been operating for decades in circumstances of partial or no state and social support for protection of human rights. Human rights are high on the agenda only at rare moments. This makes CSOs work constantly under a great pressure of uncertainty, without a possibility to strategically plan ahead and constantly choose battles.

On the other hand, CSOs in Serbia have a long and rich tradition, as well as immense experience gained in turbulent time. Their creativity and entrepreneurship are most often impressive.

From how they plan, implement and advocate for a change, these organizations are always at the forefront of the struggle for exercise of human rights.

## NEW TRENDS

Activities of civil society organization most often belong to some of these three categories: advocacy, monitoring and community empowerment. We are unceasingly looking for new ways in which changes we believe in are accepted by a larger number of people, upheld by a greater number of citizens, supported by decision makers, and in which we inspire and motivate people to take an action. In addition, there is a constant need for an objective observation of the results of work and evaluation of activities, in order to know how to change them, but also to constantly check, assess and influence the activities of everyone participating in the exercise of human rights. Finally, the goal is always that citizens remain empowered to fight for their rights continuously and be able to see the problem and seek a solution.

The examples given in this publication show some of the new universal tendencies in advocacy, empowerment and monitoring, and can be interesting to organizations regardless of the area in which they operate.

Lately, these activities are permeated by several trends: return to a broad human rights-based approach and participation, use of new technologies, and unstoppable urbanization that also affects the realization of human rights.

These changes opens up the possibility, but also an obligation, to understand the new initiatives and explore their potentials in Serbia.

# HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED PRINCIPLE AND PARTICIPATION

**THE FOCUS IS NOT ON THE NEEDS OF CITIZENS, BUT ON THE DUTIES OF THE STATES, AND THEREFORE THE GOAL IS TO EMPOWER CITIZENS TO BE EQUAL AND STRONG INTERLOCUTORS.**

One of the greatest challenges in the work of civil society organizations is how to see a bigger picture outside daily duties and projects tasks. The organizations, which daily testify to the problems and challenges faced by the most vulnerable citizens, sometimes rightfully have a feeling that seeing a bigger picture means losing energy that could otherwise be aimed at direct assistance and change. However, approaching every problem with understanding of the universality and breadth of human rights is the only way for standards and principles to become an integral part of policy-making and decision-making process focused on human dignity and rule of law.

Human rights-based approach is an approach based on which the established international obligations are used as the basis for policy-making and implementation of law. This approach is based on the fact that international human rights standards have created an obligation and duty of states to respect, improve and protect them in all segments of their activities. The focus is not on the needs of citizens, but on the duties of the states, and therefore the goal is to empower citizens to be equal and strong interlocutors. Citizens are not left to the good will of the state to respect their rights, but the state has the responsibility to implement all standards assumed by international obligations. Even though at first glance it could seem unnecessary to make difference, it turned out that this approach creates a narrative where it is possible to make sustainable changes. In essence, a human rights-based approach seeks to include

human rights standards such as accountability and transparency, legitimacy, empowerment, participation, equality and non-discrimination into all plans, policies and decision-making procedures.

Seeing a bigger picture is inextricably linked to targeted and detailed analysis of attitudes and opinions of citizens at whom the activities are directed. A feedback is the most adequate measure of the project performance and the manner to ensure its effectiveness. Without it, it is difficult to determine the best way of acting.

The role of civil society organizations, regardless of the area they deal with, their target group or activity, should include education and empowerment of citizens to participate in decision-making process that affects their rights. Spreading the idea about uncompromised respect for human rights, pointing out that human rights culture is the irreplaceable attribute of each advanced society and the fact that a thread of each project should be to empower the citizens to familiarize and use human rights, lead towards accountability of institutions whose obligations is to ensure respect, protection and realization of human rights.

In that regard, the participation of citizens in the creation of activities carried out by civil society organizations is particularly important. It is equally important to include citizens in the creation of an idea, to analyze their attitudes and opinions during the project implementation, as well as to consider their assessment of the final results of the project. Reasons for participation are numerous, but two undoubtedly indicate the extent to which it is impossible to implement projects that bring change without the participation of citizens. First, considering a problem without the participation is at great risk of inaccuracy and incompleteness, and second, participation ensures trust in the outcome of the project, in good will and sincerity of those who implement the project. Besides leading to useful results, a serious approach to the participation of citizens also empowers them to permanently and sustainably represent their interests.

*One of the organizations which fully creates its activities based on the participation of citizens is PPR (Participation and the Practice of Rights) from Belfast. This organization is recognized as a global leader in the approach that is fully focused on education and empowerment of citizens*

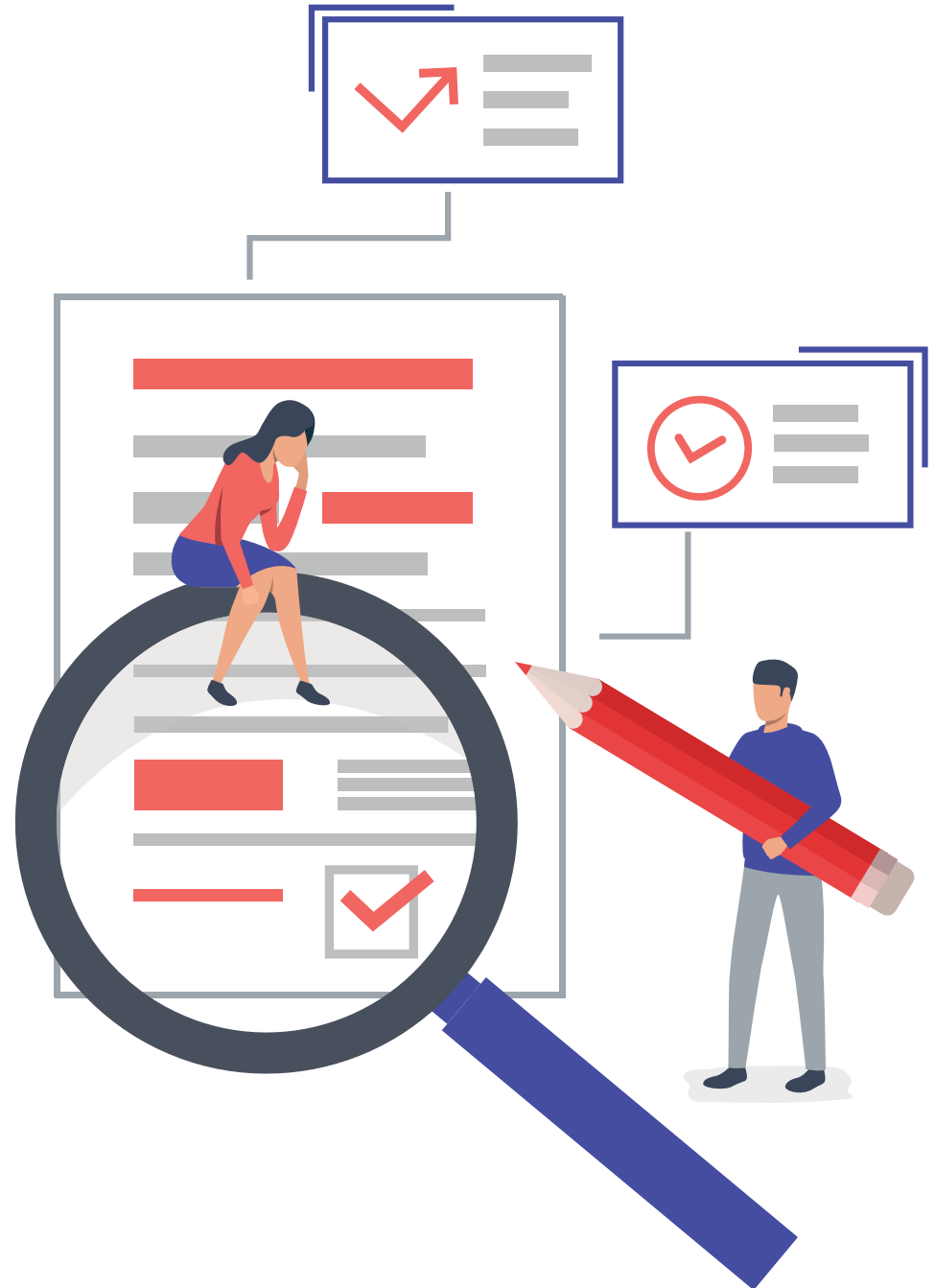
to use human rights in the struggle for the improvement of their daily life. From the right to housing, the right to access to education, health services, their vision is that people living in vulnerable communities already have valuable knowledge about the problems they are facing and ideas how to solve them. The goal of PPR is to shape the experience and knowledge so that citizens alone can equally participate in decision-making process, in which they are usually discredited and marginalized. One of their key projects is the participation of community representatives in the creation of criteria for assessing the progress in the improvement of economic and social rights. Through research, collection of evidence in the field, focus groups, access to information of public importance, citizens participate in the assessment of a problem, seeking of a solution and dissemination of information. Indicators they create are tasked to provide answers to two questions:

- are the authorities working progressively and continuously to improve the realisation of human rights,
- does the community feel the improvement in the field.

What makes their projects unique is that they create and assess them so that they are simply not completed before a change occurs in the field, and indicators help them track the changes precisely and in real time, so that they can easily correct the activities.

In 2012, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights recognized their approach as the best example of practice which allows communities to demand and realize their rights. (<https://www.pprproject.org>)

A possibility to hear the opinion of the project users is the key step in building trust. Without inclusion in a dialogue and exchanging the opinion, it is impossible to empower those at whom the activities are directed. In that way, human rights standards and principles become an integral part of policy-making and decision-making process that are focused on human dignity.





# RAPID URBANIZATION

**ON THE OTHER HAND, A LARGE NUMBER OF CITIES MANAGE TO REMAIN THE BASE OF UNIVERSAL VALUES OF RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE TIME WHEN MANY GOVERNMENTS TURN RIGHT. THE CITIES, WHICH MANAGE TO MAINTAIN THE POLICY OF SOCIAL EQUALITY AND INCLUSION AND THROUGH THEIR ACTIVITIES GIVE AN EXAMPLE THAT IT IS A POSSIBLE AND ACHIEVABLE WAY, ARE NOT RARE.**

Rapid urbanization has led to a new phenomenon – the empowerment and repositioning of cities, not only as local self-governments, but also as entities the citizens feel the strongest connection with. On one hand, those are places which they feel like their homes, in which development they want to participate, but on the other, those are organizations they expect incentive, help and protection from. Life happens in cities and local communities. Social, political and economic issues emerge at the local level, policies are turned into concrete actions and rights are realized. The specific position of cities enables efficient dealing with both local and global issues, and therefore cities become the centre of activities of civil society organizations. On the other hand, cities are expanding at the rate which even the most efficient local self-governments cannot follow. Following such development requires planning and action, for which in most cases there is a lack of capacity.

Migrations towards cities are caused by various reasons such as economic reasons, wars, natural disasters caused by climate changes and other. Therefore, cities expand completely unprepared to offer a minimum standard of living to people coming to them. On the other hand, a large number of cities manage to remain the base of universal values of

respect for human rights at the time when many governments are turning right. The cities, which manage to maintain the policy of social equality and inclusion and through their activities give an example that it is a possible and achievable way, are not rare.

An increasingly deeper social gap requires synchronized work and advocating at a global level. Advocating in this, as in most cases, makes sense only if it is preceded by a serious consultation with local communities. In that way, it is possible to set priorities, include decision-makers, business and investors in order to move away from construction that threads over human rights and puts business ahead of human rights and sustainable development.



## NEW TECHNOLOGIES

**NO MATTER HOW LARGE, ORGANIZATIONS HAVE A HABIT OF USING AND ADJUSTING EASILY AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGIES, AND THEREFORE THERE ARE A FEW TECHNOLOGIES DEVELOPED SPECIALLY FOR THE NEEDS OF THE REALIZATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS.**

Technology in the human rights contexts has not been discussed only in terms of protection of data and right to privacy since long time ago - technology has become crucial in documenting, reporting and monitoring of human rights violation. For instance, processing of big data enables to map trends and patterns and to consider the effects of policies and responsibility of actors.

Nowadays, civil society organizations primarily rely on widely accepted technologies: in communication on WhatsApp and Telegram, in promotion of idea on WordPress or Drupal; on Dropbox or Google Drive for data storage and on Skype and Zoom for meetings and interviews.

Civil society organizations most often work under huge time and financial pressure, and therefore their approach to use of technologies reflects this. No matter how large, organizations have a habit of using and adjusting easily available technologies, and therefore there are a few developed specially for the needs of the realization of human rights. Some of those software solutions are directed mainly at information management and communication. For instance, the project **OpenEvsys** (<https://openevsys.org/>) has been created to document human rights violations, and a mobile application created by **Guardian Project** protects privacy in e-communication (<https://guardianproject.info/>).

Several trends are dominant in an incredible expansion in technology: development and use of artificial intelligence, automation, and the impact “gig economy” has on the future of work.

Artificial intelligence and automation have the same potential to build a more righteous society of equal opportunities and to be the cause of mass unemployment and inequality of unprecedented proportions. That is why it is necessary to put human rights at the centre of technology development - they should remain a border in interweaving of people and technology, but also a tool actively and inventively used by human rights activists.

Artificial intelligence significantly extends the availability and quality of data based on which we make decisions. It already opens up new possibilities, increases efficiency and human potential. At the same time, rapid development in the field of artificial intelligence rises up many questions about the impact on humanity. There is a real risk that by increasing the productivity these changes lead to the increase of inequality.

*One of examples illustrating the possibility of artificial intelligence is the project of the University of Sheffield and the University of Pennsylvania, which used artificial intelligence to develop a method that predicts decisions of the European Court of Human Rights. The research team identified 584 cases relating to Articles 3, 6 and 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights and created an algorithm to find patterns in the text. By applying this algorithm, the team managed to anticipate the outcome of the decision with an accuracy of 79%. The project proved that artificial intelligence can be used to anticipate court decisions, which potentially can have a dramatic impact on success and efficiency of human rights trials.<sup>1</sup>*

Development of technology enabled expansion of the “gig economy”, which influenced the change in the nature of work. The availability of flexible positions created opportunities for some people, and on the other hand it negatively affected the life of others. New business models created new work relationships which do not fit into traditional frameworks. For instance, it became common that jobs identical or very similar to

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<sup>1</sup> For more information see: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/news/nr/artificial-intelligence-predicts-outcomes-human-rights-trials-study-1.656915>

those done by permanent employees are masked as “self-employment” or “free jobs”, so that the negotiation rights or the right to association would remain inaccessible to people hired in that way.

Lately, the application of blockchains in the protection of human rights has become increasingly certain. The blockchain can be, for instance, used to confirm that a video, photo or another digital document was real at a certain moment. That “confirmation” can enlarge the probative burden of digital documents, such as videos or photos of human rights violations which can appear on social networks. *Video Vault project, which enables the storage of digital resources of any kind for later usage, pre-empts the blockchain technology. Video Vault makes it easy to verify the digital records by providing the exact time stamp to online content. Data collected by individuals or organizations can be “authenticated” in this way and added to blockchain in order to create a public record which enables the verification of media containing the evidence on human rights violation.*<sup>2</sup>

Human rights organizations should not retreat from this arena but explore what they can do so that technological advancement can be useful to all people and not deepen the inequality of those already marginalized.

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<sup>2</sup> For more information see: <https://www.bravenewtech.org/join.php>

## HOW CAN THAT LOOK IN PRACTICE?

It is interesting to observe how human rights-based approach, participation, new technologies and urbanization inspire changes worldwide. The following examples illustrate the impact which these trends lately have on empowerment, advocacy and monitoring that are important for the realization of human rights.

### **URBANIZATION AND REPOSITIONING OF CITIES IN THE REALIZATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS**

#### ***Human Rights Cities***

An example of flexibility and adaptability to individual and collective needs in new circumstances is the global project *Human Rights Cities*<sup>3</sup>. This project promotes a culture of human rights and provides an opportunity to tackle specific local and regional challenges.

**HUMAN RIGHTS CANNOT ONLY FALL FROM THE GLOBAL POLITICAL SYSTEM, AND CANNOT BE REALIZED AS LONG AS THEY ARE NOT FULLY ACCEPTED AT THE LOCAL LEVEL. A COMMUNITY THAT TRULY FOSTERS A CULTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS MUST FULLY BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE CRUCIAL FOR EVERYDAY LIFE.**

Implementation and adaptation of human rights standards to the local level is the best way to create better public policies and empower

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<sup>3</sup> For more information see: <https://humanrightscities.net/>

individuals. Inclusion, sustainability, gender equality, environment, accessibility, good governance – local level is the best place for these issues to meet. Human Rights Cities use a strategic position at the local level to address such issues.

Spreading the movement Human Rights Cities motivates local and regional authorities to respect human rights standards in their internal operations and interaction with citizens. However, the project itself recognizes that actors and mechanisms for transformation of local culture of human rights are different for each city and region. Thus, for instance, a human rights city in Sweden will adopt local priorities and approach that differ from the human rights city in Austria or the Netherlands, or in Serbia one day.

The established human rights concept is flexible enough to adapt to these differences. Both the community and an individual are at the centre of this idea, and the community takes an active part in empowering the citizens to understand and demand their rights, and to participate in decisions that affect them. The goal is to integrate human rights in all city policies and practices, and maybe the most importantly to keep the constant momentum of the implementation of human rights. This is, of course, an attempt to respond to one of the greatest challenges in the implementation of human rights projects: constant project planning. The idea behind Human Rights Cities is that human rights are always present as a whole, as a permeating thread of all activities and plans implemented at the local level.

Being aware of such approach, the cities worldwide have started to take steps to become human rights cities. So far, those are York in Great Britain, Eugene in United States of America, Jakarta in Indonesia, Barcelona in Spain, Rosario in Argentina, Gangneung in South Korea and Lund in Sweden.

### **York – reaching the goal by advocating**

York became the first human rights city in Great Britain in 2017. The organization York: *Human Right City*<sup>4</sup> became a catalyst for activities and

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<sup>4</sup> For more information see: <https://www.yorkhumanrights.org/>

ideas relating to protection of human rights, including the empowerment of civil society organizations, researchers and scientists, and connection of business and individuals who want to engage in development of human rights in York. The citizens also continuously participated in the development of York as a human rights city and chose five priority areas: education, housing, adequate standard of living, equality and non-discrimination.

One of the activities under this initiative is the project *The Community Voices* aimed at including the citizens who are the most difficult to reach, the marginalized citizens who very rarely have an opportunity to talk about their priorities and problems. The idea is to achieve the inclusion of the most marginalized citizens in York in three ways: first, by working with the homeless and social welfare beneficiaries, then with people who live and work in previously neglected settlements, and through regular meetings with the whole community, when topics that are common concern of a wide range of people and organizations are opened up.

This example shows the exceptional importance of the advocacy process, which in the case of York lasted for six years. It turned out that the presence of consensus on the importance of the project among decision-makers and highly ranked city officials and full support to the project by local political parties were of irreplaceable importance for the sustainability and integrity of the project. One of the results of advocacy and cooperation between city authorities and civil society organizations is the establishment of a group that will implement financial inclusion on behalf of the city and manage the fund for financing the crisis loans and initiatives for inclusion. The group is supposed to help citizens to manage their personal finances, including long-term planning and responsible borrowing.

Even though it is too early to talk about the results of this project, the precision by which the possible challenges and plans for their overcoming were defined indicates that the project has the opportunity to become a sustainable example of good practice. The motto that a human rights city is not the goal itself but a station on the long road illustrates that one should not run away from the complexity of challenges but analyze it. Human rights cannot only overflow from the global political system, and cannot be realized as long as they are not fully accepted at the local

level. A community that truly fosters a culture of human rights must fully believe that they are crucial for everyday life.

### ***The City of Islington – creating a narrative in which advocacy for equality is the main topic***

**THE GOAL OF THE COMMISSION IS TO MAKE ISLINGTON A MORE RIGHTEOUS PLACE FOR LIVING THROUGH REDUCTION OF POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN THE AREAS THAT ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO CITIZENS AND THOSE ARE: INEQUALITY OF INCOME, AVAILABILITY OF JOBS, SUPPORT TO FAMILIES, INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY, SAFETY, THE RIGHT TO HOUSING AND HEALTH.**

Although it seems prosperous at first sight, the City of Islington is the 24th poorest self-government in England. In cooperation with civil society, the city administration recognized a dialogue about the reduction of poverty and inequality as the key element in building the social and economic equality and human rights culture. Public opinion research showed that a dialogue at the local level is one of primary expectations of citizens, and according to the employees the role of city administration in the protection of economic and social rights is one of primary reasons why they choose to work there.

Therefore, in 2010 Islington established the first Fairness Commission in Great Britain<sup>5</sup> and thus created a framework for addressing social inequality at the local level and motivation to go above and beyond legal obligations. The goal of the Commission is to make Islington a more righteous place for living through reduction of poverty and inequality in the areas that are most important to citizens and those are: inequality of income, availability of jobs, support to families, inclusive community, safety, the right to housing and health.

The key part of the Commission's work is regular meetings with citizens, which are held at different places such as schools, municipal halls and

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<sup>5</sup> For more information see: <https://www.islington.gov.uk/about-the-council/vision-and-priorities/fairness-commission>

companies. The goal is to enable all groups of citizens to take part in a dialogue without much effort and renunciation. After each meeting, the Commission publishes a brief report in local newspapers in order to present conclusions, but also to inspire the citizens to engage in this process in a large number. During the first year, more than 500 citizens attended the meetings many of whom came for several times and remained involved in the local policy.

The Commission also had a great role in the creation of the city housing policy in Islington, which led to the adoption of the Islington Council Housing Strategy 2014—2019. The Strategy allowed the identification of empty apartments and their reuse. In the period from 2010 to 2013, the use of 300 empty apartments was enabled, and in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, the city continues to explore how to prevent the accumulation of real estates aimed at influencing the market.

### ***Project Newcastle City Council – decision-making with understanding socio-economic inequality***

**BUDGET ANALYSIS IS A SERIOUS MEANS OF FIGHTING BECAUSE IT OPENS UP A POSSIBILITY TO DEBATE ABOUT INCOMES, ALLOCATION AND COSTS WHICH AFFECT HUMAN RIGHTS, PARTICULARLY ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS.**

One of the most common arguments of states why it is impossible to implement the obligation to respect human rights to a greater extent is an excuse that there are not enough resources. However, in spite of that the budget analysis is still an insufficiently used method among civil society organizations. Even though the budget analysis would enable a debate about the essence of social order, economics, priorities and, nothing less important, values, civil society organizations still hesitate to make steps in that direction. Data received by the budget analysis provide researchers the information on state policies and plans and an opportunity to propose alternatives. Budget analysis is a serious means of fighting because it opens up a possibility to debate about incomes, allocation and costs which affect human rights, particularly economic and social rights.

Project **Newcastle City Council**<sup>6</sup> is aimed at enabling the adoption of budget decisions with understanding the attitudes and needs of the vulnerable citizens of the city. All budget proposals are assessed by the Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) which takes into account the local strategic needs assessment, quantitative data on the community, as well as qualitative data, more precise results of consultations and dialogues with those who are potentially affected by changes. All budget proposals are published before and after the consultations in order to ensure that decisions are based on the understanding of their impact on citizens and development of the city, and especially with an aim to see what effect they have on socially economic challenges, health and welfare of citizens and environment. In addition, the assessment of the impact on vulnerable groups is done, particularly on: homeless people, citizens living in poor parts of the city, citizens with low incomes, citizens who have potential obstacles to employment due to lower level of education, as well as foster families.

### ***Fighting Subsidy Abuse in Chicago – Downtown Prosperity, Neighbourhood Neglect***

The organization Grassroots Collaborative has been conducting a campaign against Tax increment financing (TIF) and privileged taxation of the infrastructure building and improvement projects for years. For example, in the period from 2011 to 2015, almost one half of 1.3 billion dollars intended for urban development was spent on Loop (central business district in Chicago) and similar projects. In other words, the mechanism intended for development and improvement of vulnerable and undeveloped districts was abused so that it began to cause even larger economic disparity in Chicago. The report published by the organization, *Downtown Prosperity, Neighbourhood Neglect*<sup>7</sup>, showed that while workers, most often the members of minority groups, were massively losing their jobs, the city was donating millions to corporations investing in building in the centre of the city. Companies with the

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<sup>6</sup> For more information see: [https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/wwwfileroot/your-council-and-democracy/budget-annual-report-and-spending/newcastle\\_2020\\_investing\\_in\\_a\\_fairer\\_future\\_-\\_efficiency\\_plan.pdf](https://www.newcastle.gov.uk/sites/default/files/wwwfileroot/your-council-and-democracy/budget-annual-report-and-spending/newcastle_2020_investing_in_a_fairer_future_-_efficiency_plan.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> For more information see: <http://grassrootscollaborative.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/DowntownProsperityNeighborhoodNeglect.pdf>

annual revenues exceeding 2 billion dollars received millions worth tax reliefs presenting, for instance, internal refurbishments and adaptations as an improvement of the quality of life in the city. In 2012, Grassroots Collaborative successfully made its first victory that Chicago Mercantile Exchange (CME), the world's largest bonds trading centre, returns 15 million dollars of previously received subsidies to the city. After that, this practice was continued and decisions were made to return several dozens of million dollars of subsidies.

### **HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH AND PARTICIPATION**

Human rights-based approach enables empowering citizens to know and use their rights, and to increase the ability and responsibility of individuals and institutions responsible for respect, protection and exercise of rights. This primarily implies providing citizens with a possibility to participate in creation of decisions that affect their human rights. Human rights-based approach means that human rights standards and principles should be integrated into policy making, as well as into daily management of organizations.

### ***Healthy Homes Initiative, Liverpool***

*Healthy Homes Initiative*<sup>8</sup> managed to change the image of life in rented apartments in Liverpool and to ensure better living conditions to the poorest citizens not allowing them to be left to the conditions in the real estate market. The goal of the Initiative was to reduce the number of deaths and chronic diseases caused by poor living conditions in the apartments rented by the poorest citizens. The Initiative took into account physical conditions of living, the condition of apartments and health problems of people living in them. First, there was a survey on living conditions and tenants. Then, the competent inspection urgently visited the worst ranked apartments and immediately started eliminating the identified deficiencies. The landlords were obliged to take an active part in this process with an obligation to eliminate all deficiencies

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<sup>8</sup> For more information see: <http://www.makingthelink.net/case-study/healthy-homes-liverpool>

so that apartments reach legal standard of adequate life. Throughout the programme, upon the initiative of non-governmental organizations, health workers and legal representatives of citizens, the inspection checked more than 6,000 apartments. At the same time, 4,400 hazards that needed to be urgently eliminated were also identified, and owners of apartments had to allocate more than 5 million pounds to improve the housing conditions of the poorest citizens of Liverpool.

### **Human rights-based approach as a means of fighting for the right to housing in Dublin**

**BY NEW APPROACH, THIS PROJECT MANAGED TO FULLY REDEFINE THE PROBLEM, PUTTING BAD CONDITIONS OF HOUSING INTO THE CONTEXT OF INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS AND DUTIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND. CONSEQUENTLY, IRELAND ACCEPTED THE OBLIGATION TO RESPOND TO THIS PROBLEM AT THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL LEVEL AND TO ASSUME THE OBLIGATION TO REACH ADEQUATE STANDARDS.**

After unsuccessful individual attempts to exercise their right to housing, citizens teamed up with non-governmental organizations, academic community, social and health workers in order to request a change. The methodology implied organizing frequent meetings and trainings for users of apartments, as well as introduction into the national and international standard in this area.

The core of the problem in this case was a decade-long denial of city authorities to be responsible for the living conditions in apartments. Their attitude was that citizens were responsible for the low standard in apartments and that responsibility and obligation were solely individual.

By new approach, this project managed to fully redefine the problem, putting bad conditions of housing into the context of international obligations and duties of the Republic of Ireland. Consequently, Ireland accepted the obligation to respond to this problem at the national and local level and to assume the obligation to reach adequate standards.

The success of this project was in simplicity, clarity and accessibility of the human rights-based approach of citizens, as well as in the comparative development of the community. This approach created a framework which citizens understand and support, and which corresponds with the language and approach of state authorities.

This was the first project which successfully demonstrated that the right to housing is not just an unclear value that cannot be precisely formulated and quantified. Universal human rights principles relating to transparency, responsibility, impartiality, participation, empowerment and non-discrimination were means to achieve changes. The project was accepted in public as an example of long-term result because a group of tenants and social workers were empowered to continue reviewing and criticizing the work of state authorities in the future, not only in relation to the housing right but also in relation to the realization of other guaranteed rights. The cooperation with different actors gave legitimacy to the project, which led to the support of the widest public to the issue that initially looked like a small local issue without an interest for society as a whole.

### **Project of the organization *Just Fair* - 1 For Equality**

The goal of the organization *Just Fair* is that through monitoring and representing the protection of economic and social rights contribute to Great Britain becoming a more just society. *Just Fair* is committed to familiarizing the citizens with international human rights standards and possibilities to use them and tends to improve creative and constructive thinking, training and practice in order to ensure that economic and social rights are respected, protected and fulfilled.

One of the latest campaigns of *Just Fair* shows how citizens can be influenced and motivated to get engaged in the improvement of economic and social rights and achievement of social and economic equality. #1forEquality campaign<sup>9</sup> started after the British Parliament passed the Equality Act 2010 which, among others, prescribes a "socioeconomic duty". According to the law, this duty means that the authorities are

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<sup>9</sup> For more information see: <https://1forequality.com/>



obliged to “perform their duty in a manner which contributes to the reduction of inequality resulting from socio-economic injustice”.

The main activity of this campaign is to advocate and motivate citizens to address directly their representatives with a request to support this law. The platform on which the campaign is conducted enables citizens to write directly to representatives through it (with the possibility to draft the letter on their own or to use the one proposed by Just Fair).



#### CHECK IF YOUR MP IS 1 FOREQUALITY

Click the icon above if your MP has signed EDM 591, (if you have, great! You don't need to do anything else).\*



#### WRITE TO YOUR MP

Click the icon above if your MP and ask them to support EDM 591. If you need some inspiration, feel free to use or adapt text below.



#### LET US KNOW!

If you receive a response, remember to forward it to us at [info@just-fair.co.uk](mailto:info@just-fair.co.uk) and [info@equalitytrust.org](mailto:info@equalitytrust.org) so we can keep track of them.



#### TWEET YOUR MP

You can also contact your MP on twitter, click the icon above to find their twitter profile.

A total of 78 representatives of citizens from 5 different parties and more than 70 representatives of academic community currently support the government to carry out its legal obligation.

### ***Oxfam and Unilever – Advocating for recognizing and abolishing the unpaid labour and for women empowerment***

**IT IS IMPORTANT THAT CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS UNDERSTAND THAT BUSINESSES DO NOT BRING JUST MONEY INTO THE HUMAN RIGHTS ARENA, BUT THAT THERE IS A LOT OF SPACE FOR MUTUAL LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT. TECHNICAL EXPERTISE, AS WELL AS KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION AND PROJECT MANAGEMENT CAN BE AN IMPORTANT INSPIRATION TO CIVIL SECTOR.**

Human rights-based approach also implies a constant search for allies, creation of partnership and association. One of the tasks of civil society organizations is to motivate a wider range of social actors to engage in the protection of human rights. The strength of civil society organizations is the ability to recognize the potential in actors that do not see themselves how and to which extent they can contribute. One of those actors is definitely companies, and partnerships between business and civil society organizations are getting more common. The resources which companies have today can significantly contribute to solving many challenges. It is important that civil society organizations understand that businesses do not bring just money into the human rights arena, but that there is a lot of space for mutual learning and improvement. Technical expertise, as well as knowledge about the organization and project management can be an important inspiration to civil sector. In addition, changes in international and different national legal frameworks contributed to companies becoming important experts on human rights standards and very often the bearers of change worldwide. Such partnerships are very frequent and important at the global level. The analysis of such cooperation provides all actors with know-how and tests the ideas for which others would not have resources.

One of examples of such cooperation is Oxfam and Unilever<sup>10</sup> which together advocate for the change of public policies in order to recognize and regulate home work and unpaid labour, particularly the home work of girls and women, through better access to public services, infrastructure and social protection. In addition to the change of policy, the project is also focused on the change of attitudes and behaviour of the public and promotion of common responsibility for the fate of workers. Even though the activities of such projects are disproportionately large in relation to the capabilities of other civil society organizations (for instance, only in Zimbabwe and Philippines the project directly supported 250,000 women and girls), their experiences can be significant at different levels. The impact and reach of public advocacy activities have been improved by combining the Oxfam knowledge, data and contacts in the community, with Unilever's access to resources, media and customers. At the community level, activities are carried out through schools and cultural

<sup>10</sup> For more information see: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/project-sunrise-final-report-338731>



leaders, as well as through religious groups in order to change social attitudes and encourage the change in behaviour.

## NEW TECHNOLOGIES

### ***Digital Humanitarian Network (DHN)***

The purpose of digital humanitarian network<sup>11</sup> is to connect digital volunteers with civil society organization in need of support. The idea came from a student of Tufts University Patrick Meier after a Haiti earthquake who created the unique digital map depicting the situation in the field by using the sources from media and social networks, as well as satellite images. After just a few days, he was joined by several hundred volunteers from the whole world. Soon after mobile connections were established, people started sending messages on the locations they were trapped in. Since the messages were in the local language, Digital humanitarian network connected with more than 1,000 people who lived all around the world and knew the language and who translated more than 10,000 messages on the location. Thanks to such a large number of interpreters and IT experts, 10 minutes in average passed from receiving a message to finding the location in the map.

Today, this organization continues with its work, and in addition to crisis situation it also helps in cases of deforestation and hunting in Africa. They participated in mapping the Ebola epidemic by mapping and making a detailed picture of infrastructure on the ground by using the satellite images, reports by media and humanitarians, in order to provide medical assistance everywhere.

### ***Event – based media monitoring EMM***

British non-governmental organization **Every Casualty**<sup>12</sup> deals with monitoring and reporting on the victims of armed conflicts. The mission of

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<sup>11</sup> For more information see: <http://digitalhumanitarians.com/>

<sup>12</sup> For more information see: <http://www.everycasualty.org/downloads/ec/ecppp-towards-recording-every-casualty.pdf>

this organization is that none of the civil victims of armed conflicts remains unregistered. They developed the methodology of systemic monitoring and reporting on certain events which enables them to compare media reports and check the credibility of data in them. Since media often report partially on conflicts using unverified sources, their greatest challenge is which media source to follow, which information to seek and what to do with collected information. Thus, for example, during the war in Iraq, this methodology implied receiving data primarily from media reports which were then compared with available data from hospitals, non-governmental organizations and with official statistics. All assumptions and calculations were reviewed by at least two members of the team, and each incident or death was supported by at least 18 pieces of information from different sources. Though not perfect, their computer program remained one of the most respected in this area because the use of standardized indicators for date, time, location, weapon and demographic data resulted in great precision in computing. Their publicly available program uses only verified facts and constantly updates data and records changes. During the conflict, this program identified not just a large number of victims but also their names in 9% of cases, which was a great success.

### ***Real-time monitoring – example of protection of forests in Africa***

In 2015, *Rainforest Foundation UK*, in cooperation with a partner organization in Cameroon, *Forêts et Développement Rurale (FODER)* developed and tested a new system for monitoring and protection of forests – *ForestLink*. ForestLink is an application which enables communities anywhere in the world to “capture” real-time data and<sup>13</sup> transmit precisely to authorities or other interested parties the georeferenced reports on illegal activities in forest even in the areas without mobile or Internet connection. The application is easily adapted to the needs of a community so that even people who do not know to read and write can transmit information about incidents.

Information on illegal activities can be collected by the use of a tablet or smart phone, and then only in 20 seconds it is transmitted to

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<sup>13</sup> For more information see: <https://www.rainforestfoundationuk.org/>

the online database via satellite modem. Different non-governmental organizations, local communities and government representatives can access and analyse the database. This technology has the potential to transform the management and monitoring of forests, making the location and type of reported violations visible to the widest range of interested individuals.

What particularly distinguishes the approach of this application from others is that it recognizes the connection between human rights and the environment, restoring the power to communities living in and of forests to protect them and decide on their management.

### ***The potential of alternative social networks in advocacy***

Social networks have completely changed the way social movements and non-governmental organization work. In many cases, they are the primary means of work of organizations, and without them advocacy, monitoring and empowerment of communities are impossible. Besides using common social networks, it is important to note that there are also ways of communication that fully meet the needs and which are beyond usual challenges in the use of social networks such as safety, privacy, spreading false news or manipulation.

These are some of the examples:

- Platforms such as *Groundwork* and *Hustle* recognize that sometimes the greatest strength is not in the number of people who participate in the conversation, but in a deeper relationship of people who support the idea, who are ready to participate in actions and not only to be a part of click activism;
- *FireChat* is an application primarily developed for music festivals, which enables the users to talk to each other without accessing the Internet or mobile network. This feature makes *FireChat* interesting at the time of crisis when the Internet can be interrupted and other networks unavailable. This application was widely used during *Sunflower*

*Student Movement* in Taiwan and *Umbrella Revolution* in Hong Kong. A huge drawback of this application is that it leaves an open space for potential monitoring, information is not encrypted and is stored in the phone of a person using the application;

- *FrontlineSMS* is an application which has become interesting to civil society organizations because it enables fast and easy messaging in a way to enable receiving the information, tracking the event or providing instructions on behaviour in certain situations (natural disasters, terroristic attacks, revolutions). It is particularly important that it does not require a phone with advanced technology. The application, for instance, was used after the Haiti earthquake as the victims could send urgent messages on their location or medical problems. The messages were automatically forwarded to the competent bodies and civil society organizations. In Malawi and Uganda, 1.2 million citizens use this application in order to have a better access to health protection and it can be also used to send medical records, connect with doctors or for education about reproductive health. Thus, for instance, *Georgetown University's Institute for Reproductive Health (IRH)* uses *FrontlineSMS* in the project *CycleTel* to provide women worldwide with the information about reproductive health system via SMS.

## CONCLUSION

This overview of some of the new tendencies and examples of advocacy, monitoring and empowerment should, above all, serve as a reminder of how important it is to exchange ideas and experience among civil society organizations. Despite completely different circumstances in which civil society organizations work worldwide, most of them face similar challenges that can be given a joint response.

The intensity of accelerated urbanization and migrations will be also a challenge for organizations that at first glance do not have much in common with these phenomena. Development of plans and policies will surely be marked by circumstances such as the growth of population in the environments they work, diversity of groups living there, new languages, new cultures, and probably an increasingly bigger economic and social gap.

The return to seeing a bigger picture, no matter how a project implemented by an organization seems to have a local effect, is the trend reminding us that at the time of intensive globalization, local activities are also potentially a part of a big puzzle of human rights protection.

A human rights-based approach imposes a task to implement projects by seeing a bigger picture and analyzing cause-and-effect relationships between the implementation of human rights standards, state policies and role of other participants in the process, ranging from multinational companies, through regional alliances, to global movements.

An unlimited ability to communicate and necessary speed of reaction is an opportunity for the development of technology to become a driver of the work of civil society. In order to be able to manage all changes and respond quickly and adequately, people of different profiles should participate in the work of civil society organizations. Civil society organizations have become places where artists, programmers, lawyers, political scientist, doctors and many others cooperate together. Such an outcome has enriched the human rights community and provides a potential for further improvement of the work of organizations engaged in promotion and protection of human rights.

The problems faced by civil society organizations are intensive and unpredictable, but on the other hand, the methods which organizations can use in their work have never been more diverse. Mutual cooperation, good practice analysis, and opening doors to experts from different fields will make each community of human rights organizations more agile, more efficient and more responsive to challenges. Therefore, we hope that this brief overview of experiences of civil society organizations engaged in advocacy, monitoring and empowerment of communities in the field of human rights, is a useful tool for the improvement of the work of organizations dealing with these issues in Serbia.

CIP - Каталогизација у публикацији  
Народна библиотека Србије, Београд

ДИЧИЋ, Невена, 1982-

Stvarno korisno znanje za unapređenje rada organizacija  
za zaštitu ljudskih prava : priručnik za javnu upravu / [autorka  
Nevena Dičić Kostić ; prevod Jelena Petrović Popović]. - Beograd  
: A11 -inicijativa za ekonomska i socijalna prava, 2019 (Beograd :  
New image). - 35, 35 str. : ilustr. ; 20 cm

Nasl. prištampanog engl. teksta: Really Useful Knowledge for the  
Improvement of Work of Human Rights Organizations. - Oba rada  
štampana u međusobno obrnutim smerovima. - "...napravljen i  
objavljen u okviru projekta 'Operacionalizacija ljudskih prava - od  
praktičnih politika do lokalnog nivoa'..." --> kolofon. - Tiraž 300. -  
Napomene uz tekst.

ISBN 978-86-900707-2-5

а) Лудска права -- Заштита

COBISS.SR-ID 278109708



**A11\***  
initiative for  
economic and  
social rights