

**The ‘human rights-based approach to programming’:
A contradiction in terms?**

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Abstract

Many development assistance organizations – UN agencies, NGOs, bilateral donors, even international financial institutions – have embraced human rights to a greater or lesser extent since the end of the Cold War. Some have gone so far as to embrace a rights-based approach to planning and programming, believing that human rights principles such as universality and indivisibility must inform and infuse every stage of the planning and programming process. Planning and programming must become more holistic, they tell us. In some cases, this has led development assistance organizations to embrace absolutist stances that, while sound in a purely legalistic sense, lead to organizational paralysis through the inability to select intervention points. If “to plan is to choose” (Julius Nyerere), can the holistic tendencies of rights-based approaches be consistent with good programming and planning? Will the rights-based approach to programming mean poorer programming and, hence, the realization of fewer rights for those who were meant to benefit? This paper explores the case of one UN agency that has embraced a human rights-based approach to programming while simultaneously trying to develop a more focused strategic plan.

Introduction

Many development organisations – UN agencies, NGOs, bilateral donors, even international financial institutions – have embraced the discourse of human rights to a greater or lesser extent since the end of the Cold War. Some have gone so far as to embrace a “human rights-based approach to programming” (UNICEF, 1998), asserting that human rights principles must inform and infuse every stage of the planning and programming process. Furthermore, and in line with international human rights law, rights cannot be prioritised or hierarchised. UNICEF, for example, tells us that “there are no small rights” (UNICEF, 2000?); UNDP says that “all human rights are equally important” (UNDP, 2000: 6). Human rights-based planning and programming must become holistic, looking at the whole range of human rights and how, through the actions of rights holders and duty bearers, some rights come to be violated. “One cannot deal with one specific right in isolation without taking into consideration the whole range of related rights....” (UNDP, 2000:6). To the extent that “development” continues to be an objective, it is seen as the progressive realization of human rights.

This human rights-based approach to development planning and programming is in sharp contrast to the hitherto common parlance and practice of the development business. The planning and programming models prevalent in mainstream development thinking insist that priorities must be set, since some problems are just more important than others. These planning and programming models are consistent with the fundamental insight of mainstream economics, namely that resources are scarce and desires infinite, which necessitates some means for allocating scarce resources, i.e. setting priorities. Furthermore, the classical project planning techniques are based on analyzing a situation,

breaking it down into tractable problems and finding solutions to those problems. Classical project planning thinking and practice is not holistic; it is atomizing.

If “to plan is to choose” (Julius Nyerere), can the holistic tendencies of rights-based approaches be consistent with classical planning and programming? Will the rights-based approach to programming mean poorer programming and, hence, the realization of fewer rights for those who were meant to benefit? Or can both schools learn from each other, if they can assemble the necessary humility? This paper contrasts two views of planning and programming, the human rights-based approach and the classical approach, and tries to assess what is gained and lost when one moves from classical to human rights-based approach to programming and planning. The article uses as a case study one UN agency that embraced a human rights-based approach to programming while simultaneously trying to develop a more focused strategic plan.

Classical Project Planning and Programming

Classical project planning techniques are modernist tools with several common characteristics. By “modernist” is meant that they are based on the fundamental conviction that humans can change their circumstances for the better. The problems that humans face can be mastered. Nature can be conquered by applying reason and science. The by-words are evidence, analysis, and rigour. The classical project planning techniques are objectives-oriented; indeed the very nomenclature embodies this goal orientation, viz. “management by objectives”, “objectives-oriented project planning”, and “results-based management”. These project planning and programming techniques aim to create specific changes in the state of the world or in the human condition. Classical planning and programming tools are pragmatic; success or failure is judged by efficacy, by impact, by the degree of achievement of stated objectives. No moral or legal criteria are necessary. Indeed, these classical project planning and programming tools are in essence amoral; they can be used to eradicate a disease or to run a genocide. They have been used for both.

The classical project planning techniques, especially those associated with results-based management, cost-benefit analysis, logical framework analysis and their cousins¹, insist that priorities must be set. Some problems are just more important than others, and these should be addressed first. These planning and programming models are also consistent with the fundamental insight of mainstream economics, namely that resources are scarce and desires infinite, which necessitates some set of means for allocating scarce resources, i.e. setting priorities.

The classical models of project planning are based on analyzing a situation (the situation analysis or environmental scan), breaking it down into tractable problems (the work breakdown structure), identifying the causes of the problems (problem trees), and designing interventions to counteract those causes and, hence, to solve those problems (feasibility studies, work planning and programming). Classical project planning thinking and practice is, in short, not holistic. It is atomising.

¹ E.g. critical path analysis, cost-effectiveness analysis.

Setting priorities and breaking down the complex problems of the world into tractable problems addressed by feasible projects are second nature to the bureaucrats of the development industry.

[Section to be developed further with more detailed explanation of classical project planning techniques?]

Human Rights: Law and Theory

A huge corpus of international human rights law and theory has emerged since the end of the Second World War. The first step was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). It was followed two decades later by two covenants which have each been ratified by around three quarters of all states, namely the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UN, 1966) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) (UN, 1966a). There have since been other major international human rights conventions, notably the Convention on the Elimination All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1976?) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989); the latter is the most widely ratified instrument of international law in human history, having been ratified by all states except Somalia and the United States of America. A key moment in modern human rights law was the UN's Vienna Conference on human rights of 1993. It was here that the doctrine of interdependence or indivisibility of human rights (see below) was enshrined, as a way to counteract Western countries' traditional emphasis on civil and political rights instead of and to the detriment of economic, social and cultural rights².

Modern human rights theory and international human rights law rest of four fundamental principles: universality (also known as non-discrimination or equality), indivisibility (also known as interdependence), accountability, and participation.

The principle of universality asserts that all human beings have rights simply by virtue of being human. People have rights regardless of their race, national or ethnic origins, class, sex, language, religion, or political or other beliefs. The basis for saying that all humans have rights can be traced back to three sources: the natural law tradition, which has quasi-theological roots; international human rights law, as embodied in a variety of treaties, declaration and conventions ratified by the states of the world in the last 60 or so years; and political philosophy rooted in the concept of human needs (e.g. Doyle and Gough, 1990; Munro 2000). The universality principle is also called the principle of non-discrimination or equality. By emphasizing non-discrimination or equality, rights theorists assert that all human beings are equally entitled to all rights. This has important implications for the design of public policy, in that programmes designed to provide rights-based entitlements must be universalistic (Munro, 2002).

² Indeed, despite the existence of two separate international conventions no small number of human rights theorists reject the distinction between civil and political rights on the one hand and economic, social and cultural rights on the other.

The principle of indivisibility or interdependence asserts that “one cannot deal with one specific right in isolation without taking into consideration the whole range of related rights” (UNDP, 2000: 6). The rights-based Weltanschauung is a holistic one; it sees a web of inter-related and mutually supporting rights. As one UNICEF colleague put it to me, “a child who has received all of her vaccinations and who is not suffering from any disease but who is beaten by her parents is not a healthy child.” There are two important corollaries of the indivisibility principle. The first is that there is no hierarchy of rights. “Some rights cannot be classified as being more basic than others; all rights are equally important.....” (UNDP, 2000: 6). The second corollary is that one cannot pursue the realization of one right to the detriment of any other right. The old argument “bread now, freedom later” – used by Soviet planners and Brazilian generals alike – is banned in a human rights-based approach to development policy and programming.

The principle of accountability asserts that people are active subjects, or claim holders. To have a right is to have a claim against others, whether against other individuals or against organized social units like the family or the state. Thus, for every claim holder there must be at least one duty bearer, i.e. someone who has the obligation to support the realization of the claim holder’s rights, or at least not to interfere with the claim holder’s enjoyment of her rights. Thus, if every child has the right to an education, then her parents have the duty to send her to school, the state has the duty to ensure that adequate schooling facilities are available, the school authorities are under a duty to ensure that the school environment is conducive, and so on.

The principle of participation insists that humans are entitled to have a role, a voice in decisions that affect them and their communities. Participation is not an option; it is a must. The embrace of this principle has profound consequences for the design of development projects and programmes. Paternalism is out, and with it the language of “project beneficiaries” and the like. Even consultation with those affected by a project may not be enough; participation and accountability imply that those affected must have a measure of control, power.

Most importantly, the proponents of a rights-based approach to development insist that the existence of these international human rights conventions means that development policy is no longer simply a matter of charity, or morality, or social preference, or economic or social benefit. It is a matter of law. People have economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights; states and others therefore have duties to respect, protect and promote those rights. Universal primary education, for example, is no longer a policy choice; it is a legal obligation. The great majority of countries, of all political, religious, social, and other stripes, have voluntarily assumed these obligations when they ratified the international conventions in question. Rights have legal force.

Though rights have legal force, they are obviously not all respected in practice. While the realization of some rights requires only forbearance on the part of other people, the realization of no small number of rights requires resource allocations. This is particularly true of many economic and social rights (e.g. the right to an education, the right to social security), but also to many civil and political rights (e.g. the right to a fair trial). Since

resources are more plentiful in some societies than in others, the question arises of how these resource-intensive rights (that are legal obligations) can be respected, protected and fulfilled. In a concession to economic reality, the rights discourse invented the concept of the progressive realization of rights; the ICESCR speaks of the need for the state to allocate “the maximum of its available resources” to achieving economic, social and cultural rights (UN, 1966a: Art. 2). In other words, society (or the state) may tolerate some cases where rights are not realized, as long as there is a plausible commitment to devoting resources over the medium- to long-run to improve the realization of those rights³.

Needless to say, this view of the world is not altogether uncontroversial. Let us leave aside for the moment those who reject the notion of human rights altogether⁴. Their rejection of human rights implies an automatic rejection of rights-based programming. But even amongst those who are willing to entertain the notion of human rights, the above set of doctrines has its uncontroversial and controversial points. For example, the notion of universality, i.e. that all humans have the same set of rights, is not now seriously disputed, at least at a rhetorical level. The collapse of apartheid in southern Africa saw the demise of the last doctrine preaching the flat out denial of universality. A small number of minor challenges are frequently brought out in practice, however. In many legal systems, citizens and non-citizens have different sets of rights, for example. Some people claim that certain groups, such as aboriginal peoples, have a larger set of rights than other people e.g. rights to hunt, fish and graze where other people do not. The principles of accountability and participation are not overly controversial, though some observers, especially those with an economics background, point out that accountability mechanisms and participation have costs as well as benefits. The implication is that an insistence on, for example, participation rights may lead to a situation where the costs of participation outweigh the benefits.

The principles of indivisibility or inter-dependence is much more controversial, however, and much less amenable to common sense logic. It seems common sense to say that rights are inter-dependent. Promoting one right, e.g. the right to free speech, can promote other rights, e.g. the right to an adequate standard of health care, if free speech is used to pressure the state to provide better health care. Similarly, the violation of one right, e.g. the right to education, can lead to violations of other rights, such as the right to vote.

But the fact that rights are inter-related does not lead logically to the assertion that there is no hierarchy of rights. Indeed, many people who believe in human rights at some level

³ One of the failings of the international human rights mechanisms is that it has not well defined the standards for the “progressive realization” of economic, social or cultural rights (Robertson, 1994).

⁴ These people come principally from the cultural relativists on one side and from the social and religious conservatives on the other. The relativists emphasise that the rights-based discourse descends from the intellectual tradition of the Western enlightenment; to them, rights are a historical and cultural construct of the dominant, but not the only, intellectual tradition in the world. The social conservatives usually rally around themes of a utopia based on social cohesion cemented by obedience to authority; recall the Vichy slogan of “*travail, famille, patrie*”. The religious conservatives emphasise the divine source of authority and obligation, not the rights born of a social contract. The two types of conservatives frequently overlap, e.g. the old British slogan of “God, King and Country”.

find it easy to believe that some rights are more basic than others, e.g. the right to survival. This is the position taken by no less a figure than the editor of *The Lancet* in a recent editorial (Horton, 2004). As the late political philosopher Christian Bay once pointed out to me, such a view has a long history in human rights theory going back as far as Thomas Hobbes in the 17th century.

The idea that there is no hierarchy of rights or that, to quote UNICEF (2000), “there are no small rights” is at the core of the contradiction between rights-based and classical approaches to programming. If no rights are more crucial or more basic than others, how does one plan or prioritise? Is it not true that “the deepest error (is the) ... argument that everything matter(s?) If everything matters, nothing does. Priorities must be set” (Bhagwati, 2004). How then does a human rights-based approach proceed?

Human Rights-Based Approach to Programming: A Description

The human rights-based approach to programming (HRBAP) has been used by a number of different agencies. Amnesty International pioneered the use of human rights as an advocacy tool in the 1960s and 1970s; their focus was on violations of rights and the denunciation of such violations. Later, as development organisations discovered human rights in the 1980s and 1990s, the focus shifted to promoting the realisation of human rights. For most of these organisations, denunciation became one possible tool amongst many, usually one to be used as a last resort in extreme circumstances. Increasingly, rights-based development organisations saw their role as building the capacities of individuals and societies to respect, protect and realise human rights, especially for those whose rights were least likely to be respected.

Development organizations adopted several different styles of rights-based approaches to programming. In NORAD, for example, projects must pass through a checklist that identifies the human rights (drawn from major international human rights conventions) that the proposed project will support, and how, and what rights will be violated by the project (NORAD, 2001). If rights are to be violated, then mitigation measures must be described. (See Table 1.) While this approach has the virtue of clarifying the rights implications of projects, it is hardly rights-based programming. To the true believers, such an approach is HRBAP-lite.

Table 1
 NORAD Grid for Human Rights Assessment of a Programme

Date	Archive Code	Program ID No.		
Mandate	Appraisal	Appropriation	Review	Completion
Program Goal and Objectives				
Target Group(s) Focussed:				
HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACT				
Degree of Impact:	Score	Follow up		
Positive Impact	PI			
No Change	NC			
Negative Impact	NI			
No information available	N.A.			
1. What is the programme's assumed/actual impact on equality and non-discrimination?	Awa rene ss			
2. Has the population directly affected been informed about the programme?				
3. Does the programme respect / has the programme respected everyone's right to seek, and impart information relevant to the project?				
4. Does the programme respect / has the programme respected the right to express views freely in the preparation and implementation of the programme?				
5. Does the programme promote / has the programme promoted				
6. Does the programme uphold / has the programme upheld the right to organise?				
7. Does the programme respect / has the programme respected the right to just and favourable conditions of work?				
8. Does the programme affect / has the programme affected the fulfilment of the right to an adequate standard of living for target groups and other people affected, including access to adequate food and continuous improvement of living conditions?	Emp ower ment			
9. Does the programme affect / has the programme affected the opportunity of people for self provision in terms of income generating activities?				
10. Does the programme address the right to compensation for those negatively affected?				
Need for follow-up? Yes / No	Additional/ Supplementary Information Needed	Limited Study needed (to be defined in dialogue with partner)	Full Scale analysis needed (to be defined in dialogue with partner)	
Type of Data:				
Comments:				

Early attempts at HRBAP in UNICEF followed a similar path. I recall one meeting of programme staff in UNICEF-Zimbabwe about a decade ago where all staff read through both the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and the UNICEF country programme document. Staff then identified which rights were promoted by each programme component. A few years later, it was not uncommon in UNICEF for the former health programme to be re-baptised as the “survival rights programme” and for the former education and child protection programmes to be re-named as the “development rights programme”. In practical terms, not much changed except the name. This too was HRBAP-lite.

A few years later, UNICEF introduced a much more elaborate system of HRBAP (UNICEF, 1998). The case is interesting, not least because UNICEF had been known hitherto for its relatively adept use of classical project management techniques. HRBAP asserts that, while rights cannot be prioritized, actions in support of rights can be. The key to a HRBAP is a change in the situation analysis or environmental scan that precedes the programming. In classical project planning and programming, the situation analysis follows sectoral lines, e.g. health or education (e.g. UNICEF-Uganda 1989), or follows conventional disciplinary lines such as those followed in most of the World Bank’s Country Economic Memorandums.

In HRBAP, the situation analysis takes the rights bearer as the point of departure, and looks for violations of that person’s (or those people’s) rights. To pick up on an earlier example, suppose that in country X a large proportion of children, especially girls, are not in school. This is a violation of their right to education. One then looks for duty bearers, i.e. those who are supposed to respect, protect and help the girl realize her right to education. Who is failing to respect, protect or fulfill the girl’s right to education, and why? Say that parents are not sending their girls to school. One needs to ask why they are not sending their child to school. Is it because they refuse to do so? Or because they lack resources to pay for school fees or uniforms? Or is it because there is no school in their vicinity? Or because the school is judged too hostile or dangerous an environment for a young girl?

Whatever the answer, the job of the development aid organization and its national partners is to identify the duty bearers, and to find out why the duty bearers are unwilling or unable to fulfill their duties vis à vis the rights holder(s). If they are unwilling, they must be cajoled, convinced, or – possibly – coerced into preventing the continued violation of rights⁵. If duty bearers are unable to provide support that they are obliged to, then the donor agency’s job is to support them with money, ideas, capacity building, or whatever is needed to cause the rights violation to cease. In the case of girls not going to school, an integrated rights-based package of interventions might seek to convince parents of the value of educating their daughters, reduce out-of-pocket costs of schooling, build more schools, and make the school environment more girl-friendly.

⁵ Laws enforcing compulsory schooling of children are amongst the possible coercive measures that the state could take.

So far, the HRBAP is not at all inconsistent with the good classical project planning and programming described above. In fact, in line with a lot of the recent thinking on public service provision, the HRBAP puts the focus on “the client”, i.e. the rights holder. Schools should be run with “the best interests of the child” (UN, 1989: Article 3) in mind, not in the interests of principals, the teachers’ union or the local pedophile ring. Similarly, clinics should operate in such a way that they promote the rights of their clients to an adequate standard of health care, and so on. Though it should be something of a no-brainer, this focus on the rights of the client has been strikingly absent from the public services of far too many countries for far too long. The rights-based approach adds value, for it provides the classical project management tools with the moral and legal basis that the classical toolkit lacks. If this were where the story ended, there would not be much controversy.

Two Examples of HRBAP in Action

But the story does not end here. The HRBAP makes strong statements about how development projects and programmes should be pursued. Let us take our example of girls’ education further. The HRBAP’s insistence on the universality or non-discrimination principle implies that all girls, indeed all children, have the right to an education. If the rights-based situation analysis reveals that girls are particularly disadvantaged in their access to schooling, then special provision should be made to address their particular disadvantages. Furthermore, the HRBAP insists that the only possible policy objective is education for *all* children.

This is not necessarily what an analyst steeped in the cost-benefit tradition would conclude. In telecommunications, they call it the “last mile” problem. In social development, one talks about the problem of “reaching the poorest” or “reaching the unreached”. The last ones to get schooling (or telephone service, or postal service, or modern health care) will be those hardest – and therefore the most expensive – to reach, e.g. those living in remote or inaccessible areas, ethnic or linguistic minorities who do not speak the majority language, those living in the worst slums, etc. The marginal cost of providing a service to last tranche of unreached population will be substantially higher than the cost of reaching any other tranche of the population. In fact, the cost of reaching the final 10% or 20% of a population may exceed the cost of reaching the rest of the population combined. An analyst from the cost-benefit tradition would ask whether the funds could not be better used elsewhere. For example, evidence suggests that a country must get to the point where approximately a third of its population graduates from secondary school before it can get on a long-term sustainable growth path (Mehotra and Jolly, 1997?). If this is indeed true, then the policy objective should be to reach and sustain that level of primary and secondary school enrolment in the medium-term, or possibly to exceed it somewhat. A policy that greatly increases costs by putting all children through secondary school would not necessarily be supported by the classical school. In fact, they might argue that the opportunity cost of such a policy would be too high. Scarce resources might be more productively spent elsewhere.

Example 1

Nor is this merely a theoretical possibility. An even more complicated case is that of polio eradication. In the late 1980s, there were over 350,000 cases of polio annually worldwide; polio affected people in well over 100 countries on all continents. Thanks to an aggressive campaign of immunization led by UNICEF, the World Health Organization and Rotary International, the number of cases is now (in 2004) less than 1,000 per year, all of them in a handful of countries on two continents. This reduction is an excellent example of the classical project planning and programming tools at work. But the polio eradication programme was not initially justified in human rights terms. Rather it was justified in classical public health terms of deaths and disabilities prevented at very low cost. A commonly heard justification was that all countries – even those that had eradicated polio long ago – would benefit from global eradication since it would mean that eventually all countries could cease immunising their children against a disease that no longer existed. An annual saving of US\$1.5 billion would be available forever more.

But once the number of polio cases was greatly reduced, other voices began to question the cost of the eradication programme (refs.). The global campaign to eradicate polio was itself very costly and, as country after country announced the eradication of the disease, people began to question why so many resources were being used to fight a disease that was no longer a major public health problem in their country. Why should the scarce resources available for immunization be used on a disease that hardly existed any more, while other diseases, notably measles, killed and maimed far more children? Evidence mounted that the focus on polio eradication was undermining the rest of the immunization system, especially routine immunization delivered through clinics⁶. The opportunity cost of putting enormous resources into polio eradication were indeed high; in the short run at least, more deaths and disabilities could have been averted by moving some resources from polio immunization to measles immunization in a great many countries.

But to do so would have violated the principle of indivisibility, for it would have set up a trade-off between the right to be free from polio on the one hand and the right to be free of measles on the other. In human rights circles, it is called the principle of non-retrogression; having once achieved a given level of satisfaction of a right, one is not allowed to reduce that in order to promote another right. In effect, having established a huge anti-polio prevention mechanism, countries are obliged to maintain it, even at substantial cost (both direct and opportunity cost). In this sense, the HRBAP is, like the very similar Pareto principle in welfare economics, profoundly conservative. Acquired rights can never be sacrificed in favour of potential future gains in other rights. The implication of HRBAP is that it pushes for the established polio eradication programme, whatever the cost⁷.

⁶ The polio eradication effort has been largely conducted through campaigns, such as national immunization days, rather than through routine systems.

⁷ The only way around this dilemma is the principle of compensation for damage. Certain rights can be violated in the public interest, as long as there is compensation for the loss. For example, my property rights in a piece of land can be expropriated to build a road or a school, as long as I am paid a fair market price. The problem with the compensation principle in the case of many economic, social and cultural rights is that the rights holder is legally a minor, usually a child. Legal minors cannot by definition make

This gives rise to the question, “how do we get to the point where one set of rights is acquired to a certain level, that must then be protected?”. Given scarcity of resources, this is another way of asking about how priorities get set. This is a question that HRBAP cannot answer. The answer, common in UNICEF, to the effect that rights cannot be prioritized, but actions to promote rights can be, simply side-steps the question. In fact, HRBAP leaves us wallowing in a sea of relativism with no oars and no rudder; whatever rights get respected and protected through whatever political or other mechanism become sacrosanct. Resources must then be continuously devoted to their maintenance and upkeep. Whatever other rights are unfulfilled must wait for “progressive realization” to take place. As and when those rights get respected and protected, they too join the list of the sacrosanct. A UN colleague once told me this amounts to “one helluva way to do your budgeting”.⁸

Example 2

Case Study: UNICEF, HRBAP and A Focused Strategic Plan

(Material to follow)

Contrasting HRBAP and Classical Project Planning and Programming

Table 2 below contrasts the human rights-based approach to programming and the classical approach to programming.

Table 2
Contrasting Human Rights-Based and Classical Approaches to Project Planning and Programming

	Human Rights-Based Approach to Programming	Classical Project Planning
Analytical approach	Holistic; rights are inter-dependent	Atomistic; development challenges can be broken down into tractable problems
Ontology	Individualistic	Agnostic about ontology

certain decisions about their status including which rights to forfeit and for what level of compensation. Parents or legal guardians must make these decisions for them. Here, the rights holder – duty bearer relationship can be analysed as form of principal – agent interaction; see Munro, 2001 for an in-depth analysis of this interaction.

⁸ It should be noted that the HRBAP is the antithesis of another widely taught, but seldom practiced, classical tool, namely zero-based budgeting. Under zero-based budgeting, everything is re-evaluated each and every budget cycle based on past performance and projected future performance. ZBB is rarely used since it is so difficult and costly to practice.

View of Participation	Mandatory	Optional
Moral Framework	Normative	Amoral, pragmatic, cost-benefit
Legal Framework	Universal (international human rights law) and local	Local
Attitude to Priority Setting	Rights cannot be prioritized, but actions can be.	Some projects are more important than others. Actions within projects need to be sequenced.

A Way out of the Maze?

There is, however, yet another school of thought related to planning and programming, one which we have ignored until now. This school, which I will dub as “adaptive administration” (Rondinelli, 1993) is sceptical of the claims of the rationalist, classical school of programming. Drawing on insights from Austrian economics (Munro, forthcoming), and emphasising uncertainty, the incapacity of planners to foresee all possibilities, and the need to retain flexibility, adaptability and complex redundancy, this school.... More recent versions emphasise the importance of networks and social relationships in understanding the fate of projects, programmes and policies.

A question of balance. No hierarchy in a networked world. (Flesh this out later.)

Conclusions (Still sketchy)

A classical approach would balance costs and benefits. HRBAP raised budgetary costs, but provides no suggestion of how to solve them/where to set priorities. Both seek an absolute truth, either “rights trump all” or “maximize social benefits”. Albeit in different ways, both are modernist approaches, though their differences also serve to highlight the contradictions within modernism. Without going into the relativist swamp of post-modernism, can we escape? Balance, soft judgement (Mintzberg, 1996). The paradox that every good idea (e.g. classical programming, human rights) can become ridiculous if taken too far. Maybe HRBAP-lite isn’t so bad after all. Feasibility, resource constraints matter. But don’t lose the moral and inspiration power of the rights discourse.

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