Assisting the Most Vulnerable Populations in the Regions of La Rioja and the Maghreb: The Human Rights-Based Approach and Social Work

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This article examines the evolution of social assistance provided to the most disadvantaged populations in La Rioja, Spain and the Maghreb, going from charity to the human rights-based approach (HRBA). A case-analysis methodology was applied to two social interventions: the ABDEM project, which is part of the EU Tempus program, and the UNICEF program to combat poverty in the Spanish region of La Rioja. In these two cases, the HRBA represents a conceptual leap in the promotion of people's autonomy and an effective means for sustainable progress in response to the inequality, discrimination and unjust power relations negatively affecting the most vulnerable members of society.

Keywords: Vulnerability, exclusion, HRBA, social work, social intervention

Introduction

Human rights are an underlying principle of professional social work that may be viewed as a means and an end of social intervention with vulnerable individuals and groups. The human rights-based approach (HRBA) is a conceptual and methodological framework that goes beyond the ideological dimension of social policies and social work practice. The HRBA

redefines the relationship between service providers, recipients of social services, and all agents involved in the social intervention processes. It calls for helping the most disadvantaged by acknowledging that they must not only be service recipients but also active participants in the policy-making process (Gómez, 2011a, 2011b).

The empowerment of citizens requires ensuring the respect, protection and enforcement of their human rights. Governments can accomplish this through legislation and the allocation of the necessary funds to implement laws (UNDP, 2007). Together we must reduce the vulnerability of citizens who are rights-holders, and empower them in order to promote sustainable human and social development. Empowerment should not be understood as a static phenomenon but rather as a dynamic process in which the citizens are the main actors and change agents both individually and as groups (HEGOA, 2006; Titi & Singh, 1995)

Consistent with the prior statements, this article seeks to provide an overview of the HRBA and prior discussions related to it, formulate a working proposal based on the HRBA, and share experiences and provide practical examples of the HRBA. This article is divided into two sections. The first section describes the evolution and theoretical debate related to poverty and vulnerability prior to the emergence of the human rights approach. Special attention is given to the emergence of the welfare state and the appropriateness of viewing the response to human needs as a right. The second section of the article provides a justification for the HRBA within the context of social work and discusses the HRBA in relation to two cases of social intervention.

The Evolution of Rights for Vulnerable People

The current debate on poverty and human rights can be divided into three distinct stages: the classical stage presents approaches adapted to international contexts and needs-based theories. This first stage coincides with the period prior to the Human Rights Convention of 1948 and with the transition to industrial societies, referenced by functionalist, Marxist and cultural perspectives. Durkheim's (1982, 1995) functionalist theory introduces the concept of anomie, which describes the lack of integration of the labor market and morals. Parsons (1976) and

Merton (1964) built on Durkheim's concept of lack of integration in studies of deviant behavior, intervening institutions and control mechanisms to deal with them.

Marxist theories focus on the relation of the working class with the means of production and the production system. Income and sources of income depend on the various modes of production and the ownership of the means of production (Marx, 1959, pp. 812-818). Engels (1971) specifically linked income to the living conditions of the industrial proletariat characterized by high poverty rates, disease, illiteracy, alcoholism, and child exploitation.

The cultural perspective focuses on society's marginalized or vulnerable groups, such as foreigners or social welfare users, and the effects of gross inequality on the individual and family systems (Harrington, 1962; Lewis, 1970, 1975, 1986; Simmel, 1977, 1998, 1999). The cultural perspective is concerned with deviant behaviors and the development of adaptive norms and behaviors. Simmel, for instance, views being a welfare recipient as an adaptive norm or behavior.

The second stage is associated with the model of citizenship proposed by Marshall (1950), and the political, economic and social rights brought by the emergence of the welfare state in Europe. The citizenship model prevailed in Europe for at least three decades and gave rise to various models of economic and social development. Based on the concepts of commodification and de-familiarization, Esping-Andersen (1993) examined social rights within three types of welfare state regimes: conservative, liberal and social democratic. Taylor-Gooby (2005) in turn, focused on rights at the onset of the welfare state and during the transition to post-industrial societies while differentiating between old and new social risks. Old social risks include unemployment, lack of health care and retirement benefits, while new social risks include work-family imbalance, increasing job insecurity and high unemployment rates for young people. The inability to exercise rights has two foci. First is the concept of deprivation in Anglo-Saxon societies. This concept is concerned with consumption, accommodation, education, the job market, social relationships and participation (Atkinson, Cantillon, Marlier, & Nolan, 2002). Second is the concept of disaffiliation, which explains the breakdown of work and personal relationships, and the lack of mechanisms for integration or inclusion

that in turn provide access to citizenship rights (Castel, 1997; Paugam, 1991, 1993, 2005).

The third stage spans the 1980's and is associated with the development of the capability approach and human needs-based theories. This stage immediately preceded the rise of the HRBA. Sen's (1985, 1992) and Doyal and Gought's (1994) reviews of economic approaches to poverty led to the proposal of a universal approach that provided a new classification of human needs with which to interpret the concept of human development.

The capability approach proposed by Sen (1992) is linked to the HRBA that will be discussed in the next section. This approach views poverty as a complex issue that must be addressed to ensure adequate human functioning in society. The approach also views freedom of expression, dignity, respect and participation in society as essential to well-being.

The needs theory proposed by Doyal and Gought (1994) differentiates between basic and intermediate needs. Physical health represents a key basic need that is essential to human survival and the development of capabilities. The theory proposes that the satisfaction of intermediate needs facilitates meeting basic needs. Although the priority of intermediate needs varies from one society and social group to the next, such needs usually include protective housing, physical security, appropriate health care, adequate nutritional food and clean water, a secure childhood and economic security.

The human rights-based approach (HRBA) and vulnerability

The HRBA builds on welfare state theories and the human needs-based approach. It requires meeting a minimum of conditions to facilitate the development of individual capabilities and satisfy needs. Furthermore, it represents a conceptual leap, given that it views rights as a necessary condition for human development; solidarity is not enough. Thus, the HRBA proposes that our response to social problems should be motivated by our acknowledgement of rights and corresponding obligations and not only by our desire to respond to needs or promote development (Elena, 2011).

In this regard, the Statement of Common Understanding on Human Rights-Based Approaches adopted by the United Nations in 2003 highlighted the importance of applying HRBA to

programming processes in development cooperation. The aim was to provide a conceptual framework for human development, as well as to "analyze inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress" (UN, 2006, p. 15).

The HRBA is grounded on the principles of entitlement, universality and program planning. It proposes that individuals are born with inalienable human rights simply because they are human beings. At the same time, because of the principles of universality and non-discrimination, it proposes that all individuals must have access to all the processes and benefits of public policies, regardless of their personal attributes (ethnicity, place of residence, etc.). Planning and development by public authorities, in turn, refer to the redistribution of goods and services. Such redistribution must benefit everyone. Vulnerable groups must be identified to ensure that they receive the same assistance as the rest of the population. To this end, we should acknowledge their needs and remove discriminatory barriers that prevent access to available social goods (UNDP, 2007, p. 11).

The HRBA identifies *rights-holders* and their entitlements and the corresponding *duty-bearers* and their obligations (UN, 2006). To this end, the HRBA proposes a three stage analytical model. The first stage involves analyzing the causes of the identified problems. The second stage seeks to identify who is a right-holder and who is a duty-bearer, and identify vulnerable groups and the roles of key players while making sure the rights of all groups are guaranteed consistent with local and international laws. The third stage aims to identify a plan of action in your respective location that empowers rights-holders and enables them to become the main change agents.

All actions associated with the HRBA are aimed at promoting and protecting human rights and for this reason must be guided by the basic principles that define them. Table 1 shows the association between human rights and social work codes of ethics as set forth in the document titled *Principles of Social Work Ethics* adopted by the IFSW General Meeting of 1994. As shown below, HRBA and social work ethical principles overlap. We propose that these principles should guide our interventions.

Table 1. Human rights principles and related
Principles of Social Work Ethics

Principle	Description	Ethics of Social Work Principles
Universality and inalienability	All people everywhere in the world are entitled to human rights.	2.2.1 Every human being has unique value,which which justifies moral consideration for that person.
Indivisibility	All rights have equal status and cannot be ranked in a hierarchical order.	2.2.2 Each individual has the right to self-fulfillment to the extent that it does not encroach upon the same right of others, and has an obliga-tion to contribute to the well-being of society.
Inter-dependence and inter-relatedness	In certain circumstances, benefiting from a right may depend on benefitting from other rights.	2.2.3 Each society, regardless of its form, should function to provide the maximum benefits for all of its members.
Equality and non-discrimination	All individuals are equal and are entitled to their human rights without discrimination.	2.2.6 Social workers are expected to provide the best possible assistance to anybody seeking their help and advice, without unfair discrimina tion on the basis of gender, age, disability, color, social class, race, religion, language, political beliefs, or sexual orientation.
Participation and inclusion	All persons and peoples are entitled to active, free and meaningful participa-tion and to contribute to and enjoy development.	2.2.10 Social workers generally expect clients to take responsibility, in collaboration with them, for determining courses of action affecting their lives. Compulsion which might be necessary to solve one party's problems at the expense of the interests of others involved should only take place after careful explicit evaluation of the claims of the conflicting parties. Social workers should mini-mize the use of legal compulsion. 2.2.11 Social work is inconsistent with direct or indirect support of individuals, groups, political forces or power-structures suppressing their fellow human beings by employing terrorism, torture or similar brutal means.
Accountability and rule of law	States and other duty-holders are accontable for the observance of human rights	2.2.12 Social workers make ethically justified decisions, and stand by them, paying due regard to the IFSW International Declaration of Ethical Principles, and to the International Ethical Standards for Social Workers adopted by their national professional association.

Source: Caparrós & Raya (2016, pp. 306-307) and UNDP (2007, p. 15)

Research methodology: case analysis

Case analysis represents a commonly used method in social science research due to its usefulness in generating practical knowledge. Several authors support the use of this method (Campbell, 1975; Chetty, 1996; Flyvbjerg, 2001, 2006; Martínez, 2006; Perry, 1998; Yin, 1994) as it allows for the contextualization of knowledge related to social phenomena and the in-depth exploration of identified problems. In the pages that follow, we will analyze two cases: children in the La Rioja region of northern Spain and the ABDEM Project in the Maghreb. These two regions have been the object of HRBA programs of study implemented by European and African institutions of higher education.

Case study analyses are delimited by the environment in which research takes place to produce specific and practical knowledge (Cambpell & Stanley 1966; Ragin, 1992). The value of this method stems from the presentation of cases and their connection to elements of real life. Given their proximity to the context in which they operate, real details and problems can be detected and observed (Kish, 1987). The cases we have selected make it possible for us to thoroughly study the practical application of HRBA in two areas of social work research. Our case analysis does not seek to generalize or compare findings, but rather to provide clear examples of the potential of applying HRBA in social work, both as a means and an end (Bourdieu, 1977; Christensen, 1987; Cragg, 1940; Flyvbjerg, 2001).

The chosen cases are appropriate for the goal of this article, which is to provide useful examples of the HRBA in social work as a strategy to empower subjects of interventions as opposed to providing them with charity or assistance.

The first case is the ABDEM project (French acronym for *Introduction de l'approche basée sur les droits de l'homme dans l'enseignement supérieur au Magreb*). This project, funded by the Lifelong Learning Program (LLP) program of the European Commission's IV TEMPUS, seeks to introduce the HRBA to higher education institutions in the Maghreb.

The Maghreb refers to the northern region of the African continent. It is a geopolitical term, referring to the region bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, the Atlantic Ocean

to the West, and the Sahara Desert to the south. It includes the countries of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Libya and Mauritania.

The countries participating in the project experience very diverse and complex social and economic realities. Their economies are based on agriculture, industry, tourism and/or oil revenues. At the same time, they share Islam as a common religion and Arabic as a common language. According to the Human Development Index (HDI), these countries experience medium to low levels of development. In 2015, Algeria ranked 83, Libya 94, Morocco 126, Tunisia 96 and Mauritania 156 out of a total of 188 countries in terms of their level of development. Their reported expected years of schooling are 8.5 for Mauritania, 14.6 for Tunisia, 11.6 for Morocco and 14 for Algeria and Libya. Because of this, these countries were considered good candidates for participating in a program that seeks to provide support and assistance, and promote cooperation and democratic reforms (UNDP, 2015).

The second case revolves around a research study sponsored by the Spanish Committee of UNICEF to analyze children's rights in all regions of Spain. Such study seeks information about the various types of rights we will discuss in the following section. We have focused on the region of La Rioja, Spain due to the features it shares with the rest of Spain and because of its location in one of Spain's most developed economic areas. Furthermore, La Rioja has one of the lowest rates of exclusion in the country according to the "At Risk of Poverty and/or Exclusion" (AROPE) classification (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas, 2016).

La Rioja is an autonomous community of Spain, one of the 28 countries that make up the European Union. La Rioja is located in the north of the Iberian Peninsula and comprising part of the Ebro Valley to the north and the Iberian mountain range to the south. This autonomous community comprises only one province, which is subdivided into three sub-regions: the Rioja Alta, the Rioja Media and the Rioja Baja. The region has a population of 317,053 inhabitants. The population demographics are as follows: 15.8% are children under the age of 16, 64.7% of the population is aged 16 to 64 years old and 19.4% is over 65. La Rioja has a moderate population density with 63 inhabitants per square kilometer. This makes it the 6th most dense autonomous

region in Spain (Anuario Estadístico de la Comunidad Autónoma de La Rioja, 2015).

It is important to highlight that the cases analyzed in this article are not intended to test hypotheses, given that ours is not a deductive research study with an experimental or quasi-experimental design. These are only intended to illustrate the feasibility of applying the HBRA to different contexts. Both cases provide a detailed description of the most interesting aspects of both experiences (Flyvberg, 1998; Geertz, 1973; Kish, 1987; Ragin, 1992).

The aim of the ABDEM project is to train future university graduates to use HRBA in their professional practice. In this case, the vulnerable population comprises all individuals whose human rights are not sufficiently guaranteed. On the other hand, the study of children in La Rioja focuses on high risk or highly vulnerable minors. These include children living in poverty, children who come from broken homes, and those living in rural areas with little access to cultural and educational resources (see Table 6 in the Appendix for figures). Finally, both cases provide detailed information on aspects of interest with regard to the application of the HRBA, as described in the following section.

The HRBA as a means in higher education. The ABDEM Project

The ABDEM Project aims to integrate the HRBA into higher education given the importance of strengthening and reinforcing training in human rights in university settings. Education on human rights is viewed as a means for human, economic and social development. The World Program for Education on Human Rights, and specifically the Action Plan for the second stage (2010-2014) aimed at Higher Education serve as the conceptual and methodological framework for this project

The project is divided into three stages:

- First stage—An analysis was performed on the status of human rights in the universities and countries participating in the project.

- Second stage—A training program was proposed for university professors from various disciplines (education, communication, law and social work).

- Third stage—The creation of an inter-university and interdisciplinary master's degree in human rights and public policy was proposed.

Participating institutions of higher education in Europe include: the Spanish universities of La Rioja, Zaragoza, Extremadura and La Coruña; Bergamo University in Italy, and the University of Westminster in the United Kingdom. Participating universities in the Maghreb include: the Mohamed V Souissi and Hassan II Mohammed universities in Morocco; the University of Setif and the Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Sciences Politiques of Algeria; and the Institut National du Travail et des Etudes Sociales, the Institut de Presse et Sciences de l'information and the Université de la Manouba of Tunisia. Meetings, seminars and courses were held throughout the project at the various participating universities, and information was exchanged through a custom-designed online platform.

Table 2. Indicators. Stage I ABDEM Project

Structure of the table of indicators for evaluating the HRBA in Higher Education

Dimensions/Scope	Core Idea I	Core Idea II	Core Idea III	Core Idea IV	Core Idea V
	Connected policies and application measures	Teaching learning processes & instruments	Research	Learning context	Training and professional development of higher education teaching personnel
Dimension 1: Human Rights *in* Higher Education	How rights are observed in education policies	How rights are observed in the development of teaching activities	How rights are observed in research activities	How rights are observed in the learning environment	How knowledge of human rights is promoted and teachers' rights are observed
Dimension 2: Human Rights *through* Higher Education	How educatioin policies promote education on human rights	The processes and instruments for teaching rights	Presence and scope of research on human rights	How the learning environment benefits the understanding of rights	How teachers are taught to teach rights

Source: The authors

During the first stage, analyzes were conducted about how each university addresses the issue of human rights. Custom-designed tools were developed taking into account two dimensions and five core ideas, as shown in Table 2.

This initial analysis served as a draft for a subsequent SWOT analysis conducted in preparation for the implementation of the HRBA in higher education. The following are key findings of this analysis pertaining to participating European and North African universities:

- Scarce presence of HRBA in higher education programs.

- Need to integrate human rights with teaching approaches and the university's mission in general.

- Need to include HRBA statements in external and internal university regulations.

- HRBA must be present not only in social science degree programs, but in all university degree programs.

- The autonomy of each university should facilitate advances of the HRBA.
- In the case of Europe, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) reform facilitates the revision of the HRBA.

- In the case of Africa, there is a need to create entities that will work to implement the HRBA.

The second phase of the project focuses on training professors according to the United Nations World Program for Human Rights Education. Such program underlines the need to include training on human rights as part of the faculty hiring criteria. Unfortunately, this criterion is rarely taken into consideration or valued by hiring universities.

Human rights training is especially important in social work as a distinctive feature of professional intervention. For this reason, future social workers should undergo solid training in human rights as a sign of commitment to their own discipline.

Lastly, in the third stage (currently underway) the content of the Master's Degree in Human Rights is being designed. The main content areas are: Section 1—Skills-based learning; Section 2—Human rights-based approach; Section 3—Service learning.

Within the framework of higher education on human rights, both trainers and trainees must be able to:

- Know what human rights are and what those rights mean in their respective professional fields.

- Acquire and/or strengthen skills and competencies to effectively promote respect for and support of human rights in different settings and situations.

- Be aware of the importance of attitudes and behaviors aimed at promoting and protecting the human rights of the objects of their interventions.

General and specific competencies for trainers:

- Teamwork: Be engaged and actively collaborate in the achievement of common goals with other people, areas and organizations.

- Work in international contexts: Utilize a psychosocial perspective when dealing with critical situations and maintain a balanced physical and mental state that will enable them to continue working effectively.

- Interpersonal communication: Interact with other people in a positive way while engaging in empathetic listening, ensuring the clear and assertive expression of thoughts and/or feelings, and paying attention to verbal and non-verbal communication.
- Appreciate diversity and multiculturalism: Understand and accept social and cultural diversity as a factor leading to personal and collective enrichment. Also

understand that life without discrimination on the grounds of sex, age, religion, social condition, politics and/or ethnicity will enhance people's coexistence.

- Critical reasoning: Evaluate the consistency of definitions, especially those assumed to be true by society and the immediate context of the person.

- Ethics and commitment: Move towards one's own or someone else's moral good (in other words, owards everything that is or means a good, meaningful life, personal fulfilment and sense of justice) and persevere in this moral good.

The United Nations World Program for Human Rights Education anticipates that the approved participating teachers will recognize the educational potential of the previously described competencies.

Given the goal of integrating human rights in teaching practices and planning processes, guidance is necessary to implement human rights in various contexts. These are part of the professional challenges and interests of participating teachers. HRBA as an end while working with vulnerable populations. The UNICEF study

Adopting a human rights-based approach in research targeting vulnerable populations requires focusing on international laws and regulations given that these provide a framework for comparative analysis. The study conducted about children in La Rioja is based on this premise. Because of this, the University of La Rioja and UNICEF entered into a collaboration agreement in 2015.

The purpose of the project was to explore the situation of children rights and child welfare policies in La Rioja. The study relied on the foundation laid by the Convention on Children's Rights (CRC); Observations of the Spanish Government Committee reviewing the CRC report of October 2010, and other reports related to child welfare in Spain dating from 2010.

These reports were compared to secondary sources of data such as statistics, activity reports, regulations, etc., published by other institutions and government agencies working with

children. Table 3 shows a summary of this project's areas of study and the CRC report used as reference in this article. Tables 4, 5, 6 and 7 summarize the stages and findings of this study.

Table 3. Areas of Study

Area	CRC Article	Content Related to Rights
Right to Participation	12	Right to express their opinion and that this opinion be taken into consideration in all matters affecting them
Right to Health	24	Right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. State Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.
Right to an Adequate ment, Standard of Living	27	Right to enjoy a standard of living adequate for their develop- and it is the parent(s) primary responsibility to secure this development. It is the State's obligation to take all appropriate measures to secure that this responsibility can be fulfilled and that it is assumed, if necessary, by payment of child support.
Right to Education	28	Right to education with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.
Right to participate in cultural life	31	Right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and to recreational activities appropriate to their age and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

Source: The authors based on CRC

Table 4. Stages, Activities and Goals Pursued in the ABDEM Project

Stage	Activity	Objective	Participants	Main Center	Date
Working seminar Stage I	Exploratory meeting	Establish the basis of the project on the HRBA in higher education	U. La Rioja U. Extremadura U. A Coruña U. Zaragoza	Extremadura	September 2014
Working seminar Stage1	Meetings Debate sessions	Define the tool for evaluating human rights in higher education (indicators and dimensions)	U. La Rioja U. Extremadura U. A Coruña U. Zaragoza U. Westminster U. Bergamo U. Mohamed V	University of Logrofio	December 2014
	Conference —Discussion	Present results Stage I beginning of Stage II	Souissi, U. Hassan II Mohammed-Casablanca Setif 2,	Setif. Algeria	March 2015
	Working seminar	Design stage II, goals, content, methodology and schedule	Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Sciences Politiques Institut National du Travail et des Etudes	Madrid	May 2015
Stage II	Discussion	Presentation of contents of the training program	Sociales, Institut de presse et Sciences de l'information Universite de la Manouba	London	October 2015
	Training Day	Training the Trainers. Section: Training in competences	University of La Rioja Universities of the Maghreb	Rabat	January 2016
	Training day	Training the Trainers. Section: Human Rights in Higher Education	University of La Rioja Universities of Maghreb	Setif	March 2016
	Training the Trainers Section 3: Learning Service	Universities of Maghreb	University of La Rioja Universities of Maghreb	Tunisia	October 2016
Stage III	Preparatory meeting	Design of the inter-university master's degree	European universities	Madrid	July 2016
	Discussion	Training university teaching staff in human rights	Full Consortium	Tunisia	October 2016

Source: The authors based on the project design

Table 5. Stages of the research, techniques, and results achieved
during the research

Research Stage	Methods	Findings		Data Sources
First stage of research: review of secondary data sources	Review of secondary data sources related to the HRBA	The context of La Rioja	321,173 inhabitants in the region. 44,404 people born outside of Spain accounting for 13.8% of the population 56,056 people under 18 years old (17.5%) 46,151 people under 18 years old, born in Spain (16.6%) 10,354 people under 18 years old, born in La Rioja (23.4%)	Municipal Electorial Register at 1st January 2013 Population Census 2011
			24.4% of homes at risk of poverty, 31.8% of the homes comprising two adults with children and 26.7% of other homes with children	Life Conditions Survey 2013
			The Basque Country and La Rioja region have made the fewest cutbacks in spending for children	Data from the general directorate of social services of the Government of La Rioja, as of 2013
			Reduction in the rate of maternity and paternity benefits (-9.97%), leave to take care of a family member (-25.01%), caring for own children (29.71%)	Information on benefits for leave to take care of a family member, child, maternity and paternity leave provided by the National Institute of Statistics
			Budget cutbacks for child-related policies from €3,876,018 to €3,636,273 between 2011 and 2014	Annual regional budget
				Review of regional regulations on matters of children

Research Stage	Methods		Findings	Data Sources
		Right to a proper standard of living	Poverty rate: 20.1% Childhood poverty rate: 26.1%	Life Conditions Survey 2013 and 2014
			Increase in job inactivity between 2009 and 2014	Survey on Active Population I T. 2002-2014
		Right to education	Increase in the number of students in general education from 47.52 to 54.97	Source: School Statistics of the Region of La Rioja. Government of La Rioja General Directorate for Education
			Lack of universal school enrolment for children under 3. Only 24.6% of two-year-olds are in school. Rates above 90% in school enrolment of children between 3 and 17 years old	Source: National Institute of Educational Evaluation. National System of Education Indicators 2014 Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, 2014
			Results in math, science and reading skills above the Spanish average	Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports. PISA results (INCE, 2013)
		Right to health	Scarce care to children: only one mental health unit specializing in children for the entire region	La Rioja Health Services, 2008; Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, 2012
			Increase in psychiatric disorders and their prevalence in children	First Mental Health Plan for La Rioja, 2010
			Widespread consumption of alcohol and tobacco, with 91.9% consuming both substances	Regional survey on drug use and habits

Source: Authors based on the project design

Table 6. Methods, findings, recommendations and participants
associated with the second stage of research

Research Stage	Methods	Findings/Recommendations	Participants
Second stage of the research, qualitative fieldwork	Preparatory work by research team	1. Adapt the HRBA to childhood problems in La Rioja. 2. Compilation of data and regulations pertaining to children in La Rioja. 3. Design research method	Researchers of UNESCO, Chair of Human Rights and regional committee on childhood
	First discussion group: diagnosis and illustration of cases with entities working with children	1. Identification of social cases related to forms of violence against children. Examples: Victims and/ or perpetrators of crimes in family conflicts; Violence towards adults: child-parent violence. 2. Identification of social cases with schooling deficits. Need to ensure quality education through redistribution of students in several schools; added protocols for absenteeism, support materials and promote personal development. 3. Identification of cases where the economic crisis has affected child integration 4. Identification of cases related to the management of cultural diversity and commonalities. 5. Identification of cases of discrimination or cultural/ethnic segregation; integration problems for children with disabilities	La Rioja Child Welfare Association (Asociación Pro Infancia Riojana); La Rioja Association against Drug Addiction (Asociación Riojana para la atención a personas con problemas de drogas); Pioneer Foundation Family Point of Encounter (Fundación PIONEROS, Punto de Encuentro Familiar), Red Cross, Family Assistance Service and Minors Group of the National Police (SAF; GRUME); and staff from the Logroño Town Hall and of the Regional Government of La Rioja, General Directorates of Social Services
	Second discussion group with entities working with children: evaluation and intervention proposals	1. Invest the necessary *economic resources* to ensure equal opportunities and non-discrimination of boys and girls, especially in the areas of education, health and social services, and protection of children. 2. Improve coordination between the agents involved in providing assistance to children and the generation of shared knowledge. 3. Ensure equal opportunities to access the *right to education*, and adopt specific measures to promote academic success. 4. Promote and improve the regional protection system for children, within the scope of youth justice, prevention, foster families, vulnerability and assistance overcoming all types of violence	

Source: Authors based on the project design

Table 7. Methods, findings, and participants associated with the third stage of research

Research Stage	Methods	Findings	Participants
Third stage: quantitative field work on children's right to participation	Exploratory survey using a semi-structured questionnaire	Lack of awareness of children's rights in general and of the right to participation in particular	Students (215) from various grades aged 10 to 16 years old

Source: Authors based on the project design

UNICEF made recommendations to duty-bearers based on the principles set forth in the CRC and other applicable regulations. These are summarized below:

- Invest the necessary *economic resources* to guarantee equal opportunities and non-discrimination of boys and girls, especially in education, health care and social services. Spending on children should be closer to the European average.

- Develop mechanisms to improve *coordination* between all government agencies responsible for children services in La Rioja region. Assistance to the most vulnerable children requires coordinated collective action.

- Ensure equal *educational opportunities* and adopt specific measures to promote academic success.

- Improve the entire *child protection system* in the La Rioja autonomous community by increasing investment in human, economic and program resources.

- Promote the *right to participation* and citizen empowerment for boys and girls, through strategies that enable them to participate in all matters affecting them.

Conclusion

Social intervention on behalf of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged has evolved throughout Spanish history. One of the most recent developments of this evolution has been the move towards a human rights approach that focuses on outcomes and the strategies to achieve such outcomes. This development took place in the 20th century.

This article presented two experiences in which the HRBA was applied in social work practice. The findings of the ABDEM project highlight the need to think of higher education as an important means for change available to the population, and not as a sacred depository of knowledge that is isolated from society. From a micro perspective, social work professors should take advantage of their academic freedom to promote engagement with the surrounding socio-political environment. From a macro perspective, we should identify the rights-holders and duty-bearers in situations of rights violations in order to propose pertinent interventions, consistent with the human rights approach.

The use of the HRBA in the UNICEF study of children in La Rioja permitted identifying problems and making recommendations for duty-bearers about policies related to child welfare to guarantee equal opportunities and non-discrimination, the creation of service delivery systems, and uphold participation rights, among others.

The HRBA views people as change agents who participate in their own development and not as simple passive welfare recipients. For this reason, it is essential to inform, educate and empower them. Their participation is key to the HRBA, not only to guarantee their rights, but also to maintain progress (UNDP, 2010, 2015). For this reason, the implementation of social interventions based on the HRBA should consider the following considerations:

- Policies and programs should revolve around human rights.

- We should identify rights-holders and their entitlements as well as duty-bearers and their obligations.

- We should empower rights-holders and hold duty-bearers accountable.

- The principles and rules related to international human rights treaties should guide the entire social intervention process.

This perspective places citizens at the heart of interventions, not only as recipients but as active agents for change and as key players who must make decisions, file claims, and defend particular rights (Gomez, 2011). This way, the beneficiaries of public policies and programs cease to be mere service recipients and become actively involved in their personal and social development. The HRBA proposes that social workers should not simply focus on processing applications for benefits but also work towards the empowerment of vulnerable groups. The ABDEM project addressed this recommendation through the training of employers of future university graduates in the Maghreb to focus on various dimensions of the HRBA and its implications for working with vulnerable populations. The study of children in La Rioja, on the other hand, revealed the vulnerability of various children subgroups. Findings serve to inform medium-term policies related to autonomy, personal development, and the social inclusion of disadvantaged minors.

The application of the HRBA to the analysis of social problems and social interventions constitutes a significant change influencing the actions taken, problem analysis, project identification, methodologies, and social development. The HRBA is consistent with international human rights law, which promotes the self-determination of all individuals and peoples. This includes their right to participate in the civic, economic, social and political decisions that affect their lives (Elena, 2011).

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