The Economic Case for Human Rights

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The World Bank engages on human rights?

Yes, as part of our efforts to support accountability and good governance.
Why try to show “the economic case” for human rights?

*Rights are rights, right?*

Of course, but establishing an economic case for human rights is useful for a couple of reasons ...
“SECTION 10. Political Activity Prohibited
The Bank and its officers shall not interfere in
the political affairs of any member; nor shall
they be influenced in their decisions by the
political character of the member or members
concerned. Only economic considerations
shall be relevant to their decisions …”
Why would human rights be important for economic development?

Here are some examples focusing purely on the economic case for human rights …
Women’s Rights Improve Economic Outcomes

- Ability to build human capital
- Improves children’s welfare
- Shapes children’s behavior

Human Rights support Property Rights which support Investment

Study in Warsaw and Moscow found that confidence in the police was the most important determinant of property rights and of shopkeepers’ investment decisions.

Nobel laureate Douglass North and others emphasized the importance of property rights for long run economic growth.

Cumulative Effects of Discrimination are Large

*Cumulative impacts:* Discrimination in Housing facilitates discrimination in Mortgage lending and Employment.

*Feedback:* Discrimination at later stages (employment) reduces the returns to human capital development, and reduces incentive to study.

Back of the envelope calculation: 40% difference in ability escape the poorest quintile

Access to Information Leads to Better Services

Study in India: Access to Information Law helped poor people obtain services, and reduced the need for bribery.

Study in Uganda: A newspaper campaign to give information about school budgets led to lower corruption, higher enrolment, and better learning outcomes.

Better Education Outcomes!
Better Public Services!

Legal guarantees of access to information
Open access to information
Accountability of public officials

Okay, but what can an institution like the World Bank do to support human rights?

The short answer: work constructively to improve awareness and bridge the gap between rights in law and rights in practice.
Example on human rights education: Piloting a training of trainers course on human rights for regional political schools, together with the Vietnam Institute for Human Rights, and supported by the Irish Human Rights Commission.

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