

# Human Rights and Public Goods

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**Why reliance on  
markets is bad for  
people's health**

**Anja Rudiger, Ph.D.  
National Economic & Social Rights Initiative  
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# Human Rights and Social Determinants of Health



- What determines the social determinants?
- What are the roots causes of inequities?
- What connects the different determinants?
- What connects the struggles against particular injustices?
- What is our vision for a society that achieves health for all?

# Market Imperatives

What's happening to human rights in the market?

- Health care
- Education
- Housing
- Work
- Social Protection
- Food and Water



Human Rights and Social Determinants

# The Human Right to Health Care



- ❑ Health care is sold as a commodity to those who can afford it. Access to care depends on payment.
- ❑ Business model of insurance companies depends on limiting or denying care.
- ❑ Insurance companies made \$12 billion profits, while 700,000 families went bankrupt despite having insurance.
- ❑ Insurance companies receive billion dollar subsidies while residual public programs are underfunded.

# Health Outcomes

Commercialized health systems have poorer health outcomes than public systems.

- 45,000 people die in the U.S. each year because they have no health insurance
- 10-year survival rate for people with cancer is 60% for Whites and 48% for African Americans

# The Human Right to Education



- ❑ Public schools are being closed or privatized
- ❑ Public funds are channeled toward privately-run schools, undermining the funding base of public schools
- ❑ Children are pushed out of schools, as part of pressure on schools to stay competitive
- ❑ A two-tier school system discriminates against students of color

# Health Outcomes

Health outcomes correlate highly with education level.

- Children are denied their full development by being pushed out or relegated to underfunded schools
- A disproportional number of children of color is denied access to quality education as a public good

Education

# The Human Right to Housing



- ❑ Housing is commodified into real estate, traded in a highly stratified marketplace
- ❑ Financialization of housing caused economic crisis
- ❑ Public subsidies give preferential treatment to the acquisition of private property
- ❑ Privatization push through converting public into private housing, outsourcing management of public housing, selling off public land and channeling public subsidies to private developers

# Health Outcomes

The housing crisis is not crisis of housing shortages, but a systemic neglect of people's needs. Poor health outcomes arise from:

- Increasing homelessness
- Poor and unsafe housing conditions
- Stress of foreclosure risks
- High housing costs cut into food and health budgets
- Housing determines access to education, jobs, health care

# The Human Right to Work with Dignity



- Market forces dictate wages and workplace conditions
- Employment policies respond to the market dominance of large corporations; no national employment strategy
- Corporations treat workers as an expendable commodity
- Government policies distribute public resources to corporations without regulating or monitoring them
- Corporations are deemed rightsholders

# Health Outcomes

Exploitation at work and the lack of meaningful work makes people sick:

- Limited and often unenforced health & safety protections at workplace
- Stress of unemployment
- Low/no wages lead to unmet needs
- Eroding consumer protections

# The Human Right to Social Security



- ❑ Securing the resources for a life with dignity is treated as an individual responsibility, to be exercised in the market. This is exacerbated by austerity policies.
- ❑ Social protection programs increasingly require recipients to carry market risks (pensions, health insurance).
- ❑ Public expenditures for social protection fail to redistribute resources to the poor
- ❑ Privatization of social services administration and delivery

# Health Outcomes

Poverty is highly correlated with poor health outcomes.

- Unmet needs
- Financial insecurity
- Income and wealth disparities
- Threats to dignity, self-esteem, etc.

# The Human Right to Food and Water



- Food is treated as a market commodity
- Food subsidies go to corporate agriculture, not toward producing or eating healthy food
- Food stamps serve as charity within the market model, stigmatized and subject to eligibility testing
- Privatization of water supply increases dependency on investor-owned water utilities

# Health Outcomes

Health is directly dependent on access to healthy food and clean water.

- 45 million people receive food stamps, 7 million people go hungry
- Obesity increase is link to food industry development
- Water insecurity is increasing
- Inequality in access to food and water is increasing

# From Market Imperatives to Public Goods

- Market reliance as a structural cause of poor health outcomes
- Privatization of core public functions that affect human rights undermines accountability to human rights

The core goods, services and infrastructure necessary to meet people's fundamental needs and fulfill their rights must be treated as **public goods**, not as commodities.



# A Vision of Public Goods

- ❖ What if health care, education, housing, food and water were treated as public goods?
- ❖ What if social protection was universal, guaranteed for all?
- ❖ What if we placed human rights conditions on all jobs and created public and community-led jobs for the common good?

# Human Rights Principles and Public Goods

**Equity:** Essential goods and services must be provided collectively, on an equitable basis, not according to exclusionary market imperatives.

**Universality:** The provision of public goods must be shared by all and serve to meet everyone's needs, not to make profit or for any other purpose.

**Participation:** Communities must be involved in making decisions about the financing, management and distribution of public goods.

# A Rights-based Policy Agenda for Public Goods



- ✓ Defund market approaches that have failed to meet needs
- ✓ Mobilize and distribute public resources equitably to meet people's needs
- ✓ Provide equal access to universal public goods
- ✓ Hold private corporations accountable for protecting human rights

Public Goods

# Using Human Rights to Build a Movement

The human rights denials that people and their communities experience are neither accidental nor isolated.

Human rights principles serve as:

- ❑ a compass for a unified human rights movement
- ❑ a rights-based framework for policy demands
- ❑ a tool for analyzing structural causes and solutions





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Building a Movement