

Discussion on the Paper

Towards a Gender-Responsive Human Rights Documentation System on VAW in the Philippines: the HURIDOCS-WinEVsys Experience by Abigael Cuba_Cainglet

By

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I first heard about the HURIDOCS database system when I was presenting a result of the DSWD project about the Database of Unduplicated Records of Rape Cases in the NCR. That database was eventually expanded into Unduplicated Records of Sexually Abused Cases due to the difficulty in some instances of determining whether a particular report on sexual abuse can be classified as rape. This project was under the funding support of the UNICEF. Let me share with you some information about that database system.

The main purpose of the system is to facilitate encoding and processing of data on unduplicated sexual abuse cases committed against children and women. Source agencies are the government agencies, the local government units, and the non-government agencies.

The project team also interviewed key personnel at the barangay level and found out that all reports of sexual abuses at the barangay level eventually reach the Philippine National Police (PNP) which was one of the source agencies for the system. Hence we stopped at having the source agencies only down to the municipality or city levels apart from the PNP, NBI, and the NGOs.

These source agencies were installed with the system for them to encode the reports on sexual abuse. The encoded data are then submitted to the DSWD at the end of each calendar year for the integration of the report and elimination of duplication. The database system has a mechanism for eliminating duplicate reports.

The data can be transmitted electronically but if the agency has no facility yet for electronic transmittal, data will be picked up from the agency by the DSWD or the data will be sent to the DSWD.

At the start of system development, there was a need to address the issue of how to reconcile with other systems being used by other agencies. Agencies having a system in operation will surely not adopt another system with similar purpose. One of these systems already being adopted by an NGO is the HURIDOCS system. The plan was for the DSWD system to capture the needed information from the existing system being used by the source agencies. However, as these existing systems were examined, it was found that the problem of capturing the information is more complicated than what was expected. It would require, therefore, a longer time to develop a program for extracting the needed information.

Another issue is on how it could be managed in such a way that it will not become another layer of work loads for other agencies. For other agencies without the system, this will provide even more convenience for them provided they encode the reports as they come in. One difficulty in the implementation of the system is the need to encode the previous records which had already been archived.

Data reliability is also an issue specifically in rape cases. The data generated from the system may not be sufficient indicator of actual rape cases. Reported rape cases could include those that are not actual rape cases since it is possible that one would report a rape case even when it is not a real rape case. However it is also known that there were rape cases that were not reported at all. How the two will offset each other can not be determined.

The HURIDOCS system as I understand has a different focus. It is more concerned about documentation rather than producing statistics of human rights abuses. It is neither simple nor easy to use as it requires a good competence in documentation and the patience to record the events that happen to a human rights victim. The coverage is so big; it covers all possible violations of human rights offences. The DSWD database system on sexual abuse cases is just a very small portion of what the system would like to document.

On the other hand the HURIDOCS system is designed for international adoption so it does not include certain peculiar characteristics of the country like the geographic classification in the Philippines from barangay, municipality or province.

With the very large scope of cases to document under the HURIDOCS system, it is simply an impossible task to document all the cases under its coverage. Having documented 791 cases of VAW in year 2000 is quit a big accomplishment indeed. Of these cases 423 were domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment. On the other hand, under the DSWD system, there were 1, 542 unduplicated reported rape cases in 2001 in NCR alone.

Every database system however is designed for a specific purpose. It is therefore wrong to judge a particular database system according to one's specific need. It would be impossible to address in one database system the need to count and characterize for example sexually abused cases and produce a detailed documentation about the cases. The amount of work is simply enormous to undertake. Each agency has their task to accomplish and they can only handle so much. It is futile to aim for complete and comprehensive documentation of human rights cases but there is a lot of learning, policy issues and sound decision making that can be derived at a few documentations that can be done with the system.

On the other hand, we also know that there is a need for us to have a good idea of the extent of human rights violations committed to men, women, and children. A database to serve that purpose of providing us counts and a few characterizations of these cases in terms of who are the victims and the perpetrators can also be developed. As I studied and learn some aspects of the HURIDOCS system, I also stopped dreaming about integrating various similar database systems. Each database system even if they share similar objectives cannot be too extended to the point that it might end up not being used by anyone anymore due to its complexity.

The HURIDOCS is an excellent database for documentation of what I though would be very difficult information to computerize. I congratulate and salute the dedication of the NGOs who have the passion to continue with their work along this line.