



ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT THE HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

Q 1 – Will a human rights-based approach **change anything? Would our programs look exactly the same if we used this approach but just with a different name?**

A 1 - A human rights-based approach supports the principles of empowerment and participation, and therefore is consistent with community-led processes that many development practitioners currently use. However, in addition to a community focus, a human rights-based approach focuses on activities that place pressure on duty bearers to fulfil their obligations. This second focus is a key component of a human rights-based approach.

Q 2 – Does a human rights-based approach **only work in theory? Can it be meaningfully implemented?**

A 2 – Human rights do not simply exist in the international area. A human rights-based approach can be practically implemented in local communities by conducting human rights analyses of countries and regions where development organisations work, by ensuring stakeholders can participate and hold donors to account and for considering the sources of power who benefit from maintaining the status quo. Just because the process of combating the root causes of poverty is a long-term commitment does not mean a human rights-based approach cannot work in practice.

Q 3 – Is direct service delivery compatible with a human rights-based approach? What do we do if our stakeholders and partners **don't have the capacity to take on their local government to provide those services?**

A 3 - A human rights-based approach doesn't demand that all stakeholders and partners become ruthless lobbyists on day one. There are many reasons why this would be inappropriate and ineffective including illiteracy. Rather, a human rights-based approach is consistent with the long-term development progression of communities by ensuring that communities are meaningfully involved in the design and delivery of projects. Importantly, stakeholders should be supported to identify and address all sources of power, not just governments, which impact on the exercise of human rights.

Q 4 - There are so many competing interests and yet we are told that no one human right is more important than another. How does a human rights-based approach **help us in prioritising our activities so that our finite resources are used in the best way?**

A 4 – It is true that there is no hierarchy amongst human rights. However, by conducting a thorough analysis of a communities needs and rights, which link community-level issues with broader national issues, development organisations can act with a more defined purpose and ensure the complementarity of their work with other donors and governments. In addition, the precise meaning of human rights, and what is required to respect, fulfil and protect human rights, has been debated by courts and governments around the world. By using the knowledge that already exists on what is required for the achievement and exercise of human rights enables development organisations to target their programs.

Q 5 – How do we do a human rights-based approach when talking about human rights **is just not possible in emergencies and conflicts?**

A 5 – With so many pressing issues in emergencies and conflicts, the empowerment of communities can be overlooked. However, there are many ways that communities can be involved in the design and delivery of programs in these contexts, and in developing strategies for engaging with governments in these contexts. Implementing formal processes



for ensuring the voices of the most vulnerable are listened to in refugee camps is one example.

Q 6 – How do we use a human rights-based approach in countries where the government thinks ‘human rights’ is a dirty word? Wouldn’t it place our programs in jeopardy if we used a human rights-based approach?

A 6 – Talking about human rights in countries where human rights is a dirty word may not be possible or sensible. However, there is a difference between ‘using’ and ‘speaking about’ a human rights-based approach. A human rights-based approach also means supporting governments to better understand and discharge their responsibilities, as well as the empowerment of communities. Using a human rights-based approach doesn’t require development organisations to shout the *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* from the rooftops. It does ask development organisations to work with communities and governments to achieve desired change.

Q 7 – Will our donors understand the human rights-based approach and continue to fund these programs.

A 7 – The public is generally very supportive of human rights. A study conducted in the United Kingdom on the public perception about human rights found that people feel a strong correlation between the values that are important for living and human rights. At a fundamental level, human rights appeals to the aspirations of ‘ordinary’ citizens who believe a world where human rights are not violated would be ideal. Development organisations can play an important role in explaining to their donors what respecting, fulfilling and protecting human rights in practice is about. In addition, many governments around the world have adopted human rights-based principles to guide their development work and how they fund development organisations.



*Want more information about the human rights-based approach?
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