

## Definitions of Rights Based Approach to Development

By Perspective

### Europeans

#### *DFID*

“The objective of DFID’s Human Rights Strategy is to enable all people to be active citizens with rights, expectations, and responsibilities...A rights perspective means incorporating the empowerment of poor people into our approach to tackling poverty. It means ensuring that poor people’s voices are heard when decisions which affect their lives are made. It means recognizing that equality matters. Addressing discrimination in legislation, policies, and society contributes to an environment in which excluded people have more control over their lives. A rights approach also means making sure that citizens can hold governments to account for their human rights obligations.” (“Realising Human Rights for Poor People.” DFID, October 2000, pg. 7)

“A human rights approach to development means empowering people to make their own decisions, rather than be passive objects of choices made on their behalf. It focuses on empowering all people to claim their right to opportunities and services made available through pro-poor development.

A rights based approach means that:

- Development organizations should work in ways which strengthen accountability of governments to people living in poverty, particularly ensuring that citizen’s can hold governments to account in regard to human rights obligations;
- Promoting social justice and recognizing that equality matters. Addressing discrimination in legislation, policies and society will contribute to an environment in which excluded people have more control over their rights and that the rights of poor people are not sacrificed for aggregate gain;
- Poor people’s perspectives will be linked with the national and international policy processes;
- Poor people are both empowered and engaged in the decision-making processes which affect their lives.”

(Department for International Development-UK; in “OHCHR Asia-Pacific Human Rights Roundtable No. 1: A rights-based approach to development” October 2002)

“The growing acceptance of the relevance of human rights-based approaches to development not only ‘empowers’ the beneficiaries of development, by purporting to make them the active participants of the development process, and by giving greater legitimacy and moral force to their demands. It also fundamentally requires greater accountability from all actors in the development process: through legal, administrative, or political mechanisms, individuals, as right-holders, can make claims on the conduct of individual and collective agents, including states, which as duty-holders, can be held responsible for not meeting their obligations.” (The Right to Development: A Review of the Current State of the Debate for the Department of International Development. Laure-Helene Piron, April 2002, DFID/ODI)

### ***ODI***

“A rights-based approach to development sets the achievement of human rights as an objective of development. It uses thinking about human rights as the scaffolding of development policy. It invokes the international apparatus of human rights accountability in support of development action. In all of these, it is concerned not just with civil and political rights but also with economic, social, and cultural rights” (ODI Briefing Paper, 1999 (3) September)

“Rights are widely characterized as legitimate claims that give rise to correlative obligations or duties. This suggests that to have a right is to have a legitimate claim against some person, group or organization (e.g. a social or economic institution, a state or an international community). The latter in turn is under an obligation or a duty to ensure or to assist the rights-holder in security the right... Critical to this formulation is the implicit requirement of some structure of power or authority that is able to confer legitimacy on the claim being made. The definition, interpretation, and implementation of rights are therefore dynamic processes that are inherently political in their nature.” (“To Claim our Rights: Livelihood Security, Human Rights and Sustainable Development.” Caroline Moser and Andy Norton, 2001.)

### ***Australian Government***

“ACFOA defines a human rights approach to development as an approach that sees poverty as a violation of human rights and places elimination of poverty as the primary goal of development assistance.” (“Human Rights Policy and Strategy Paper.” Australian Council for Overseas Aid, June 2001, pg. 2)

### ***Norwegian Government***

“A rights based approach to development is a concept that integrates all human rights norms, standards and principles of international human rights systems, including the right to development, into the plans, policies and processes of development.” (Norwegian Agency for International Development in “OHCHR Asia-Pacific Human Rights Roundtable No. 1: A rights-based approach to development” October 2002)

### ***Swedish Government***

“The Swedish International Development Cooperating Agency (SIDA) defines the rights-based approach as the ‘consideration of people’s economic, cultural, civil, political, and social rights in all aspects of the development process.’ At the same time Sida also advocates the democratization of society as a pivotal aspect of development” (Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency in “OHCHR Asia-Pacific Human Rights Roundtable No. 1: A rights-based approach to development” October 2002)

“To support the struggle against poverty by using its development assistance to promote human rights observance... Poverty is equivalent to peoples being prevented from enjoying their human rights, and poverty’s many dimensions are exacerbated by lack of democracy, participation, and empowerment of the poor.” (“Promoting a Human Rights

Approach in Development Cooperation.” Human Rights Council of Australia, October ?, describing the Swedish Government approach)

### **United Nations**

“A human rights based approach ensures that human standards, as established in international law, are applied as a criterion for policy orientation and the solution of problems in specific areas. It introduces a normative basis, which is obligatory for State Parties, and thus requires a legislative response at the State level. A rights approach implies that beneficiaries of policies and activities are active subjects and claim holders and stipulates duties or obligations for those against whom such claims can be held (duty bearers).” (1998 Report of the Secretary General to the ECOSOC)

“A rights-based approach to development is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. Essentially, a rights-based approach integrates the norms, standards and principles of the international human rights system into the plans, policies and processes of development.” (Workshop on the Implementation of Rights-based Approach to Development: Training Manual” UN Office of the Resident Coordinator, Philippines. 2002)

“The human rights approach may be regarded as a programming methodology that derives from the Sustainable Human Development paradigm... The approach proposes the use of human rights concepts and standards in the analysis of development problems and in the design of projects and programs, including mechanisms to assess the impact of these programs and the process by which they are developed and implemented. The human rights approach proposes that our understanding of development and our strategies to achieve it, are considerably enhanced by the use of rights-based programming tools and methodologies.” (Workshop on the Implementation of Rights-based Approach to Development: Training Manual” UN Office of the Resident Coordinator, Philippines. 2002)

“In a human rights-based approach to programming and development cooperation, the aim of all activities is to contribute directly to the realization of one or several human rights... In a HRBA human rights determine the relationship between individuals and groups with valid claims (rights-holders) and State and non-state actors with correlative obligations (duty-bearers). It identifies *rights-holders* (and their entitlements) and corresponding *duty-bearers* (and their obligations) and works towards strengthening the capacities of rights-holders to make their claims, and of duty-bearers to meet their obligations.” (UN Common Understanding, May 2003)

“A rights based approach to development describes situations not simply in terms of human needs, or of development requirements, but in terms of society’s obligations to respond to the inalienable rights of individuals, empowers people to demand justice as a rights, not as charity, and gives communities a moral basis from which to claim international assistance when needed.” (UN 1998)

***Amartya Sen***

“The promotion of human development and the fulfillment of human rights are, in many ways, a common motivation, and reflect a fundamental commitment to promoting the freedom, well-being and dignity of individuals in all societies.”

(From Sen Article “Human Rights and Human Development” in Human Development Report 2000)

“If human development focuses on the enhancement of the capabilities and freedoms that the members of a community enjoy, human rights represent the claims that individuals have on the conduct of individual and collective agents and on the design of social arrangements to facilitate or secure these capabilities and freedoms.” (From Sen Article “Human Rights and Human Development” in Human Development Report 2000)

***Independent Expert on the Right to Development***

“The recognition of the Right to Development as an inalienable human right confers on its implementation a claim on national and international resources, and obliges the states and other agencies of society, including individuals, to implement that right. Human rights are the fundamental basis on which other rights, created by the legal and political systems, are built. States, both nationally and internationally, as well as organs of civil society have an unquestionable responsibility to give the utmost priority to Action.”

(Arjun Sengupta. “Realizing the Right to Development” *Development and Change* Vol 31, 2000)

“The process of development as one in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized. It is centered around the concept of equity and justice, with the majority of the population who are currently poor and deprived enjoying raised living standards and the capacity to improve their position... The concept of well-being in this context extends well beyond the conventional notions of economic growth to the expansion of opportunities and capabilities to enjoy those opportunities.” (Arjun Sengupta. “Realizing the Right to Development” *Development and Change* Vol 31, 2000)

“The realization of each human right and all of them together has to be carried out in a rights-based manner, as a participatory, accountable and transparent process with equity in decision-making and sharing of the fruits of the process while maintaining respect for civil and political rights... The objectives of development should be expressed in terms of claims or entitlements of rights-holders that duty-bearers must protect and promote in accordance with international human rights standards of equity and justice. The realization of the universal human right to development must expand human development following a human rights-based approach, thus improving equity and fairness.” (“Third Report on the Independent Expert on the Right to Development.” Arjun Sengupta, January 2001)

“A manner that follows the procedures and norms of human rights law, and which is transparent, accountable, participatory, and non-discriminatory, with equity in decision-

making and sharing of the fruits or outcomes of the process.” (E/CN.4/2002/WG.18/2, 4<sup>th</sup> report of the Independent Expert)

### ***UNICEF***

“A rights-based approach to programming means that we must be mindful in our development work of the basic principles of human rights that have been universally recognised and which underpin both CRC and CEDAW: inter alia, the equality of each individual as a human being, the inherent dignity of each person, the rights to self determination, peace and security... A human rights approach to UNICEF programming also calls for more inherently integrated, cross-sectoral and decentralized activities, and for participatory approaches recognizing that those we are trying to help are central actors in the development process.” (A Human Rights Approach to UNICEF: Programming for Women and Children UNICEF April 1998)

“It (rights-based development) is generating an inclusion of concepts related to the realization of human rights and covers issues such as empowerment, justice, accountability and governance. Economic and social development objectives are integrated and redefined as rights. Goals become mechanisms or instruments to ensure benefits to which people have legitimate claims” (Human Rights as an Emerging Development Paradigm and some implications for Programme Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation” Mahesh Patel UNICEF May 2001)

“Rights approach is transformative” (Human Rights as an Emerging Development Paradigm and some implications for Programme Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation” Mahesh Patel UNICEF May 2001)

For UNICEF, a human rights-based approach to programming means that:

- All UNICEF Programmes of Cooperation are focused on the realization of the rights of children and women;
- Human Rights principles are applied in all programming in all sectors; and
- Human rights principles guide all phases of the programme process.

(*Programme Policy and Procedure Manual: Programme Operations*, Revised April 2002, p. 4. UNICEF)

### ***UN Division on Advancement of Women***

“First, human rights bring to the development discussion a unifying set of standards, or a common reference, for setting objectives and assessing the value of action. Second, if sustainable economic development and the eradication of poverty are to be achieved, economic growth has to be combined with the concept of human development and respect for human rights. As such, the rights-based approach is an inherent dimension of the concept of people-centered sustainable development, with development constituting a comprehensive process directed towards the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms...’ Groonsekere further notes that the application of a human rights-based approach to human development provides a holistic framework for planning, programming and decision-making which considers the dimensions of civil and political,

economic, social and cultural rights” (Savitri Goonesekere “A Rights-based Approach to Realizing Gender Equity” UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 1998)

### ***WHO***

“A rights-based approach to health refers to the processes of: a) using human rights as a framework for health development; b) assessing and addressing the human rights implications of any health policy, programme or legislation; c) making human rights an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of health-related policies and programmes in all spheres, including political, economic and social” (“Twenty-Five Questions and Answers on Health and Human Rights” Health and Human Rights Publication Series, No. 1 July 2002)

### ***UNAIDS***

“A rights-based effective response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic involves establishing appropriate governmental institutional responsibilities, implementing law reform and support services and promoting a supportive environment for groups vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and for those living with HIV/AIDS.” (UNAIDS in “OHCHR Asia-Pacific Human Rights Roundtable No. 1: A rights-based approach to development” October 2002)

### ***UNDP***

“A human rights-based approach constitutes for UNDP a holistic framework methodology with the potential to enrich operational strategies. It adds a missing element to present activities by enhancing the enabling environment for human development, and by empowering people to claim their rights and influence decision about their lives.” (UNDP-HURIST, March 2002)

“A rights-based approach is based on the values, standards and principles captures in the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent legally binding human rights conventions and treaties.

A human rights perspective to development calls for enhanced attention to and a full understanding of the legal framework of a country and the factors that create and perpetuate discrimination and social exclusion and hinder people from realizing their full potential.

Civil and political rights and social, economic, and cultural rights should be simultaneously advanced in a rights-based approach to poverty eradication.” (UNDP in “OHCHR Asia-Pacific Human Rights Roundtable No. 1: A rights-based approach to development” October 2002)

### ***High Commissioner for Human Rights***

“The rights-based definition of development in article 1 of the [Declaration on the Right to Development](#) sees it as a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process. Its object is the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals, on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development

and in the fair distribution of the resulting benefits. The human rights approach to development is therefore integrated and multidisciplinary.” (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights)

“The norms and standards are those contained in the wealth of international treaties and declarations. The principles include equality and equity, accountability, empowerment and participation.” (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights)

“A human rights-based approach – bringing human rights standards and values to the core of *everything* we do – offers the best prospect of leveraging our influence to *empower* people to advance their own claims, to *prevent discrimination* and marginalisation, and to bridge the *accountability* deficits that have chronically crippled development progress.

Under a rights-based approach, participation in development is a matter of *right* rather than charity. Essential to the very definition of human rights is the existence of *claims* and corresponding *obligations* at various levels of government and society. In each situation we confront, a rights-based approach requires us to ask:

- *What* is the content of the right?
- *Who* are the human rights *claim-holders*?
- *Who* are the corresponding *duty-bearers*?
- Are claim-holders and duty-bearers *able to claim their rights and fulfill their responsibilities*?
- If not, *how can we help* them to do so?

This is the heart of a human rights-based approach.” (from comments of High Commissioner for Human Rights at 2<sup>nd</sup> Interagency Workshop on Implementing a Rights-based Approach in the Context of UN Reform” May 2003)

### ***UNDAF***

“By building capacity in all aspects of relevant data collection, UNCTs are in essence helping to create a “culture of monitoring, follow-up and evaluation” as the Morocco UNDAF states. This is also the essence of the human rights-based approach, helping to transform inhabitants of a state into active, informed and involved citizens with a say in their own lives and in the future of their country.<sup>1</sup>” (Bill O’Neil, The Current Status of Human Rights Mainstreaming: Review of Selected CCA/UNDAFs and RC Annual Reports. April, 2003)

### **NGOs**

#### ***ActionAid***

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<sup>1</sup> In another context, one analyst has noted, “it has helped millions of Venezuelans awaken to the fact that for too many years they have been mere inhabitants of their own country. Now they demand to be citizens...” Moises Naim, “Hugo Chavez and the Limits of Democracy,” Op-ed, **The New York Times**, March 5, 2003 at A-23

“This approach (rights based) seeks lasting solutions to poverty through the establishment and enforcement of rights that entitle poor and marginalized people to a fair share of society’s resources... The rights based approach builds on the analysis of poverty that ActionAid has developed since its inception. Rights are legal and moral entitlements. Our understanding of poverty informs us that some groups and peoples face a lack of access to, representation in and control over resources, services, institutions and processes to which they are entitled. This is caused by systemic denial and violation of their rights, which produces and reproduces the conditions of poverty... The primary responsibility for enforcing people’s rights vests with the institutions of government. National states define a more or less adequate set of human rights in their constitutions and laws, which in turn establish duties and obligations for other institutions and actors within society. In an increasingly globalised world, inter-governmental bodies also exercise important powers to expand or limit the rights of people particularly vis-à-vis transnational actors and issues. Ultimately, however, ActionAid believes that people themselves must have the power to define and defend their rights.” (“The Hua Hin Declaration on Rights Based Approach” ActionAid Asia, August 2000)

“Thus, a RBA is a development approach which takes on the centrality of human rights as elucidated in the international system of human rights, contained in treaties and declarations, in plans, policies and development processes. The rights based framework derives from the conceptualisation of human rights located in civil, political, economic, social and cultural spheres. Rights are thus manifold, interlinked and indivisible and the framework of human rights is based on an assumption that there is an ethical and moral base, which confers equal rights on all humans, and that in nation states today and in the processes of development, there are rights, which need to be protected and promoted.” (from Stockholm Workshop, ActionAid India, February 2003)

### ***Danish Church Aid***

“The rights-based approach:

- Targeting fundamental injustices and removing barriers for the fulfillment of people’s basic rights;
- Analysis and action at several levels from local to global arenas;
- A relational approach addressing ‘duty-bearers’ as well as ‘claimholders.’

### ***CARE***

“A rights-based approach deliberately and explicitly focuses on people’s achieving the minimum conditions for living with dignity (i.e achieving human rights). It does so by exposing the roots of vulnerability and marginalization and expanding the range of responses. It empowers people to claim and exercise their rights and fulfill their responsibilities. A rights-based approach recognizes poor, displaced, and war-affected people as having inherent rights essential to livelihood security—rights that are validated by international law” (“CARE Workshop on Human Rights and Rights-based Approaches to Programming” August 2000 in *Promoting Rights and Responsibilities*, June 2001)

“A rights approach affirms the importance of systematic identification of the fundamental, or ‘root’ causes of vulnerability and of commitment, wherever possible, to help confront such causes in our work... Root causes are often systemic or structural, residing at the societal or even global level and underpinned by vested interests at all levels.” (Andrew Jones. “A Rights Approach and Responsibility Analysis” *Promoting Rights and Responsibilities* October, 2000).

“For CARE, a rights-based approach deliberately and explicitly focuses on people achieving the minimum conditions for living with dignity. It does so by exposing the roots of vulnerability and marginalization and expanding the range of responses. It empowers people to claim and exercise their rights and fulfill their responsibilities. A rights-based approach recognizes poor, displaced, and war-affected people as having inherent rights essential to livelihood security – rights that are validated by international law.” (CARE, October 2002)

“A rights-based approach deliberately and explicitly focuses on people realizing their human rights. It does so by exposing the root causes of vulnerability and marginalization and expanding the range of responses. It empowers people to claim and exercise their rights and fulfill their responsibilities. A rights-based approach recognizes poor, displaced and war-affected people as having inherent rights essential to livelihood security – rights that are validated by international standards and law.” (Andrew Jones, CARE: Frequently Asked Questions about Adoption of a Rights-Based Approach, March 2002)

### ***International Human Rights Internship Program***

“The rights approach uses international human rights norms and treaties to hold governments accountable for their obligations. The rights approach can be integrated into any number of advocacy strategies and tools, including monitoring, community education and mobilization, litigation, legislative advocacy and policy formulation.” (“Ripple in Still Water” International Human Rights Internship Program, 1997)

“A rights-based approach is founded on the conviction that each and every human being, by virtue of being human, is a holder of rights. A right entails an obligation on the part of the government to respect, promote, protect, and fulfill it. The legal and normative character of rights and the associated governmental obligations are based on international human rights treaties and other standards, as well as on national constitutional human rights provisions. Thus a rights-based approach involves not charity or simple economic development, but a process of enabling and empowering those not enjoying their ESC rights to *claim* their rights.” (*Circle of Rights*, 2000)

### ***Oxfam***

“A rights-based approach:

- Is based on the belief that human beings’ inherent dignity entitles them to a core set of rights that cannot be given or taken away
- May or may not use legal strategies or language, but is grounded in and gains legitimacy from the rights enshrined in international and national law

- Works to empower communities and individuals to know and claim their rights
- Identifies those responsible – legally or morally – for upholding and safeguarding people’s rights, and holds them accountable for their responsibilities
- Recognizes the multi-level nature of rights obligations and violations, and the need to address them systematically and strategically”

(Oxfam America RBA Workshop. October 2002)

***Save the Children***

“A rights-based approach to development combines human rights, development and social activism to promote justice, equality and freedom. It holds duty bearers to account for their obligations, empowers people to demand their rightful entitlements, promotes equity and challenges discrimination.” (Joachim Theis, “Rights-based Monitoring and Evaluation: A Discussion Paper” Save the Children, April 2003)

“A rights-based approach to development makes use of the standards, principles and approaches of human rights, social activism and of development to tackle the power issues that lies at the root of poverty and exploitation, in order to promote justice, equality, and freedom.” ((Joachim Theis, “Rights-based Monitoring and Evaluation: A Discussion Paper” Save the Children, April 2003)

***Human Rights Council of Australia***

“There was agreement that looking at poverty through the human rights lens – as a denial of human rights – enables a richer understanding of the different dimensions of poverty and encourages a more comprehensive policy response to the structural causes of poverty.” (The Human Rights Based Approach to Development Cooperation Stockholm Workshop 16–19 October 2000, The Human Rights Council of Australia)

**Other**

***Consultant***

“A rights-based approach to development adopts international human rights instruments and ideology as the backbone of development policy. It encompasses both civil and political rights and economic, social, and cultural rights. The rights framework establishes both the means to and, in some cases, the very components of sustainable human development.” (Luinstra, Amy. “Human Rights-Based Development: An Overview and Issues to Consider for HDNSP (World Bank)” June 2000, pg. 2)

***Academic***

“It (understanding rights) requires humanitarians to reorient their morality and thought so that they orbit around equality, contract and justice rather than pity and help. From such a perspective comes the proper politicization of humanitarianism—a consistent and still impartial political philosophy grounded in basic goods, natural rights and justice which can make political space for itself to challenge, mitigate and even transform the particular politics of violence and war.” (“Not Philanthropy but Rights: Rights-based Humanitarianism and the Proper Politicization of Humanitarian Philosophy of War” Hugo Slim, Oxford Brookes University)

*Source Not Listed*

“Through the systematic application of the human rights principles during all phases of programme development and implementation ways must be found to empower people to make decisions about issues that affect their lives, rather than treating them as passive objects of decisions made on their behalf by bureaucrats. That way recognition is given to the fact that all people are inherently holders of rights. At the same time, obstacles at governmental level which need to be tackled simultaneously if development efforts are to be successful will be identified.” (“The application of the Human Rights-based Approach to Development Programming: What is the Added Value?”)

“A human rights-based approach not only defines and identifies the subjects of development but is also translates people’s needs into rights, and recognizes the human person as the active subject and claim-holder. It further identifies the duties and obligations of those, against whom a claim can be brought, to ensure that needs are met. (“The application of the Human Rights-based Approach to Development Programming: What is the Added Value?”)