

# Quick Guide to Rights-Based Approaches to Development



Oxfam aims to take a rights-based approach to its development, humanitarian and campaign work. Taking a rights-based approach to development is a way of thinking about, designing and managing development programmes that is guided by the legal standards found in the range of international human rights treaties and conventions, and the values and principles that inform them.

## What are human rights?

Human rights are universal legal entitlements that represent the minimum standards essential for human dignity, often divided into the broad categories of Civil, Political, Economic, Social and Cultural rights. All people are **rights-holders**, and human rights apply to all people equally, regardless of sex, politics, colour, race, ethnic origin, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, economic or social class, or any other distinction. **Duty-bearers** have an obligation to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. States are the principle duty-bearers, but all rights entail corresponding responsibilities, and people are often both rights-holders and duty-bearers.



## Why does Oxfam take a rights-based approach to development?

- Oxfam believes that all human lives are of equal value, and that everyone has fundamental rights that must be recognized and upheld at all times;
- Oxfam respects people living in poverty as agents of their own development (not passive recipients of aid or objects of charity). Taking a rights-based approach to our work reflects our belief that with the right resources, support and training, people living in poverty can solve their own problems
- Taking a rights-based approach to our work reflects Oxfam's belief that development work needs to go beyond issues of material resources to consider and address the capacity, choices and power required for people living in poverty to enjoy all human rights.

## What are the key elements of a rights-based approach, or RBA?

Rights-based development work...

- Recognises that imbalances in **power relations** contribute to marginalisation and prevent poor people from exercising their rights;
- Is **participatory**, recognising that all people, including those living in poverty, have a right to be involved in processes that impact on their lives;
- Recognises that all development actors and all stakeholders are **accountable** to one another;
- Promotes **equality** and **non-discrimination**, with a particular focus on vulnerable or marginalised people(s);
- Is **holistic** - recognising that economic poverty has deeply felt social, cultural and political causes and effects, and that the spectrum of human rights must be understood together to constitute the basic necessities for a life of dignity and freedom;
- Recognises that rights also involve **corresponding responsibilities** – the fact that we all have human rights means we are also all duty bearers;
- Makes use of existing legal systems, and, depending on the context, develop **links** between development goals and international human rights laws.

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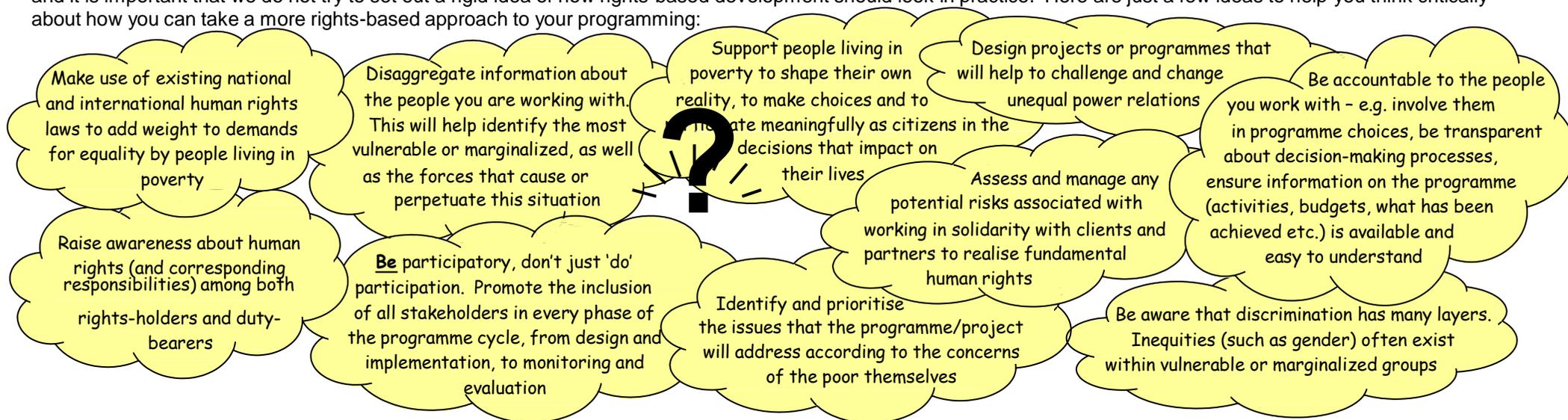
## What does working with RBA mean for development programmes?

RBA shape **what** development programmes work on by encouraging strong links between development goals and human rights standards. Working with RBA means that we are acknowledging that poverty is a denial of basic human rights, and that all development work should aim at the universal realisation of human rights.

RBA shape **how** development programmes work to achieve these goals by making the personal experience of people living in poverty a priority. RBA encourages development practitioners to show respect for people living in poverty by working in ways that enable them to be agents in their own development. This means promoting values of equality, justice, and freedom and incorporating principles of **participation, accountability, and non-discrimination** at every stage of the programme cycle.

## How can we use rights-based approaches in development work?

At a minimum, taking a rights-based approach to development will involve using human rights principles of participation, accountability and non-discrimination to guide and influence the choices that are made at every stage of the programme cycle, with the explicit goal of enabling people to realise their human rights. However, the problems faced by people living in poverty and the solutions that will work for them will be different in every context. As a result, rights-based programmes will develop differently, and it is important that we do not try to set out a rigid idea of how rights-based development should look in practice. Here are just a few ideas to help you think critically about how you can take a more rights-based approach to your programming:



## Resources and further reading

CRIN: Key Publications on Human Rights-Based Approaches: [www.crin.org/hrbap/](http://www.crin.org/hrbap/)

The Rise of Rights, IDS Policy Briefing: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/go/idspublication/the-rise-of-rights-rights-based-approaches-to-international-development>

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