



HUMAN RIGHTS AND AID EFFECTIVENESS: KEY MESSAGES ON HARMONISATION

Introduction

There is growing recognition that human rights and gender equality are functionally essential to achieving the overall goals of the Paris Declaration as well as being agreed objectives of development in themselves. Human rights, including the rights of women to equality and non-discrimination, are part of a universal value system, codified in international treaties to which all countries have subscribed. They provide a shared normative framework for dialogue between donors, partner countries and civil society on priority-setting and aid processes.

KEY MESSAGES

Donors

- Build donor harmonisation on the common platform of international human rights treaties and commitments.
- Use human rights diagnostic tools in joint planning and review missions to ensure that donor-supported programmes, at the minimum, do no harm to the human rights of people in partner countries.
- Ensure that harmonisation efforts do not lead to less attention to, and funding for, difficult agendas such as entrenched inequalities.
- Develop explicit, co-ordinated donor positions on human rights to enable a harmonized and graduated approach to deteriorating human rights situations.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND HARMONISATION: LINKAGES AND PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

Human rights provide a unique common normative and legal platform on which to build harmonisation efforts. Human rights standards and principles are established in international human rights treaties which are legally binding on countries that sign and ratify them. Today, all UN member states have ratified at least one of the core human rights treaties and 80% have ratified four or more.

Human rights standards relate to civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. National constitutions draw on civil and political human rights and many contain economic and social rights or directive principles. Building development policies and service standards on human rights provides people with clear tools for holding governments to account for their commitments.

The human rights framework has provided a strong basis for donor harmonisation in SWAps and pooled funding for Governance, Justice, Law and Order sector reform programmes. Human rights can also strengthen harmonisation to support pro-poor strategies in other sectors and can help to strengthen confidence that resources will be used for nationally agreed priorities.



Kenya: Increased alignment and harmonisation in the water sector. The Kenyan Ministry for Water and Irrigation has used international human rights standards on the right to water and sanitation as an explicit basis for pro-poor sector reform, guidelines and regulation of private water providers. These standards on availability, accessibility, affordability and quality of water supply have helped the Ministry of Water and Irrigation to develop a coherent approach to a previously fragmented sector. Using human rights standards has contributed to improved service supply and, in turn, strengthened donor confidence and increased donor alignment and harmonisation around the sector reform programme.

A growing community of practice is promoting joint reviews and lesson sharing around human rights. The UN has developed an inter-agency common understanding on the application of human rights to development and several development agencies are collaborating on human rights diagnostic tools. Development agencies are also collaborating on use of country systems and legal harmonisation (e.g the Legal Harmonisation Initiative). Potential exists for these harmonisation efforts to be mutually reinforcing. The OECD-DAC Action-Oriented Policy Paper on Human Rights and Development provides a starting point for highlighting the connections between these agendas and building consistent donor action on human rights and development.

Donor harmonisation can result in unintended consequences, including less attention to difficult agendas and fewer opportunities for civil society participation in decision making. Pooled and basket funding mechanisms may also lead to reduced financing for civil society organizations. Using human rights analysis and diagnostic tools can help to identify and mitigate these unintended negative impacts.

Explicit, harmonized discussion about human rights in political dialogue can enhance predictability around aid flows. In responding to serious human rights situations, the focus should be on harmonized, clear signals and targeted actions that do not penalize the most vulnerable in society. Rather than reducing aid in response as a first resort, donors should seek to deliver aid through a range of aid instruments and channels to continue supporting poverty reduction, and where possible, targeting their assistance to achieve progress on human rights.

In fragile contexts, harmonisation around specific human rights and social issues can provide an effective basis for development action. In Zimbabwe, for example, successful co-ordinated donor action includes the UNIFEM-led programme on gender equality and the multi-donor programme of support, led by UNICEF, for the implementation of the National Plan of Action on Orphans and Vulnerable Children.

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