Human Rights Based Approach in Finland’s Development Cooperation
Guidance note, 2015
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Cover photo: Participatory decision-making is a goal in itself. Students taking part in a teaching methods workshop, at the University of Iringa, Tanzania. Photo: TANZICT
Introduction

The objective of the paper is to introduce the Finnish perspective on the human rights based approach to development and to provide guidance on how this approach is operationalised in Finnish development cooperation. The paper also discusses the challenges and opportunities related to its implementation.

The paper provides general guidance on the application of the human rights based approach in the main channels of development cooperation – multilateral cooperation, bilateral cooperation, and cooperation with civil society and the private sector. Further, it discusses the use of the human rights based approach as part of political and policy dialogue.

This guidance has its foundations in the Finnish Constitution, the Government Development Policy Programme, Finland’s Human Rights Strategy, and the 2013 Guidelines for implementing the human rights based approach in Finland’s development policy. It builds on the experiences from implementing Finland’s development cooperation and it is inspired by the documents of other donors, such as Denmark, Germany, the European Union and the UN Statement of Common Understanding on Human Rights based Approaches to Development Cooperation and Programming, adopted by the United Nations Development Group.
PART I: Definition of the Human Rights Based Approach and the Finnish Perspective

1. Definition of the human rights based approach to development

Human rights are universally agreed basic rights which guarantee the dignity of human beings. Human rights are defined in international, regional and national legal instruments. Human rights primarily regulate the actions of the state and protect individuals. Human rights treaties are legally binding upon states after ratification. The decision to ratify a treaty is voluntary, and as such it is based on national ownership.

DEFINING HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are internationally agreed standards to protect human dignity. Human rights include civil and political, as well as social, economic and cultural rights. These rights are interrelated, interdependent and indivisible.

Civil and political rights include the right to life and privacy, freedom of thought, conscience, speech and expression, freedom of religion, freedom of the media, and freedom of assembly and movement. They also include the right to a fair trial, the right to seek redress and legal remedy, rights of political participation and the right to vote.

Economic, social and cultural rights include such rights as the rights to education, the highest attainable standard of health and social security, the right to work and an adequate standard of living, including the right to food, and the right to adequate housing, water and sanitation.

Collective rights are held by groups and include, for example, the rights of minorities to language, culture and identity and the rights of indigenous peoples to preserve their land, language, religion and traditional livelihoods, and the right to enjoy their culture in community with others.

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1 A list of the core UN human rights treaties and monitoring bodies:
http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CoreInstruments.aspx
http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx
By ratifying human rights treaties, states commit to respect, protect and fulfil the content of the rights. Human rights commitments are implemented through states’ legislation, policy, budgeting and administration. Human rights thus constitute a set of performance standards against which authorities at all levels are accountable.

**STATES AND AUTHORITIES HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO**

**Respect:** Refrain from interfering with the enjoyment of the right  
Example: States should refrain from carrying out forced evictions and not arbitrarily restrict the right to vote or the freedom of association.

**Protect:** Prevent others from interfering with the enjoyment of the right  
Example: States must ensure that parents do not prevent girls from going to school.

**Fulfil:** Adopt appropriate measures towards the full realisation of the right  
Example: States should adopt measures aimed at improving people’s access to and utilisation of resources and means to ensure their livelihood and provide essential health services such as accessible primary care and clean water.

**The human rights based approach to development (HRBA)** means that human rights are used as a basis for setting the objectives for development policy and cooperation. In addition, it means that the processes of development cooperation are guided by human rights principles.

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2 A list of the core UN human rights treaties that define the content of each right:  
http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CoreInstruments.aspx
The rule of law is crucial for efficient realisation of human rights and for ensuring redress of human rights violations. The rule of law entails division of power between the legislative, executive and judicial branches and clear accountability layers. This means that information on laws is disseminated and they are executed in a fair and non-discriminatory manner by capable institutions.

2. Finnish perspectives on the human rights based approach

The Constitution of Finland identifies human rights protection as one of the objectives of Finland’s participation in international cooperation. This objective has been introduced into Finland’s human rights and development policies. While there is a common international understanding that the core of the HRBA is to strengthen human rights through development cooperation, there is no universally accepted definition of how this should

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3 The Constitution of Finland, 1999, Chapter 1.
be done in practice. Finland’s perspective is guided by the UN Common Understanding on the HRBA\(^4\) and Finland has adapted it to its own role as a development partner.

For Finland, the HRBA entails a **systematic integration of human rights as means and objective in** development cooperation. This is operationalised through a commitment to strengthen

- the realisation of human rights as a development result
- inclusive, participatory and non-discriminatory development processes, which are transparent and enhance accountability
- enhanced capacities of rights-holders, duty-bearers and, when relevant, other responsible actors\(^5\)

This implies that human rights principles are considered and applied in the programming, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. It also entails that mapping of stakeholders according to their role and responsibility in implementing human rights commitments is an important part of the programming and planning of development interventions.

Finland operationalises the HRBA gradually in its development cooperation and recognises that this is an institutional learning process. Adaptations to the approach will be made as part of upcoming revisions of guidance, manuals and procedures. The approach may also affect development cooperation priorities and require adaptations in ongoing programmes and projects.

This guidance takes effect immediately upon its publication. It is applied in the planning of all new development interventions and in the reviews and evaluations of existing interventions. More specific guidance is provided by revisions of instrument and sector-specific manuals, as well as of the Ministry’s procedures. During the transition period the Ministry’s staff is applying this general guidance according to their capacities and by using the Ministry’s advisor services. The guidance provides an immediate tool for strengthening policy dialogue and advocacy work.

The objective is that Finland’s development cooperation is human rights based and that its adaptations in programming and different interventions are made according to informed choices. **The minimum level is that all Finnish development interventions are human rights sensitive.** The aim is that all interventions will be human rights progressive or transformative.

Finland does not finance interventions that are human rights blind or that have been identified to further exacerbate or contribute to discrimination or human rights violations.


\(^5\) See definitions in section 2.3.
The responsibility to ensure the minimum level lies with the units responsible for each intervention. Support to the units is provided by the development policy advisors and the informal HRBA coordination group consisting of members from different departments. The issue is also included in the Quality Assurance Group’s instructions.

**LEVELS OF HUMAN RIGHTS CONSIDERATION IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION**

The table includes key elements for each level to define and set the ambition level for the intervention.

**Human rights blind**
The development intervention is ignorant of human rights and the risk of unintentional harmful effects has not been assessed.

**Human rights sensitive – application of human rights as a process**
Human rights principles guide the programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the intervention. A basic human rights assessment has been carried out in order to be sufficiently aware of the human rights situation. This is done to avoid unintentional negative effects on the enjoyment of human rights and to ensure that the intervention does not contribute to discriminatory structures, norms and practices. The intervention does not have an explicit commitment to human rights in terms of expected results. Elements related to capacity development or advocacy may be included in the intervention.

**Human rights progressive – application of human rights as a process and partial integration as expected results**
The development intervention adheres to human rights principles in its processes and includes expected results that further the respect, protection or fulfilment of human rights. The needs, concerns and capacity of different duty-bearers and right-holders – especially vulnerable groups – are addressed in the project activities and expected results. Disaggregated data is systematically used and analysed when planning and monitoring the interventions and their results. However, root causes in legislation, customs, norms and practices might be unattended to by the intervention. Elements of capacity development or advocacy may be included in the intervention.

**Human rights transformative – application of human rights as a process and full integration in terms of expected results, with explicit focus on capacity development and advocacy work**
The development intervention actively seeks to transform societies and eliminate discrimination by addressing root causes in legislation, customs, norms and practices, in line with human rights standards and principles. Human rights guide the identification of expected results. Determined action is directed towards capacity development and advocacy. Accountability is emphasised as programming is explicitly framed in terms of rights and obligations. The development intervention is coupled with a strategic policy dialogue on specific human rights concerns relevant to the intervention.
2.1. The realisation of human rights as a development result

Finland seeks to ensure that all its development interventions and policies further the realisation of human rights. Economic, social, cultural, and civil and political rights are used in the identification of the expected results of each development intervention.

For Finland, applying the human rights based approach means that expected results of development interventions can include improvements in the human rights situation, changes in partner countries’ planning and decision-making processes, and a reduction in identified capacity gaps.

When considering human rights as a result Finland emphasises universality among the guiding principles. This entails that while development interventions are designed to fit local contexts, cultural relativism cannot be accepted as an excuse for not fulfilling human rights commitments. In addition, it means that each development intervention promotes the realisation of the same rights for everyone without discrimination. The human rights based approach does not, however, imply solving the problems of all people at once. Available resources require interventions to be focused and choices need to be made. While prioritising interventions, Finland emphasises the need to pay special attention to the poorest and the most vulnerable groups who face obstacles in enjoying the same benefits and services as the rest of the population.

When setting the expected results, Finland uses rights- and sector-specific quality criteria related to human rights, such as accessibility, acceptability, availability, affordability and quality. The international and regional human rights monitoring mechanisms have elaborated these criteria as guidance for states on what steps need to be taken in order for specific rights to be enjoyed in practice. In addition, these monitoring mechanisms provide recommendations and guidance on how human rights can be strengthened in a country-specific setting. Finland makes use of sector-specific criteria and country recommendations when priorities and expected results for different interventions are considered. The recommendations provided by the monitoring mechanisms help identify capacity gaps and can be used to design interventions aimed at improving the capacity of the duty-bearers to ensure the fulfilment of rights.

When setting expected results, Finland pays attention to the fact that some human rights obligations require immediate action from states, whereas other obligations can be realised progressively according to the maximum amount of available resources and the capacity of the state. Immediate action is required for a number of civil and polit-

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6 See the home page of the different human rights instruments and monitoring mechanisms for further information: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx
http://www.achpr.org/instruments/achpr/
http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/
http://www.coe.int/en/

7 See definitions in section 2.3.
cal rights, such as the prohibition of torture. Progressive realisation is acceptable in the case of economic, social and cultural rights, but states have a core obligation to satisfy the minimum essential level of each right.  

2.2. Inclusive, participatory and non-discriminatory development processes, which are transparent and enhance accountability

Finland emphasises that the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation processes of its development interventions should be as inclusive, participatory and non-discriminatory as possible. Similarly, in its policy dialogue Finland encourages its development partners to strengthen inclusion, participation, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability in their decision-making and planning processes.

In order to ensure participation and inclusion, development interventions need to include analyses of the main barriers and their underlying causes for equal participation by different groups. Based on these analyses, interventions are more apt to address factors causing and contributing to exclusion and discrimination, for example, by influencing legal and policy frameworks or administrative procedures of authorities if discriminatory practices are identified. In its interventions Finland aims to address multiple forms of discrimination, which prevent different groups from participating in decision-making processes and enjoying the benefits of development. Finland pays particular attention to the rights of indigenous peoples to free, prior and informed consent in matters that affect their lives, recognising the specific rights of indigenous peoples to participate in decision-making in matters affecting them, as set out in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Transparency, information sharing and open communication – including top down and bottom up – are critical components of participatory processes. Participation can only be meaningful if relevant information is available on time and in an accessible language and format, considering, for example, age, gender, disability, as well as ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds. Finland emphasises freedom of association and expression as crucial elements to guarantee effective participation.

Accountability is enhanced by supporting dialogue and cooperation between duty-bearers, rights-holders and other responsible actors. Awareness of human rights commitments among the actors and the identification of clear mandates and responsibilities have the potential to further strengthen accountability. Finland considers accountability to be at the heart of the HRBA.

For socio-economic rights, the following obligations are of immediate effect: a) The obligation not to discriminate between different groups of people in the realisation of the rights in question; b) The obligation to take steps (including devising specific strategies and programmes) targeted deliberately towards the full realisation of the rights in question; and c) The obligation to monitor progress in the realisation of human rights. d) Accessible mechanisms of redress should be available where rights are violated.


See definitions in section 2.3.
2.3. Enhanced capacities of rights-holders, duty-bearers and other responsible actors

Applying the human rights based approach means that Finland’s development interventions support partner countries in the implementation of their respective human rights commitments. Finland also supports civil society actors to be aware of, advocate for and claim human rights, and to work in partnerships with duty-bearers.

For analytical purposes stakeholders are identified and categorised as **duty-bearers**, **rights-holders** and **other responsible actors**. Rights-holders and duty-bearers are the key stakeholders in implementing human rights commitments. However, other responsible actors can also play a role in this. Their minimum responsibility is to respect human rights; however, they can also assume a role in protecting and fulfilling human rights, for example, as service providers.

**Rights-holders:**
All individual human beings (not only citizens). Rights-holders can also be groups, as some rights can only be enjoyed collectively within the community to which an individual belongs (e.g. minorities, indigenous peoples).

**Duty-bearers:**
States and authorities at different levels with the mandate and responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil rights.

**Other responsible actors:**
Civil society actors, donors, international organisations, service providers, the private sector, traditional or religious leaders, among others.

Finland has supported the Myanmar Census through the UNFPA. Updated and reliable demographic information is key in applying the HRBA. Photo: Erja-Outi Heino
When mapping relevant stakeholders, Finland works towards ensuring that their respective capacity gaps are identified and assessed. This enables appropriate development interventions to address them with relevant baselines for expected results. Finland works in coordination with other partners and pays special attention to the capacities of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups.

3. Human rights based approach and Finland’s other development cooperation approaches and priorities

The purpose of this section is to highlight how the HRBA relates to other development priorities that guide Finnish development cooperation.

3.1. Human rights based approach and poverty reduction

A human rights based approach to development recognises poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon. By considering the roles and capacities of duty-bearers, rights-holders and other responsible actors, as well as underlying factors for exclusion or discrimination, HRBA focuses on the root causes of poverty and helps sharpen the strategies for achieving poverty eradication.

The human rights based approach recognises that action to combat poverty is not only a moral duty, but an obligation under existing international human rights law. Governments have a duty to use the maximum amount of available resources, including available development aid, to ensure that the minimum level of basic human needs is secured for the whole population. This requires policies and measures that prioritise and specifically address the situation of those living in poverty. Consequently, there should also be accountability for policy choices, actions or failure to act that create, uphold or exacerbate poverty.

Applying the HRBA to development cooperation does not necessarily imply changes in the prioritisation of sectors or channels in addressing poverty. However, a reorientation of some elements of a country strategy or cooperation portfolio may become relevant based on a human rights situation analysis. In addition, in the application of the HRBA, human rights provide minimum standards for the expected results once the sector and channel of aid to address poverty have been chosen.

The key operational point on poverty reduction and the HRBA is:

→ The human rights based approach helps to address poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon, analyse the root causes of poverty and sharpen the strategies for achieving sustainable poverty eradication.

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3.2. Human rights based approach and cross-cutting objectives

A key objective of the HRBA is to reduce inequalities between individuals, groups and societies by ensuring that human rights are enjoyed by all, including the most vulnerable and marginalised groups.

The objective of reducing inequalities means addressing those factors that cause power imbalances or possible discrimination of groups of people or areas. The prioritisation of interventions reducing inequalities needs to rely on an analysis which can be conducted as part of a wider context or human rights analysis conducted for an intervention. The analysis needs to focus on physical, social, economic, cultural or legislative barriers to having rights and access to resources and decision-making in each context.

The objective of gender mainstreaming is to integrate the gender perspective into development interventions with the goal of achieving gender equality. Analysing gender helps to identify different roles and responsibilities women and men have in particular contexts and the relation those roles have with access to power, resources and decision-making.

In using the HRBA in gender mainstreaming and for reducing inequalities, international human rights commitments and principles are integrated into addressing the root causes for inequalities. This helps in defining priorities, actions and objectives for reaching equality in different development interventions.

Climate change directly affects the enjoyment of many human rights such as rights to food, water and health. Using the HRBA to increase climate sustainability means the adoption of appropriate measures and policies to mitigate the impacts of climate change on human rights. Furthermore, applying the HRBA means that mitigation measures take into account vulnerable groups, including indigenous peoples and people living in disaster-prone areas.

The key operational points for the cross-cutting objectives in line with the HRBA are:

- **Wide consultation preceding the programming and planning systematically include consultations with women and relevant vulnerable and marginalised groups. It considers the gaps regarding the realisation of the rights vis-à-vis these groups.**

- **Data and baseline information on results include indicators on identified capacity gaps. Data is disaggregated as far as possible (sex, age, ethnicity, disability) in order to track and monitor progress and inequalities.**

3.3. Human rights based approach, fragility and conflict sensitivity

Conflict and poverty are often correlated and they interlink with the human rights performance of the state. In addition, human rights violations can be drivers and consequences of conflict or fragility. Interventions in fragile states need to be based on a comprehensive understanding of the power relations and the root causes of conflict, poverty and the human rights challenges. Finland is committed to design its interventions following the
principles of the New Deal\textsuperscript{12} and OECD’s Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations\textsuperscript{13}, emphasising working in multi-stakeholder partnerships, in good coordination with other donors and, when feasible, aligning aid with local priorities.

The application of the HRBA is adjusted to legal and political realities in fragile states and in conflict or post-conflict settings. In these situations the expectations on the duty-bearers to perform their duties might need to be adjusted to capacity constraints that often (in conflict settings) are serious. Support might also need to be steered to other responsible actors, for example, as service providers. However, the responsibility for implementing human rights commitments always remains with the state and its authorities. This means that support to responsible actors should be linked to capacity development of the authorities.

In situations of armed conflicts or emergency, the application of the HRBA is guided by both international human rights law and international humanitarian law. These legal frameworks are complementary and together they outline the responsibilities and rights of duty-bearers and rights-holders. Although certain human rights treaties allow states to adjust their obligations temporarily in exceptional circumstances, that is, in times of public emergency threatening the life of the nation, non-derogable human rights cannot be suspended even during a conflict.\textsuperscript{14} Ensuring human rights in a conflict or post-conflict setting can be challenging; for example, if institutions playing a key role in their fulfilment are not functioning or when the state structures are unwilling to assume their responsibilities. When identifying entry points for interventions it is necessary to take into account which human rights commitments the state has undertaken, which human rights concerns are the most pressing ones and what the capacity gaps of the duty-bearers and rights-holders are. The design of the interventions needs to include built-in flexibility for the implementation in fast-changing circumstances.

The key operational points for applying the HRBA in situations of fragility and conflict are:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textbf{Conflict sensitivity focusing on the elements causing or triggering the conflict, an assessment of the power relations and the capacity of the duty-bearsers are crucial for a successful implementation of the intervention.}
  \item \textbf{In situations of deterioration or non-existence of stable and capable state institutions support to other responsible actors as service providers may be temporarily needed.}
  \item \textbf{The importance of capacity development and supporting peaceful relations and settlements between all stakeholders is emphasised.}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{12} http://www.newdeal4peace.org/
\textsuperscript{13} http://www.oecd.org/dacfragilestates/thetoofragilestatesprinciples.htm
\textsuperscript{14} Non-derogable human rights: right to life (prohibition of arbitrary deprivation of life), prohibition of torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment, freedom from medical or scientific experimentation without consent, prohibition of slavery and servitude, prohibition of retroactive application of penal laws, and right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
3.4. Human rights based approach and aid effectiveness

The human rights based approach and the commitments made in the aid effectiveness agenda support each other in many aspects, such as strengthening ownership and accountability. They may also be complementary like the HRBA and results-based management. Some challenges also exist, such as ensuring harmonised practices. The key linkages and challenges for Finnish development cooperation are presented here according to the five Paris principles.

**Ownership:** Finland emphasises the strengthening of democratic ownership by duty-bearers and rights-holders in implementing human rights commitments. This emphasis interlinks with and is strengthened by the human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination and by participation and inclusion. Finland emphasises democratic ownership both in programming and in the entire cycle of development interventions.

**Alignment:** Finland is committed to support partner countries’ own development strategies and use of their own country systems when possible. Combining the HRBA with alignment means that using national systems includes the capacity development of duty-bearers in, for example, budgeting (gender-sensitive budgeting and inclusive budgeting processes) and national statistics (capacities to produce disaggregated data).

**Transparency and accountability:** Finland is committed to increase the transparency of its own development cooperation and is currently providing timely information on its financing decisions. Finland also encourages all its partners to be open and transparent in their development financing and its use. Accountability, in turn, links to the principles of transparency, inclusion and participation. Finland seeks to support mechanisms of accountability both at central and local levels to strengthen the respective roles of duty-bearers and rights-holders.

**Results-based management (RBM):** RBM is a management tool that helps to reach desired results and report on them, while the HRBA is a framework that helps define the results and the process through which the results are achieved. Thus, Finland considers the HRBA and RBM complementary and compatible. Applying the HRBA requires that human rights principles and commitments are used in planning processes and that outcome indicators are included in results frameworks.

**Harmonisation:** Applying the HRBA in harmonised donor practices may prove difficult as not all donors are applying the HRBA or their applications may vary. Finland aims to strengthen harmonised application of the HRBA in the donor community, for example, through joint analyses and assessments. In addition, Finland promotes the application of the HRBA when participating in joint programming processes.
PART II: Operationalisation of the Human Rights Based Approach in Finland’s Development Cooperation

4. Political and policy dialogue

Finland’s application of the HRBA includes a strategic and focused political and policy dialogue with development partners at all levels. The policy dialogue does not have to follow a specific format; Finland selects the channels and partners, formulates the content of the key messages and chooses the modalities of the dialogue based on the situation or issue in question. There is also always a choice in terms of public or silent diplomacy and the tone of the discussions. The role of the embassies making these choices is important. In addition, it is important to ensure the coherence of Finland’s messages at international and national levels.

Finland encourages open and genuine human rights dialogue promoting the exchange of good practices for the overcoming of challenges related to the implementation of international obligations. Dialogue may concern respect, protection or fulfilment of human rights, any of the human rights principles or the identified capacity gaps of duty-bearers and rights-holders. Even though cultural differences can be taken into account, they do not justify violations of human rights. Finland’s starting point to any discussion on human rights is the principle of universality.

The European Union (EU) is one of the most important channels for Finland in advocacy and human rights-related dialogue. The European Union holds regular dialogues on human rights with more than 30 non-EU countries. The EU’s Human Rights Strategies and country positions inform the EU’s development policy, development cooperation and programming. Finland is active within the European Union in ensuring that

Finnish strategic priorities are included in strategies, positions and in the political dialogues that the European Union conducts.

Finland also participates, as a member of the European Union, in the political and policy dialogue within multilateral organisations in their governing bodies. In addition, bilateral and Nordic consultations are held regularly. The focus of Finland’s participation is defined in the influencing strategies prepared for these organisations. These are discussed in the section on multilateral cooperation.

Political dialogue at multilateral and national fora is informed by the recommendations made by the UN human rights monitoring systems, in particular the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the treaty bodies and the special procedures. Regional human rights instruments and the recommendations made by their respective monitoring can also have an added value.

Country situations are discussed in the UPR under the Human Rights Council. In these discussions Finland focuses on giving recommendations particularly to its long-term

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16 Home page of the different human rights monitoring mechanisms:
http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx  
http://www.achpr.org/instruments/achpr/  
http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/  
http://www.coe.int/en/
partner countries and is committed to using the recommendations made by treaty bodies and UN special mechanisms for its country-level work and dialogue. Particularly the recommendations accepted by governments can, in addition to the national constitution and legislation, be used as a starting point for bilateral policy dialogue.

At country level Finland integrates human rights issues into dialogue with partner countries in different ways, including bilateral meetings and official visits. Additionally, aid coordination structures, including sector and general budget support groups, offer an important opportunity for addressing human rights issues. Joint dialogue structures such as the Development Partners Group (DPG), the EU Head of Missions (HOMs) and Head of Cooperation (HOC) Groups are also useful for human rights dialogue. Cooperation with like-minded partners can be instrumental in delicate situations. Civil society partners such as human rights organisations can provide Finland with information concerning their own findings, which can be helpful for policy discussions, as well as be instrumental in advocating for change at large.

Political and policy dialogue and development interventions can be mutually reinforcing to further human rights. Finland makes use of the opportunities provided by development interventions in furthering the dialogue on human rights. This is useful particularly in situations where a human rights dialogue is difficult.

The Public Guidelines of the Finnish Foreign Ministry on the implementation of the European Union’s Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders offer recommendations on how to address the violence or pressure suffered by human rights defenders as part of the dialogue with partner countries.

5. Multilateral cooperation

Finland adheres to the HRBA also in its multilateral cooperation through partnerships with international organisations, including international financing institutions (IFIs).

Finland has influencing strategies for all international organisations which receive a substantial amount of Finnish financing annually. The selection criteria for organisations receiving funding vary. When preparing influencing strategies the human rights based approach must be considered. This entails assessing how the HRBA is taken into consideration in the organisation’s policies and objective setting, guidance on implementation processes and assessing the HRBA capacities of the organisation’s personnel. On the basis of the assessment, appropriate measures are defined to strengthen the HRBA within these organisations. This also takes into account the division of labour between the donors to avoid overlapping actions. The influencing strategies are designed and monitored by those departments and units responsible for the funding.
In the **International Financing Institutions (IFIs)**, Finland encourages the integration of the HRBA by using executive board meetings, annual meetings and other relevant fora to bring forth the human rights perspective of the agenda. The HRBA is primarily operationalised through the IFIs’ **safeguards policies**, which aim at ensuring that the banks adhere to and promote human rights principles in their operations and take into account human rights in the context analysis. Safeguards policies are bank-specific, although they often focus on the same human rights principles which guide Finland’s HRBA. The statutes of IFIs, however, exclude involvement in political affairs of the partner countries and therefore human rights are seldom explicitly mentioned in these policies. Finland prioritises the strengthening of the HRBA in the existing safeguards policies. Finland is also active in promoting their application in the IFIs’ interventions both at the headquarters and at the country level in Finland’s priority sectors.

In the case of the **UN, including its Funds and Programmes**, Finland uses their governing bodies to bring forward human rights issues and to strengthen the human rights based approach in organisation-wide strategies, policies and action plans. **The Common Understanding among UN Agencies** provides the basis for Finland’s assessment on and the application of the HRBA of the UN and its Funds and Programmes. When participating in the work of governing bodies and their preparatory processes, Finland focuses on those issues which are defined as priorities in the influencing strategies and promotes the human rights priorities set in the Finnish Development Policy and the Human Rights Strategy.

In addition, Finland provides directed funding to the promotion of human rights in the work of multilateral organisations. Finland can, for example, consider secondment of professionals as a means of strengthening the HRBA and the focus on human rights issues.

Finland also finances global development interventions of multilateral organisations. These interventions need to be at least human rights sensitive according to Finland’s minimum level requirement. Units and permanent representations responsible for the dialogue with the organisation during the planning phase need to collaborate with the organisations to ensure that the requirements of the minimum level are fulfilled. When participating in the monitoring of each intervention, the units and representations should prioritise aspects of the HRBA in implementation.

The financing of development interventions of multilateral organisations at the country level is discussed in the following section.

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17 The African Development Bank is an exception to the rule: the recently updated safeguards policy of the AfDB explicitly states that “the AfDB encourages member countries to observe international human rights norms, standards, and best practices on the basis of their commitments made under the International Human Rights Covenants and the African Charter of Human and Peoples’ Rights” (AfDB: Integrated Safeguards Policy Statement, 2013).

6. Bilateral cooperation

6.1. Country programming

The purpose of the country programming is to position the development policy objectives and the support of Finland to the partner country development goals, the support given by other donors and the country context. As part of the context analysis, the country teams of Geographic Departments in charge of programming need to understand the human rights situation, including how committed and capable the partner country is to respecting, protecting and fulfilling different human rights. The basis for country programming is the partner country’s own development strategy and plans, their goals and expected development results. However, it may be necessary to include additional human rights-related objectives in Finland’s country strategy, if these, from the Finnish point of view, do not receive adequate attention within the partner country’s own strategies, plans and actions.

Finland needs to make choices concerning which partner country objectives to support. Such strategic choices are based on different kinds of analyses, for example, of the partner country’s socio-economic and human rights situation. Past experience and results, other donor support, as well as Finland’s own policy priorities and comparative advantage, are taken into account. Existing analyses made by other donors and civil society, among others, are used, and information is also drawn from the UN human rights monitoring mechanisms. Finland’s aim is a participatory and inclusive country programming process. This is aimed through consultations and dialogue with government, donors, civil society and private sector representatives, both in the partner country and in Finland (including diaspora), including representatives of vulnerable and marginalised groups.

6.2. Identification and formulation of interventions

After choices have been made to support certain partner country objectives, for example, in good governance, agriculture, rural water supply or basic education, the identification and formulation of development interventions commence. In applying the HRBA, these objectives are analysed against the sector-specific criteria of human rights.

The human rights principles are applied in this process:

- No group may be discriminated against; meaning, for example, inclusiveness in the provision of basic services.
- Participation is seen both as a means and an end; for example, local stakeholders participate both in the planning and implementation of interventions.

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19 See section 2.1.
20 See human rights principles in section 1.
Special attention is paid to the vulnerable and marginalised groups based on available resources; for example, populations living in remote rural areas where access to services is poor.

Support may be direct, for example, strengthening the capacity of communities to self-organise, or it may be indirect, for example, supporting legislative reforms or their enforcement.

Early, broad and open access to information and broad participation in identification and formulation improve transparency and opportunities for stakeholders to influence the process.

The definitions concerning expected results and the implementing approach that are decided in identification and formulation processes should be discussed widely with stakeholders in order to increase ownership and secure improved accountability.

The different levels of human rights consideration\(^{21}\) apply to the identification and formulation process. Within one country strategy, some interventions may be human rights sensitive, and others may be human rights progressive or transformative.

\(^{21}\) See levels of human rights consideration in section 2.

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Finland has a long history of supporting the water and sanitation sector in Nepal. Inclusive and participatory processes, local ownership and increased access to water in remote areas are priorities for the Finnish support. Photo: Marja-Leena Kultanen
All interventions supported by Finland, regardless whether specific rights have been set as expected results or not, should adhere to the human rights principles. While all interventions do not need to be designed to further the rights of the most disadvantaged population, the principle of non-discrimination should, however, be ensured throughout the identification, formulation and implementation.

With regard to the setting of expected results, some interventions relate directly to furthering specific human rights such as the right to food, education, or water and sanitation. Other interventions, such as support to the private sector, may only indirectly contribute to the realisation of a specific human right (e.g. the right to work, the right to an adequate standard of living).

In the identification and formulation process, claims of rights-holders and obligations of duty-bearers are identified and analysed. This analysis takes into account the human rights obligations contained in relevant international human rights conventions and relevant recommendations made by human rights monitoring mechanisms.

Subsequently, the capacity of rights-holders to claim the right and the capacity of duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations is assessed. In the case of capacity constraints, support measures are identified and formulated to build up and strengthen these capacities. While the final responsibility for fulfilling the right normally lies with authorities (duty-bearers), it may also be necessary to strengthen the capacity of other responsible actors in advocacy, monitoring or in the provision of services.

Economic, social and cultural rights can be fulfilled progressively. Their fulfilment depends on the resources available, choices made, and – sometimes also – on political will. Although fundamentally human rights are universal, in practice priorities have to be set since the partner countries normally face numerous challenges.

When planning an intervention addressing economic, social and cultural rights, the sector-specific quality criteria related to human rights can be used, for example, in the following way: the service to be provided (e.g. water or education) should be affordable, available and accessible; the methods used (e.g. in teaching or in extension services) should be culturally and socially acceptable; and the accountability of duty-bearers to provide these services should be clear and known to all. In practice, however, progressivity, pragmatism and sensitivity to the local context apply.

When designing an intervention, its expected results at the different levels may be linked with the corresponding rights: impact may be expressed in terms of rights being respected, protected and fulfilled. Outcomes, in turn, may be stated as improvements in the performance of duty-bearers and rights-holders. Finally, outputs could be tangible changes in the capacity of duty-bearers (motivation, authority, resources), or the capacity of rights-holders (information, attitudes, motivation, risks, resources). Quantitative, qualitative and process indicators are defined to describe how the intended results will be measured. Indicators should capture the key elements of the intended level of human
rights consideration and data should be disaggregated by gender and, when relevant, by other groups of the population.

6.3. Implementation and monitoring of interventions

The design of an intervention is normally reviewed when implementation starts, for example, during the inception phase. Open issues are clarified and, if needed, the project document is updated. The results framework, baseline data with indicators and targets, and the monitoring system are completed. In line with the minimum level of human rights consideration, the human rights principles always guide this work. Accordingly, the results framework itself, and the related implementation and monitoring processes, should be transparent, accountable, participatory and ensure non-discrimination.

The higher the level of human rights consideration is, the more HRBA-related expertise and skills are required from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs’ country teams and those stakeholders involved in implementation. Thus, increasing the knowledge of human rights and skills in the HRBA may become part of the activities of the intervention.

During implementation, work plans and progress reports build on the targets and indicators of the results framework and the baseline, capturing the key elements of the intended level of human rights consideration and its implementation. Mid-term and oth-
er reviews are conducted when the need arises to further analyse the information collected through monitoring, including on human rights. Reviews often address particular areas of implementation. They can thus also be used to assess the level of human rights consideration of the intervention, and to propose measures on how to strengthen it.

7. Civil society support

Finland promotes adherence to human rights standards and the human rights principles by all civil society partners receiving support from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA). To receive financing from the Ministry, civil society partners’ activities are required to be at least human rights-sensitive. Civil society partners are also required to apply the Ministry’s Ethical Code of Conduct, which is attached to all financing decisions. The Ethical Code of Conduct requires particularly the safeguarding of the principles of non-discrimination and participation. Additionally, respect for human dignity and human rights is specifically stated and adherence to the standards of good governance is required. The Finnish support to civil society organisations can include 1) strengthening civil society in the partner country, 2) improving the provision of public services and 3) advocacy. These themes link to the promotion of human rights in the following way:

**Strengthening civil society in the partner country** is aimed at supporting an enabling environment for civil society and a representative, legitimate and locally based civil society. In addition, Finland’s priority is to promote the right and capacity of rights-holders to organise themselves and express their views while formulating demands and expectations towards duty-bearers. **Improving the provision of public services** includes support to the civil society in its complementary role in providing basic services for vulnerable groups in situations when duty-bearers may lack adequate capacity and means to perform their duties. Finland emphasises the importance of local ownership and collaboration with the duty-bearers to ensure the sustainability of services and to avoid creating service structures parallel to or separate from those of the government. Finally, **advocacy** includes the strengthening of civil society’s capacity to carry out lobbying, networking and advocacy work on human rights, and its capacity to assess duty-bearers’ accountability vis-à-vis the human rights obligations and commitments.

The Ministry for Foreign Affairs takes the following steps concerning the application of the HRBA in national and international civil society partners’ proposals to ensure that the activities being financed are at least human rights-sensitive:

**In the assessment of civil society partners’ proposals:** An assessment of the human rights situation is required in the proposals to ensure that the intervention does not contribute...
to any human rights violations or discrimination. Only proposals including the required assessment are financed. The guiding principles of participation, inclusion, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability are systematically screened as part of the overall assessment of proposals. This means that each proposal must identify who are the rights-holders and duty-bearers. The civil society partners are required to follow the Ethical Code of Conduct in the implementation of the financed activities.

In the monitoring of civil society partners’ activities and in dialogue with them: The Ministry for Foreign Affairs focuses on the following elements in its monitoring and dialogue: 1) the application of human rights principles in the implementation of activities; 2) the achievement of the expected human rights-related results; and 3) the changes in the capacities of the rights-holders. In addition, the Ministry encourages civil society partners to strengthen links, coordination and information flows with the duty-bearers and other civil society organisations. Support provided to civil society actors in partner countries can be steered towards supporting organisations to raise concerns and debate around issues on human rights and development priorities in the given context. The adherence to the Ethical Code of Conduct by the civil society partners is monitored as part of the dialogue.

The HRBA is also applied in the activities financed through the Embassies’ Fund for Local Cooperation (FLC). The application of human rights principles needs to be followed in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these activities. The revised Practitioners’ manual will provide guidance on how the HRBA is applied in FLC-financed interventions.

8. Private sector instruments

Companies and private sector actors are considered responsible actors, bound by national laws and with a duty to respect human rights, although they are not direct duty-bearers under international human rights law.

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), endorsed by the United Nations Human Rights Council, is an important milestone in defining a common international understanding of the role the private sector plays in human rights. The UNGPs clarify and elaborate the implications of relevant provisions of international human rights standards on business and provide guidance on how to put them into operation. The UNGPs refer to and derive from states’ existing obligations under international law.

23 The Ethical Code of Conduct is a document which is included in all decisions concerning discretionary transfers granted by the Finnish Government. It sets out the most important ethical standards to be observed in development cooperation and development communications carried out using discretionary transfers. Available at: http://formin.finland.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=71038&nodeid=15436&contentlan=2&culture=en-US

The UNPGs outline that companies have to respect human rights and that they are expected to exercise due diligence in order to prevent human rights abuses and provide adequate remedies when violations have been committed. This means taking proactive steps to understand how existing and proposed activities may affect human rights and taking measures to prevent negative effects. The scale of the human rights impact assessments depends on the industry and on the national and local context. There are situations in which companies may have additional responsibilities — for example, where they perform certain public functions, or because they have undertaken additional commitments voluntarily. It is the state’s duty to protect against human rights abuses by third parties, including private sector actors.

The UN Global Compact25, in turn, is a strategic policy initiative for businesses to align their operations and strategies with the universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption. The ten Global Compact principles are based on the UNGPs and are also in line with ILO’s core labour standards.26 The UNGPs complement the ten principles of the Global Compact by providing a wider framework to guide businesses in fulfilling their commitment to respect human rights.

### UN GLOBAL COMPACT PRINCIPLES

| Principle 1: | support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights |
| Principle 2: | make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses |
| Principle 3: | uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining |
| Principle 4: | contribute to the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour |
| Principle 5: | contribute to the effective abolition of child labour |
| Principle 6: | ensure the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation |
| Principle 7: | support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges |
| Principle 8: | undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility |
| Principle 9: | encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies |
| Principle 10: | work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery |

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25 [https://www.unglobalcompact.org/](https://www.unglobalcompact.org/)
Finland also applies the HRBA to its cooperation with the private sector. The minimum level is that activities financed through the Ministry for Foreign Affairs’ private sector instruments are human rights sensitive. In line with the UNPGs, this entails that partners receiving funding from the Ministry’s private sector instruments have conducted a basic assessment of the impact on human rights of their business operations funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and they are taking the findings into account to avoid or mitigate negative effects on human rights. As a part of the minimum level, private sector partners are also required to align themselves with the UN Global Compact principles in their operations. The aim is that private sector partners act fully in accordance with the UNPGs, in particular by adopting due diligence processes. This entails that in addition to the human rights impact assessment of their business operations and the integration of findings into the operations - private sector partners have in place monitoring and communication mechanisms, as well as mechanisms for complaints regarding adverse effects of their activities.

When assessing funding proposals through private sector instruments, the following elements are taken into account:

- Private sector partners receiving funding must conduct a basic assessment of the impact on human rights of their business operations funded by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in a manner and scale appropriate to the sector and to the volume and type of their operations.
- Projects receiving funding should offer solutions to developing countries to promote decent employment and inclusive economic development, and to meet social and environmental development challenges.
- Priority should be given to projects that directly or indirectly enhance human rights or socially responsible businesses that empower vulnerable and marginalised groups (e.g. increase accessibility of the labour market and productive resources).

In the monitoring of private sector partners’ operations and in dialogue with them the Ministry for Foreign Affairs focuses on the application of human rights principles in the implementation of companies’ operations in line with the UNGPs and the UN Global Compact. In addition, the Ministry focuses on the achievement of companies’ expected results and their linkages to the realisation of human rights. As part of its dialogue and in its collaboration with private sector partners, the Ministry can consider funding and support to companies to develop their own capacities to observe human rights and to implement the HRBA. In the case of concessional credits, support to state institutions can be considered to develop their capacities to fulfil their human rights obligations.

In addition to providing financing to private sector partners’ proposals, the Ministry plays an active role in the governing bodies of the institutions managing the private sector instruments. In these bodies the Ministry uses its role as an owner to strengthen the application of the human rights based approach in the institutions’ strategies, policies, guidance and operations. The Ministry also encourages the institutions to apply the safeguards policies of the International Financing Institutions (IFIs) when applicable.
ANNEX 1:

List of relevant links

Guidelines for implementing the human rights based approach in Finland’s development policy (2013)
http://formin.finland.fi/Public/default.aspx?contentid=271139


UN human rights treaties
http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CoreInstruments.aspx

UN human rights monitoring bodies
http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx

UN human rights country pages
http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Countries/Pages/HumanRightsintheWorld.aspx

UN Common Understanding on the HRBA

UN HRBA Portal
http://hrbaportal.org/

EU Council conclusions on a rights based approach to development cooperation, encompassing all human rights (2014)

African Commission of Human Rights and Peoples Rights
http://www.achpr.org/instruments/achpr/

Inter-American Commission for Human Rights
http://www.oas.org/en/iachr/

Council of Europe
http://www.coe.int/en/
The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs)

UN Global Compact
https://www.unglobalcompact.org/

International Labour Organization labour standards
ANNEX 2:

Glossary

accessability  saavutettavuus
accountability  vastuullisuus, tilivelvollisuus
advocacy  vaikuttamistyö, vaikuttaminen
affordability  kustannettavissa oleva
availability  saatavuus
capacity building  kapasiteetin vahvistaminen
capacity gap  kapasiteettivaje
civil and political rights  kansalais- ja poliittiset oikeudet
civil society  kansalaisyhteiskunta
collective rights  kollektiiviset oikeudet
conflict sensitivity  konfliktisensitiivisyys
consultation  konsultaatio
context or human rights analysis  toimintaympäristö- tai ihmisoikeusanalyysi
cross-cutting objectives  läpäisevät tavoitteet
cultural relativism  kulttuurirelativismi
duty-bearers  vastuunkantajat
economic, social and cultural rights  taloudelliset, sosiaaliset ja sivistykselliset oikeudet
equality  yhdenvertaisuus
fragility  hauraus
gender mainstreaming  sukupuolten välisen tasa-arvon valtavirtaistaminen
human rights  ihmisoikeudet
the human rights based approach to development  ihmisoikeusperustainen lähestymistapa kehitykseen
human rights law  ihmisoikeusjuridiikka
human rights blind  ihmisoikeussokea (ei ota huomioon ihmisoikeuksia)
human rights commitment  ihmisoikeusvelvoite
Human Rights Council  ihmisoikeusneuvosto
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<td>kunnioittaa, suojella ja täytäntöönpanna</td>
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<td>oikeudenhaltija</td>
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