

DEFINITIONS

RIGHTS-BASED DEVELOPMENT

A rights-based approach to development aims to transform the self-perpetuating vicious cycle of poverty, disempowerment and conflict into a virtuous cycle in which all people, rights holders, can demand accountability from states as duty-bearers, and where duty bearers have both the willingness and capacity to fulfill, protect, and promote people's human rights. A rights-based approach rejects the notion that people living in poverty can only meet their basic needs as passive recipients of charity. People are the active subjects of their own development, as they seek to claim and realise their rights. Development actors, including the state, should seek to build people's capabilities to do so by guaranteeing their rights to the essentials of a decent life.

Duncan Green, Poverty to Power, 2008

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

At an individual level, active citizenship means developing self-confidence and overcoming a feeling of powerlessness that has been internalised. In relation to other people, it means developing the ability to negotiate and influence decisions. When empowered individuals work together, it means involvement in collective action, be it in the village, in the neighbourhood or more broadly. It includes, but it is not confined to, political activism. It basically comprises any individual action with social consequences, which may include participation in faith groups or neighbourhood associations, "social entrepreneurship" (directing business activities to social ends), and a variety of other social organisations, if their benefits extend beyond the personal or the familial. Ultimately, active citizenship means engaging with the political system to build effective states.

Duncan Green, Poverty to Power, 2008

OUTLINING THE ISSUE

Human rights and human development are both about securing basic freedoms. A **rights-based approach to development** is based upon the recognition and the realisation of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the Right to Development, enshrined in internationally agreed and legally binding human rights instruments. In 2000, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) called for a "rights ethos for aid" that would empower people in the fight against poverty.

As Amartya Sen argues, significant progress in ending poverty will ultimately be achieved when the rights of the vulnerable and the poor are expressed and recognised in the face of highly unequal cultural, social, economic, and political power relations at all levels. With women forming the majority of the poor and vulnerable, issues of gender equality and processes for women to claim their rights are central to poverty reduction.

One of the central implications of using a human rights framework for assessing effectiveness is the recognition that effective and sustainable development change will not take place in the absence of active citizens. Actions to tackle poverty in any society and globally are inherently political (Tomlinson, 2006).

Civil society organisations as development actors are agents of social change. As such, they are also inherently political. They cannot be separated from the question of **active citizenship** and people's participation in their own development, and from the related questions of social justice and solidarity (Tujan, 2008).

CSOs may contribute to development by building citizens' awareness of their rights, building citizens' capacities and creating opportunities for them to participate in CSOs, organising local development initiatives, and collaborating with CSOs and social movements to advocate and claim rights nationally and globally. CSOs are a fundamental building block of a democratic political culture. Stepping up efforts by poor and marginalised people to successfully claim their rights is central for realising CSO development effectiveness.

SOME GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the characteristics of a "rights-based approach" to CSO development interventions? What aspects of CSO operations enhance or limit their ability to directly support efforts by their constituents and other marginalised and poor people to claim their rights?
2. What are some of the ways in which CSOs have organised and structured themselves at country level in order to further a rights-based framework for change?
3. What are the different roles played by Northern (NCSOs) and Southern CSOs (SCSOs) in the promotion of rights-based development? How can NCSOs and SCSOs work together to further this goal? What are positive examples of this collaboration? What needs to improve?
4. How do developing country governments and/or donors influence CSO capacities to implement a rights approach? What are some examples of good practice in upholding a rights-based framework for development by governments or donors? What positive experience do CSOs have of working constructively with elected government bodies to promote and protect rights, at the country level? Internationally?

USEFUL RESOURCES

UNDP, "Human Development Report 2000, Human Rights and Human Development", London: Oxford University Press, 2000. Available at: <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2000/en/>

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Tomlinson B., “Determinants of Civil Society Aid Effectiveness: A CCIC Discussion Paper”, Canadian Council for International Co-operation, 2006. Available at: [http://www.ccic.ca/what we do/aid civil society e.php#cs determs](http://www.ccic.ca/what_we_do/aid_civil_society_e.php#cs_determs)

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