

HRBA and Research - Summary

In research cooperation, a human rights based approach could be applied in relation to the expected results of the research itself (content), in relation to the supported institutions (governance) and in relation to the process leading to support to research programs and their execution. Applying a human rights based approach can help in addressing power imbalances within and between institutions and programs, ensure transparent, inclusive and ethical research processes, enhance good governance of research institutions and promote research programs of particular relevance to people living in poverty/under oppression, women and marginalised groups while not compromising on quality.

A human rights based approach takes a starting point in **international human rights commitments and standards**. Key questions to discuss when assessing support for research interventions are:

- Is the research of relevance to women, men, girls and boys living in poverty/under oppression? Is it relevant to human rights fulfilment? If not, what is the justification for selection of research topics that have no clear relevance to persons living in poverty or to human rights improvements?
- Will the research contribute to academic freedom, freedom of expression and autonomy of the research institution?
- Will the global disparity in knowledge production been addressed? Are the power imbalances within and between research institutions mentioned and minimised?
- Do the partner institutions have a governance system that respects the human rights principles and values?
- How will results be communicated and used for enhancement of human rights (e.g. health, education, livelihoods etc.)?
- Is the research carried out in line with human rights principles (see table below) and international ethical guidelines for research?

An important element in a human rights based approach is the focus on **empowerment and capacity development**. Key issues to discuss when assessing support for research interventions are:

- To what extent will the research empower/build capacity of decision makers and people of power and help them better fulfil their duties in line with international commitments and human rights principles?
- To what extent will the research provide evidence base and tools that empower people living in poverty/under oppression and enhance their abilities to work for sustainable development, poverty reduction and human rights fulfilment?
- Are deliberate measures taken to communicate the research results to stakeholders that can use it the research in their work to fight poverty and promote sustainable development?

Particular aspects to monitor and analyse in design and processes are the four human rights principles **Accountability, Participation, Non-discrimination and Transparency**:

<p>Accountability</p> <p>Accountability is about the existence and implementation of good governance policies and regulations at the research institution or authority/agency supported.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there clear and transparent policies and guidelines for decisions related to research grants, fellowships, academic positions, steering group nominations? • To what extent do power relations within the research setting affect the priorities and choices? • Is there a non-discriminatory and transparent policy framework for the institution? • Does the institution/authority have capacity to monitor the implementation of this policy framework? • Is there a complaints mechanism which is known and accessible to all? • Is there a follow-up of how (to what extent) research is contributing to the intended overall purpose of combating poverty and enhancing human rights? 	<p>Non-discrimination</p> <p>Non-discrimination is about being aware of possible unintended discrimination due to for example ethnicity, gender, age, kinship, sexual orientation and disability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there non-discrimination policies for staff and students (e.g. quotas or targeted actions to encourage equity)? Are these policies applied and monitored? • Are there affirmative or other targeted actions to ensure that underrepresented groups get a fair chance to participate in research programmes and compete for research grants, fellowships, academic positions, steering group nominations etc.? • Are premises, organisational systems and structures, tools and materials etc. accessible to all? Are there barriers that prevent some groups from participation (women, ethnic groups, LGBT persons, persons with disabilities etc.)?
<p>Participation</p> <p>Participation is about democratic participation of students and researchers in planning and decision making at the research institutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do different stakeholder groups participate and in decision making on research programs, and institutional strategy? • At universities, are there fora for student participation/influence? • Is the fora organised and functioning democratically? • Are opinions expressed freely and respected by the management? 	<p>Transparency</p> <p>Transparency is about having clear policies and regulations, and making them known. It is also about communicating research results</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is decision making open and transparent? • Is there an institutional set up which ensures that research grants and positions are advertised openly, that selection criteria and procedures are fair and transparent? • Are research results communicated in a way that is accessible to other researchers, policy makers and other potential users? • Are research results communicated in a way that fosters usages of research outputs?

To learn more on HRBA and research, read the full thematic area brief.