

# INSPIRED

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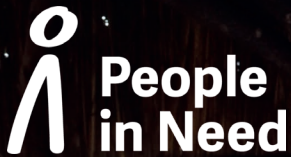


Photo: Tereza Hronová

## HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

FOSTERING INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE IN ZAMBIA THROUGH APPLICATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

With opening of civic space in Zambia following the 2021 parliamentary and legislative elections

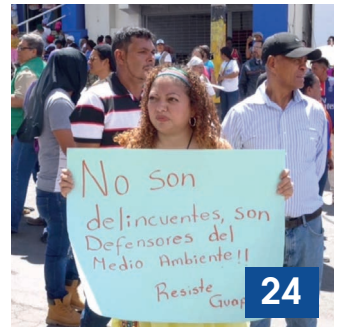
HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE AS GATEWAY TO BOTH COMMUNITY AND AUTHORITY – ACTIONAID'S PRACTICE IN BANGLADESH

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RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE, CONVERGENCE OF HUMANITARIAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS NARRATIVES

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Dear colleagues,

Welcome to this eighth issue of the People in Need internal magazine, INSPIRED! This year, we designed our new relief and development strategy for 2022-2026. Describing who we are as an organization, the strategy reminds us that: 'Human rights as enshrined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights treaties are the foundation of all our work'. The link between development, humanitarian assistance and human rights is not new: 36 years ago, in December 1986, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Right to Development. The Declaration states that "every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development."



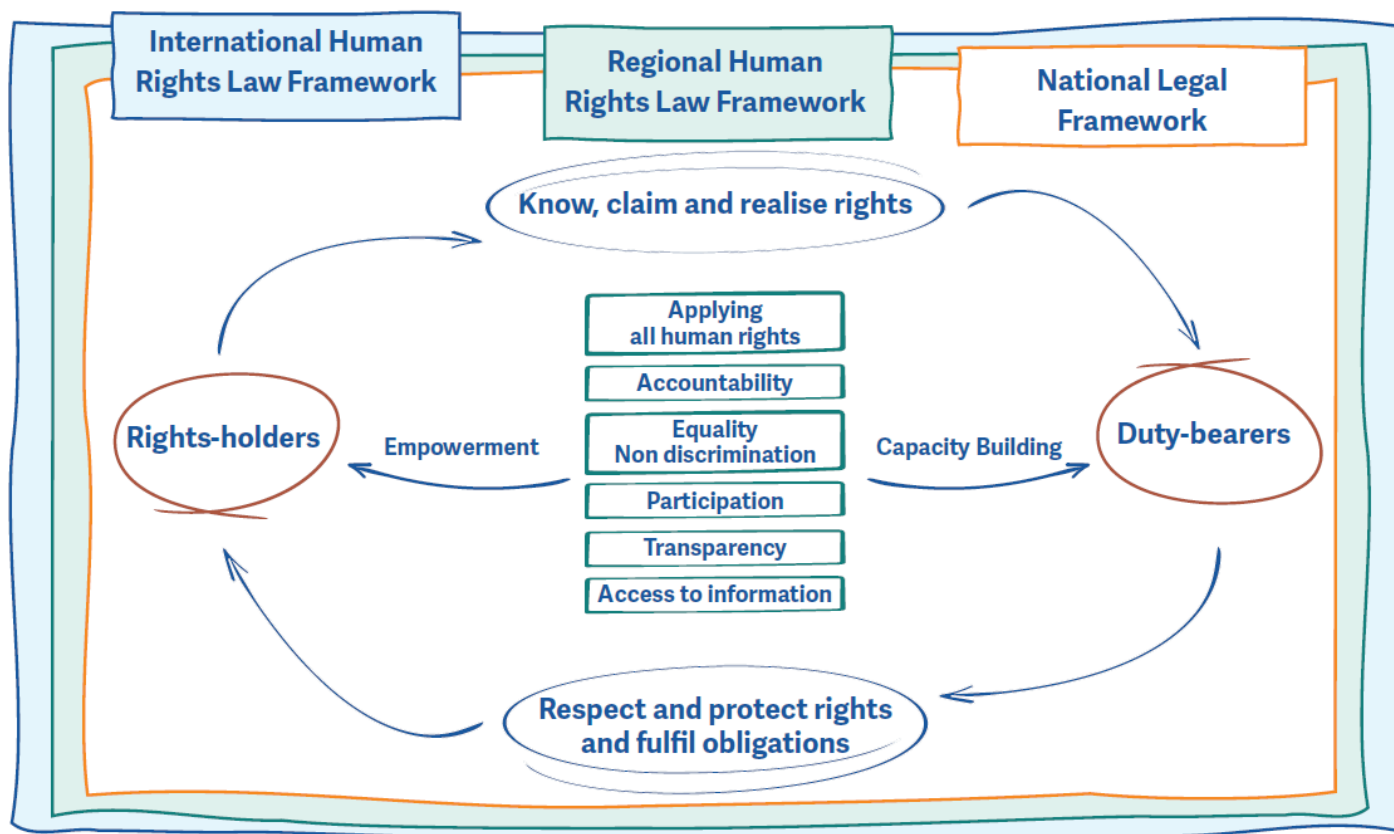
We cannot look at development or humanitarian issues in absolute isolation from their human rights aspects. As an example, in July this year, the UN General Assembly, in almost unanimity, recognized the right to live in a healthy and sustainable environment as a universal human right. Development donors increasingly require agencies like PIN to demonstrate how we apply a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA); while in the humanitarian sphere, topics of accountability, empowerment of affected people and localization are gaining prominence.

To embed human rights in our humanitarian and development work, our strategy states that "when the context allows it and it enables us to achieve impact, People in Need will apply the Human Rights-Based Approach to inform and empower people as rights-holders to advocate for respect and fulfillment of their human rights."

What does this sentence mean in practice? More importantly, how do we do that? We have sought to answer these questions through the publication of People in Need's Handbook on HRBA that aims to promote understanding, knowledge and experience sharing about HRBA. The Handbook, launched a few days ago, provides guidance on applying a HRBA throughout the cycle of a development or humanitarian project or programme.

In reflecting on the concept of HRBA, you will soon realize that a nuanced understanding about HRBA, combined with an earnest consideration and respect for the local contexts, is urgently needed. HRBA is anything but a "one size fits all" framework. This issue of INSPIRED offers you stories coming from Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America, where we provide humanitarian, development or human rights assistance. In addition, it includes an external case study shared by ActionAid in Bangladesh who has integrated HRBA into its global programmes for many years. We hope that through a thoughtful read, you can decide in what forms and under what circumstances a HRBA can be beneficial for your programmes.

Lauriane Gauny, [Deputy Director](#)  
Bach Vu, [Human Rights Advisor](#)



ILLUSTRATING HRBA FRAMEWORK according to UN Common Understanding on HRBA Photo: People in Need's HRBA Handbook

# What is and what is not Human Rights-Based Approach?

**Bach Vu**  
Human Rights Advisor

Before taking you to different regions of the world in which we work, I would like to lay out some fundamental understanding about Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA).

## What is HRBA?

HRBA, as its name suggests, is fundamentally a way of using human rights principles and standards in everyday work of development and humanitarian assistance. The approach calls for a conscious and systematic incorporation of human rights in all aspects of programming. The approach is premised on the awareness and acknowledgement that issues or challenges that development and humanitarian actions address or respond to, such as shortage of food, water and sanitation, education, healthcare,

or shelter, are ultimately all human rights issues. International law does stipulate the state's responsibility to protect, promote and fulfill human rights, including the right to adequate standard of living, to education,

it bears little due consideration of the East, or the Global South. This notion requires us to look back into the very origin of international human rights regime. Back in 1946-1947 in the aftermath of the Second

**HRBA, as its name suggests, is fundamentally a way of using human rights principles and standards in everyday work of development and humanitarian assistance.**

and to social security without discrimination. This shift in concept leads to a shift in the objective of development and humanitarian aid: from the fulfillment of needs – to realization of rights.

## What is not HRBA?

**HRBA is not a "Western" concept.** This notion stems from a long-lasting argument that the entire concept of human rights is a "construct" by the West, or the Global North; and that

World War, the newly founded United Nations created the Commission on Human Rights tasked with preparing an "International Bill of Rights." This Commission then established a special Universal Declaration of Human Rights Drafting Committee which consulted UN bodies, international organizations and NGOs before the final draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948. Among prominent members of the Drafting



Committee was P.C. Chang of the Republic of China (now Taiwan). In the vote for the Declaration, of the 58 United Nations members at the time, 48 voted in favour – including many from the Global South, none against, and eight abstained.

Today, all governments in the world have ratified at least one major human rights treaty. In addition, human rights are protected by regional human rights instruments and mechanisms, including those in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. These regional instruments echo human rights provisions within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. States further codify their human rights commitments in their constitutions, as well as in other national and sub-national legislations.

**HRBA programming is not human rights programming.** HRBA asks development and humanitarian programmes to take due regards to the human rights situation of a specific country context and to make sure that in their best capacity it contributes to the protection, promotion and peaceful exercises

**HRBA is not a “Western” concept. HRBA programming is not human rights programming and it is not only about human rights advocacy. HRBA is not “another” mainstreaming agenda and it is not just a “repackaging” of other tools without having any added values to programmes.**

of human rights. At the minimum, HRBA requires programmes to refrain themselves from making the human rights situation worse for the country’s society and population. This is what the overarching HRBA principle “Applying all rights” encapsulates.

**HRBA programming is not only about human rights advocacy.** In connection to the previous what-not, while policy advocacy and monitoring of relevant legislations pertaining to human rights are some of the activities that can make the application of HRBA more explicit, they are not mandatory components of HRBA. HRBA recognizes that in many country contexts and societies, some human rights areas are more restricted than others, and that programmes’ direct engagement in

**i According to NGOs and academic findings, these areas of work and programming can particularly benefit from HRBA:**

- Equal access to basic needs and essential services such as education, water, sanitation, social protection and safety net benefit payment schemes;
- Public awareness raising and human rights education;
- Promotion of access to information of public interest;
- Social mobilization and collective actions to address inequality;
- Active citizenship and inclusive participation;
- Dialogues between the state, community groups and civil society;
- Policy development and legislative reforms;
- Supporting countries in transition.

these human rights areas will lead to backlashes from the local authority, from a segment of the population, or both. In these situations, programmes may combine the application of HRBA with the implementation of development agendas, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), or they may customize the human rights language in their design. One practical way of doing so is, instead of making direct reference to human rights commitments, development and humanitarian actions integrate HRBA principles into their design and implementation actions. These principles include (1)

Accountability, (2) Equality and Non-discrimination, (3) Participation, and (4) Transparency.

**HRBA is not “another” mainstreaming agenda.** As you will realize through reading this INSPIRED issue and the HRBA handbook, there is more to HRBA than just a box-ticking exercise. HRBA, after all, is a mindset that consists of comprehensive human rights due diligence, organizational and personnel capacity development, and deep awareness of the local context. We aim to integrate this mindset into our existing work, thus not creating a separate set of tools or checklists but rather capitalizing on existing tools, including the Country Programme checklist, the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion policy, the Partnerships strategy, and so on.

**HRBA is not just a “repackaging” of other tools without having any added values to programmes.** HRBA indeed originates from the development sector’s extensive history which started with the conventional charity and service-based model, and then the needs-based framework. However, HRBA is particularly instrumental as an analytical tool when assessing needs for development and humanitarian assistance.

HRBA helps address not merely the symptoms of, but also underlying causes of the issues – all regarded as apparent human rights violations, which leads to more sustainable impacts. It helps programmes create a multiplier effect on the enjoyment of human rights that can go beyond its original intentions. For instance, a project that addresses climate change from a HRBA lens may not only help people claim a cleaner environment, but also promote a culture where people can actively and effectively share and impart information of public interest such as that on air pollution.

In country contexts where the human rights language is welcomed, accepted or at least tolerated, HRBA reminds local governments of their legal responsibilities to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. This recall of legal obligations creates incentives for more effective and meaningful collaboration between them, development and humanitarian programmes, their constituents and civil society. At the very heart of HRBA, it empowers the people that it aims to support, and equalizes the power imbalance between them and government bodies. This equity subsequently fosters local ownership and sustainability.



MONGU CSOs, Communities, Cashew Infrastructure Development Project and other stakeholders during an interface meeting on how to upscale the management of Cashew Infrastructure Project  
Photo: People in Need Zambia

# Fostering inclusive governance in Zambia through application of Human Rights-Based Approach

**Štěpán Bubák**  
Programme Quality and Development  
Officer for Angola and Zambia

The context of Zambia is characterized by an increased opening of civic space following the 2021 parliamentary and legislative elections, during which the country experienced an exemplary transition of power from the ruling party to the opposition party. The new administration pledged to strengthen local democracy including the rule of law, to enhance accountability of state institutions and to fight corruption. Despite significant progress, several key issues related to human rights and governance still persist. Lack of respect for civil and political rights remains

with the government regularly invoking restrictive laws to narrow political space. In addition, Zambia continues to struggle with government transparency and accountability. Corruption in government is widespread, and impunity is common. Moreover, citizens in Zambia lack information about their civil and political rights and face multiple barriers to meaningful engagement with duty bearers. Participatory processes in Zambia are underdeveloped and civic education teaching is limited.

## Empowering citizens to demand their rights

To tackle this, PIN Zambia embarked on a 3-year good governance project

funded by the EU, which aimed to contribute to enhanced capacity and engagement of communities and civil society in seeking accountability for development and poverty reduction. As a vehicle for change, PIN Zambia provided target local civil society organizations (CSOs) with tailor-made trainings in policy engagement, advocacy, social accountability, decentralization and other technical topics. In addition, PIN capacitated the target CSOs in HRBA including practical trainings in how to apply the approach in their local development work and how to integrate it in programme design.

During the project development process, the situation of civil society



participation was analysed from a human rights perspective with key issues related to right to participate in public affairs, right to access information and right to adequate standard of living. The relatively favourable local context in Zambia allowed PIN and target CSOs to use explicit human rights language during all project activities, which aimed at enhancing awareness and improving knowledge of the local communities about their civil and political rights. To facilitate meaningful communication between rights holders and duty bearers, the project established community discussion fora as channels for local communities to raise their concerns, voice their needs and demand their rights. By building capacities of local CSOs and citizens and by facilitating effective and meaningful communication between them as rights-holders and the local authorities as duty-bearers, the project helped empower local communities to claim their human rights while exercising democratic freedoms. This example shows that with conscious integration of human rights promotion in the project design, the intervention was able to produce both good governance and explicit human rights outcomes.

### Engaging with duty-bearers to advocate for policy reforms and enhanced accountability

Apart from the rights-holders, PIN Zambia also engaged local authorities to improve their understanding of local CSOs' and population needs and to lobby for enhanced accountability, citizen participation and policy reforms through targeted advocacy.

**Robust sub-granting scheme managed by PIN enabled the capacitated and empowered CSOs to implement their own initiatives in advocacy, accountability, human rights and inclusive governance.**

To achieve this, PIN engaged in development of policy briefs and advocacy position papers together with the target CSOs. Policy briefs were formulated based on local evidence and centred on themes identified as crucial for accelerated local development and poverty



A TRAINING on strengthening citizen action, decentralization, and community participation

Photo: Christine Ndopu

alleviation. To strengthen the voices of various local CSOs, PIN worked on fostering of joint cooperation through establishment and support of provincial and district-level NGO fora and by facilitating interface meetings and roundtable discussions where findings of evidence-based advocacy initiatives were presented to duty-bearers together with concrete recommendations for policy reforms.

### Case studies of impact

Two case studies based on the work of PIN-supported CSOs best demonstrate concrete impact of the project and provide several lessons and recommendations for future interventions including how to apply a HRBA in inclusive governance programmes. Robust sub-granting scheme managed by PIN enabled the capacitated and empowered CSOs

advocacy intervention, which aimed at enhanced participation of women and youth in cashew nut value chain, one of the main sources of livelihood in Western Zambia. Due to favourable conditions for cultivation of cashew nuts, Zambian government, supported by funding from the African Development Bank, embarked on a large-scale infrastructure project with the objective of developing local market, increase production and value addition and create additional employment opportunities for local communities in Western Zambia.

However, despite massive investments, the Cashew Infrastructure Development Project (CIDP) implemented by the government was largely unable to benefit local cashew producers and processors and to reach targets for women and youth participation. This is due to poor governance systems on the ground and structural barriers preventing women from benefiting from grants and input support provided as part of CIDP. Key obstacles include poor land governance and gender disparities connected with women's ownership of land. Lack of land ownership among women meant that most female farmers could not qualify for the CIDP support. To address this, CGAZ used the sub-grant provided by PIN to implement an advocacy initiative targeting a wide range of stakeholders including local authorities and



FIELD VISIT TO BAROTSE CASHEW FACTORY during the Civil Society/CIDP interface

Photo: People in Need Zambia

traditional leadership. CGAZ project aimed at collecting evidence and provide policy recommendations on how to improve the delivery of CIDP, increase benefits for female farmers and achieve impacts on poverty reduction.

For example, to access financial and material support from the CIDP, potential beneficiaries were required to provide matching funds. For most farmers it was difficult to raise the required amount of money but thanks to the sustained advocacy efforts of CGAZ and other local CSOs, CIDP

and/or financial assistance to develop their cashew processing businesses. As a result of the capacity building and financial and technical support from PIN, the work of CGAZ continues beyond the project implementation with a focus on engaging traditional leaders and local authorities to promote land ownership for women including security of tenure in order to benefit from large-scale government support programmes such as CIDP. Moreover, the work of CGAZ also focuses on lobbying for formulation and enactment of National Cashew

thus supporting their agriculture production and livelihoods. However, evidence collected by YWCA as part of the project shows unequal distribution of the FISP support and major shortcomings in its implementation. The FISP support has not been reaching its intended beneficiaries due to entrenched corruption, poor design and problems with effective implementation. In general, women receive less support from FISP compared to male farmers due to additional barriers connected to land ownership, poverty burden and social exclusion.

Specifically, YWCA project identified that women are not able to meet the requirements of FISP support including 25 USD farmer contribution and land access. This is coupled with poor service delivery of FISP and late distribution of inputs, which does not align with the local agriculture season. To tackle these shortcomings, YWCA formed and training women self-advocacy groups in HRBA, budget tracking and service delivery monitoring and facilitated interface meetings and roundtable discussions to hold authorities responsible for FISP delivery to account and to enhance transparency in provision of the FISP support. Recent FISP reforms announced by the new administration, to which the

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changed its grant matching strategy. Now, any material asset such as livestock or physical infrastructure can be used as a matching fund. Moreover, advocacy and policy engagement work of CGAZ resulted in enhanced land ownership rights for women, including 10,000 ha of land allocated for cashew production and 50 women receiving direct land allocation, which allowed them to benefit from CIDP support by receiving agriculture inputs to strengthen their cashew production

Development Policy that would ensure sustained government support to the cashew sector.

Second case study highlights the work of another PIN-supported CSO, **the Young Women Christian Association (YWCA)** of Zambia, in implementing Gender Responsive Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP). FISP is a large-scale programme run by the Government of Zambia with the objective of subsidizing inputs for small-scale farmers and



advocacy efforts of PIN-supported CSOs contributed, should increase the numbers of female farmers benefiting from the FISP by removing some of the structural barriers, enhancing local governance structures coordinating the implementation of FISP and by increasing the numbers of available agro-dealers in remote rural areas.

Both case studies show concrete impact on the realization of human rights among local communities including land rights, right to adequate standard of living, right to non-discrimination and other fundamental freedoms. This was achieved via systematic empowerment of rights holders and engagement with duty bearers through evidence-based advocacy and lobbying and by enhancing the capacities of the local civil society actors as vehicles for local development.

### **Best practices and recommendations for future programming**

Some of the best practices include careful selection of target CSOs based on their demonstrated commitments and ability to contribute to achievement of project objectives through their long-term work. In addition, it is critical to work

with civil society actors who are truly independent and representative of citizens' interests. Some of the existing organizations might on the other hand lack commitment to genuine work or be affiliated with state or private sector and thus promote their interests instead of those of the local

commitment from local authorities to achieve more systemic change and additional policy reforms. This should involve participation of a wide coalition of actors including media groups, policy research institutes and think tanks to amplify the voices of the advocacy and lobbying initiatives.

**“ In addition, thorough application of a HRBA is critical in order to ensure development of a conducive operational environment for local civil society. ”**

communities. Inadequate targeting can thus not only divert the assistance from those who need it the most but also hinder effective civic participation and civil society development.

Moreover, engagement and targeting of traditional leadership structures that wield significant influence in the society of Western Zambia showed significant impact on attitudes shift and realization of rights of vulnerable groups including women (with a particular attention on land rights and rights to participate in public affairs). However, improved strategies on how to foster participation of local authorities could achieve even more impacts in case of future programmes. There is a need to ensure increased buy in and

In addition, thorough application of a HRBA is critical in order to ensure development of a conducive operational environment for local civil society. Advancing inclusive governance is not feasible if key human rights are not protected. These include the right to freedom of opinion, the right to peaceful assembly, the right to participate in public affairs and the right to non-discrimination. Therefore, integrating human rights principles and considerations in the programme design is critical in order to promote cultivation of an open civil society space that is supported by local government authorities and remains conducive for effective advocacy and participation in policy decision-making.



MICRO-PROJECT monitoring YWCA

Photo: David Mukuka



ANNA ZAMEJC (center) in the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) of OSCE participating states in 2019, session on Azerbaijan  
Photo: People in Need

# Eastern partnership: Shaping a resilient civil society with localized accountability

**Anna Zamejc**  
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Programme, Human Rights Department  
and  
**Tomáš Komm**  
Former Advocacy Officer, Relief and  
Development Department

How can institutional and private donors help build a more resilient civil society sector? How can civil society organizations be more effective and connected to local communities? Those questions were at the heart of a study conducted by People in Need throughout 2020/2021 in Eastern Partnership countries.

Across a politically and economically diverse region, civil society in Moldova,

Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan has much more in common than might be expected.

In its modern form, the third sector was created only a few decades ago with support from foreign donors, who were often the key driving force behind its formation. However, the process had its side effects, too. The sector, represented by NGOs as traditional actors, became dependent of donors' support and as a result, the primary accountability of organisations in many cases switched from the communities they were working with to donors.

People in Need's assessment work found that, in many cases, the relations with communities are weak

as CSOs do not see strengthening ties with local neighbourhoods as a priority.

At the heart of the problem is the current system civil society operates in. Organizations do not have sufficient room to focus on their own development and on pursuing their own mission as they are forced to constantly switch their plans to secure short-term project-based funding to survive. Their area of expertise and internal capacities are being affected by the search for the needed funding, due to having to adjust their strategy to the donors' priorities.

Despite having first-hand experience from the field, CSOs have frequently given up on bringing



their own analysis of the situation and solutions on the table and often rely solely on donors' assessment. Donors therefore often act as a light beam highlighting some topics and problems, whereas the rest remains hidden and uncovered.

To make matters even more complicated, regions and capitals often constitute two different worlds in terms of the operational space and the general situation of civil society. Moreover, the sector is often unbalanced, as typically there are more women than men involved.

All of those factors influence public perception and attitudes towards CSOs which are increasingly seen as disconnected from local communities and their problems. As a result, the public rarely identifies with even the major achievements of CSOs, such as legislative changes and court victories that advance human rights and participatory democracy at the institutional level.

This work is often rooted in desk research and expertise rather than a participatory, bottom-up process, and much of it takes place in conference rooms, far removed from a typical household. Thus, the sector can be perceived, fairly or unfairly as part of the donor or elitist agenda, rather than an expression of the communities' authentic needs and aspirations.

At the same time, over the last few years, new civil society actors have started coming onto the stage, equipped with exactly the tools that the established actors are lacking: they are based on volunteerism, rooted in the local communities, often without a formal structure or experience, but burning with passion

**Among our recommendations, we suggest putting a greater emphasis on working in the regions, establishing different tiers of financing based on a beneficiary's experience, considering more institutional and long-term support.**

for change or driven by a response to acute needs. They constitute grassroots initiatives or social movements and are bringing new energy to the civic space.

For donors, this constitutes a certain dilemma: How to harness this



OCCUPY GUGUTA protest, October 2018

Photo: Daniel Ciubotaru

energy and maintain its uniqueness? How to support their sustainability and not just re-create another set of institutionalized NGOs? How to bring out the best in the traditional NGOs and these new actors and stimulate their cooperation and mutual learning?

New actors require a different approach. Instead of developing internal structures and institutionalizing, they need to gain experience through trial

society, donors should also rethink their strategy towards established actors.

Among our recommendations, we suggest putting a greater emphasis on working in the regions, establishing different tiers of financing based on a beneficiary's experience, considering more institutional and long-term support. Donors would be also wise to support relations of CSOs with the society, and offer tailored capacity-building programs. In fact, some major and small donors alike are already moving towards this direction. The benefits of such changes are clear: the creation of a vibrant and diverse civil society which is rooted in local communities, self-confident and resilient, while also being able to drive positive change and weather crises.

Read the whole report here: [www.peopleinneed.net/building-a-civil-society-in-moldova-and-the-south-caucasus-7994gp](http://www.peopleinneed.net/building-a-civil-society-in-moldova-and-the-south-caucasus-7994gp)

and error, and build trust. Instead of harnessing their reporting or project management skills, they need to focus on their ideas and purpose, develop clear goals, and learn to put them to practice in the real world, step by step. To further strengthen local civil





ABDUL ALIM joining the campaign for gender equality and against violence against women in Bangladesh

Photo: Abdul Alim

# Humanitarian response as gateway to both community and authority – ActionAid’s practice in Bangladesh

**With Abdul Alim, Head of Humanitarian Programme, ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB). He shares his current workload both at Rohingya Refugee Response programme in Cox’s Bazar, and national humanitarian programme in the capital city of Dhaka.**

**Bach Vu (BV): Thank you Alim for taking the time to sit in an interview with me. Can you please introduce yourself and the work of ActionAid Bangladesh, especially in humanitarian assistance?**

**Abdul Alim (AA):** Thank you very much, and thanks for choosing ActionAid Bangladesh to have our reflection as you mentioned. We feel very proud of that. My name is Mohamed Abdul Alim. I am the Head of Humanitarian Programme in ActionAid Bangladesh. The largest humanitarian programme of the ActionAid federation is the Rohingya refugee response programme. I am leading that programme here and I have been working with ActionAid Bangladesh since 2008. So it has been

nearly 15 years now. Over this period, I have managed to experience HRBA in different programmes. I actually started with a climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction (CCA-DRR) projects, and from there now I am leading a broader humanitarian programme.

As you know, not only ActionAid Bangladesh but the entire ActionAid federation follows the HRBA process guidebook that we have. The approach is not only for humanitarian programmes – indeed we call the approach as HRBA programming for all sectors we work in.

ActionAid Bangladesh is working on 4 strategic priorities. First is women’s rights and gender equity. Secondly, young people. Third is

resilience and climate justice. And the last one is humanitarian programme, including DRR. The cross-cutting element of all our priorities is our goal to enrich the resilience of communities from all aspects where women and youth are centered.

Where the priority lies depends on the issues of that particular area, for example if climate change is an issue for the area, if disasters are particular issues for the area. Or humanitarian crisis is the issue. So altogether we set our programme and we provide our technical support to the local partner.

**BV: I consulted ActionAid’s HRBA guidebook in developing the HRBA handbook for People in Need, and**



**really admire your extensive practical experience in HRBA implementation. Can you briefly describe what ActionAid Bangladesh's HRBA framework consists of?**

**AA:** In fostering HRBA localization, we have four pillars. First is Community Empowerment. We use the participatory community-based analytical approach in designing our programme. Through this exercise, we help communities analyze their situation and vulnerability, as well as the power dynamics within the communities. It is a process to continue, starting from a participatory situation analysis, but useful in helping communities understand their human rights entitlement within the constitution and different government policies, as well as universal human rights; who have the power, influence and duty for the protection of their rights; and what the barriers are for them to enjoy their rights. The community then identifies what kind of intervention they want and what their role is in that intervention, while ActionAid and our local partner play the supporting or facilitating role in that process.

The second pillar is called Solidarity, including technical, financial, and physical solidarity. It means we ActionAid as the implementing agency together with our local partner express and extend our solidarity with the human rights demands that the communities have identified, as well as the initiatives that the communities have formed and organized. As these actions are led by the communities, we as ActionAid can better see what our role is. We recognize there may be actors that are better positioned to influence, or in a better word, engage. The local elites, the local powerful, local and elected representatives will be the target of the communities,

The third pillar goes to Campaigns. Once an issue has been well-articulated and rooted from the community with a clear demand and target, for example the right to food and relevant agricultural policies, we make serious efforts to develop alliances at the national level with like-minded international NGOs and UN agencies who share similar visions and areas of work. In these campaigns, we organize practical actions or events to achieve the campaign's goals.

**In fostering HRBA localization, we have four pillars. First is Community Empowerment. The second pillar is called Solidarity, including technical, financial, and physical solidarity.**

The fourth pillar is Support for community-led alternatives. We work with communities to identify the needs or gaps in policy formulation that has a particularly negative impact on poor and vulnerable people. So if there are alternative and evidence-based solutions to these policy issues piloted by the communities themselves, we will support them. This approach has worked very well for us.

**BV: Working directly with the affected communities seems to be a strategic approach for ActionAid in Bangladesh.**

**AA:** That is correct. For humanitarian response to any disasters, it is difficult to separate it from our entire programme as we have worked with communities vulnerable to disasters over a long period of time. So applying HRBA in this context is part of a longer localization process. It is always ActionAid's approach to implement any programme through a local or national organization who has presence in the

response, we already have a base, connection and engagement with community. In these communities, what we do as part of community resilience programming, we build the capacity of the women and youth groups, as well as that of duty-bearers.

**BV: What about the duty-bearers?**

**AA:** The four pillars that I mentioned are basically for the community and ourselves to promote the programme. At the same time, we also work with

the duty-bearers. In underdeveloped countries like Bangladesh, there are huge capacity gaps on the duty-bearers' side. They do not have a good understanding about the rights of the community, even those provided for in the Constitution. They do not have a deep awareness of rights and their duties to provide solutions to issues in the community.

In addition to this capacity gap, there are resource constraints. Obviously in some cases there is lack of willingness of duty-bearers to take that responsibility to be proactive in ensuring human rights. We work with the government and government officials to identify the knowledge gaps and raise their awareness of human rights and their corresponding duties. In some other cases, we review the current policy framework with the government to identify policy gaps and find out how we can work on those. We also work with experts to develop policy recommendations which we advocate for the government to adopt or work further on from their end.

For example in disaster management, according to the government policy there was no disaster management committee at the ward level. Grounded on the principle of participation of all sections of the community, we advocate for the government's engagement with communities at the ward level for their disaster management plans. This way the community can participate in the planning stage and to raise their opinions during the decision-

**The third pillar goes to Campaigns and the fourth pillar is Support for community-led alternatives.**

while we provide technical support if needed. Solidarity also means we provide financial support to these local and community initiatives, including those that involve alliance and network building. We as ActionAid are also part of those networks and advocacy initiatives.

particular vulnerable community. It is part of the human rights-based intervention so that technical expertise and skills remain locally when our programme ends, and the local partner can continue working there with their community for any support in the future. So wherever we go for humanitarian

making processes related to disaster management. That was how we started this approach with the government. Later on, the government adopted this approach and nowadays it has become part of the policy that government goes down to the ward level to engage communities in disaster management plan preparation.

On the side of the community as I already mentioned, we facilitate the community's preparation of their own disaster management plan at the household level, group level and community level so they can become

Moreover, when ActionAid has some funding to assist a community in any disaster, we let the community know that information and ask them directly how they would like to utilize that funding. With the capacity that we have given them, they conduct their needs assessment to identify what kind of response is required in the community and the selection criteria for participants in the response. They identify who should be getting the priority to receive the assistance. If local procurement is possible, they also take the lead in the procurement

based emergency response what we started back in 2013 in response to one of the cyclones. Our local partner back then was very concerned that if we tried to facilitate this women-led humanitarian response, it would take much longer time in such a humanitarian crisis. The local authority was saying that what we were planning for was impossible. But we took the challenge in 2013 and observed a significant impact within the community and also on the duty-bearers.

It was the cheapest response under a low budget that has increased women mobility, women's access to market, and women's empowerment and leadership in disaster management and preparedness, thanks to a well-coordinated target community. The local authority later recognized these women-led community groups and provided them with funding to implement some projects.

You can also feel the impact of this approach on the self-esteem of poor people. [he noted: "we do not like to use the word "poor" but by "poor" I mean people who have less]. They can also take decisions and become familiar and active in the rights-claiming processes. All their shyness is now gone. In the past they did not want to go to the government offices and they were worried and felt shy to talk to them. Now they are familiar with the government officials and can approach them to ask "how can I and my community get

**“ In ActionAid we see humanitarian response or disaster response as a gateway to both the community and the authority, so both rights-holders and duty-bearers. ”**

well aware and well prepared to respond to natural disasters when they occur. We train them and give them different tools to connect with disaster management mechanisms at the local, regional and national levels. Community leaders, women leaders and young people can now report on the local disasters not only to us, but also to the local administration to claim their right [to protection]. They know by this time the role of the disaster management committees at the district and subdistrict levels, where to go to for what kind of assistance, what kind of support, and what the committees are supposed to do as duty-bearers.

and obviously they do the distribution in their leadership. That is part of the community empowerment because now that they know that their voices and demands are heard, they can act.

**BV: Considering this approach, what do you see as its impact on ActionAid Bangladesh's humanitarian response, and on the communities as a whole?**

**AA:** In ActionAid we see humanitarian response or disaster response as a gateway to both the community and the authority, so both rights-holders and duty-bearers. We have a very good example of women-led community-



ABDUL ALIM in a training with young community members on disaster risk reduction

Photo: Abdul Alim





ONE OF MULTI-PURPOSE WOMEN CENTRES supported by ActionAid Bangladesh for women-led community resilience  
Photo: Abdul Alim

this service?" This shows how women community leaders have become more empowered and connected with the government duty-bearers.

**BV: You mentioned that ActionAid in Bangladesh has worked very extensively on the situation of Rohingya refugees in Cox's Bazaar. The nature of such crisis is vastly different from that of a natural disaster, which must have influenced how you have applied HRBA?**

**AA:** It was very fuzzy from the beginning [of the Rohingya refugee migration to Bangladesh] in 2017 because Bangladesh is not a signatory to the UN Refugee Convention. The Bangladesh government then is not bound to provide for all the rights protection that Rohingya refugee should have gotten [to the same extent as other countries who have signed the UN Refugee Convention]. The questions emerged as: What rights do the Rohingya refugees have [in Bangladesh]? – and what are the corresponding duties of the Bangladesh government?

From our side as a humanitarian agency, the first thing [we see] is the situation of the right to life. So, we started our response with life-saving support, including food, water, shelter, and WASH facilities. Here we need to clearly understand the soft line between service delivery and the rights-based approach.

To ensure that we followed Human Rights-Based Approach, however,

we looked deeply into how we could engage Rohingya refugees in aid delivery, how we could ensure that their voices are heard during the decision-making processes and their demands being heard by different actors. So we have consulted them about what kind of aid package and food they want. In terms of management of the response programme, we have engaged them, including the elderly people, young people and women in the action workforce and the

**To ensure basic services for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh we consult with Rohingya peoples, in particular our targets groups to know their changing needs and demands, and do advocacy accordingly with the appropriate authorities.**

programme's decision-making, and have established complaint, feedback and response mechanisms within the community [to hold ourselves accountable].

From here in Bangladesh, we cannot directly influence Myanmar [who is the ultimate duty-bearers for the protection of rights of Rohingya people]. But we are doing advocacy at the national and international level. In Bangladesh we are collaborating and forming coalition with other like-minded organizations nationally and internationally which in different ways are pushing this advocacy agenda targeting the international community to raise stronger voice for the Myanmar government to hear.

**BV: Does that mean you do not engage the Bangladesh government at all?**

**AA:** To ensure basic services for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh we consult with Rohingya peoples, in particular our targets groups (women and young people) to know their changing needs and demands, and do advocacy accordingly with the appropriate authorities. They include the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commission of the Government of Bangladesh who manage the Rohingya refugee camps. We also do advocacy with the UN agencies and development partners at national level. Our country director, for example, is a strong voice in advocacy towards the Bangladesh government in different fora on behalf of the humanitarian organizations here.

That is how we use a HRBA approach in case of Rohingya refugee crisis considering a very challenging context. We have had to customize the approach obviously. In designing our programme we need to understand what the position of the Bangladesh government is [towards the Rohingya refugee crisis] and how they are taking it. If you become very active in claiming the rights of the refugee when government is not a signatory to the mentioned Refugee Convention, you may be kicked out any day from the

humanitarian response. For that we have to be very strategic in engaging them. [To that end] we always try to facilitate the leadership of Rohingya people, especially the role of women and young people – which is our niched area – to help them raise their voice with the authority to demand their needs.

**BV: Does ActionAid have a physical presence in Myanmar?**

**AA:** Yes, we actually have a country programme in Myanmar.

**BV: And what did your colleagues in Myanmar think about your assistance for Rohingya refugees?**

**AA:** Our colleagues in Myanmar are well aware of all our activities, including



ROHINGYA CHILDREN IN KUTUPALONG CAMP, BANGLADESH – they were flying kites at a Kite Festival organized by ActionAid for the international women's day  
Photo: ActionAid Bangladesh

our response and advocacy work, and they are very positive about the engagement of ActionAid Bangladesh [in the Rohingya crisis]. In case of advocacy work, whatever the advocacy documents we develop and publish, we internally share with ActionAid Myanmar and ActionAid International to get their views beforehand. We are very strategic in this case considering the safety and security of our colleagues in Myanmar.

But still we have raised our voice very strongly in the international community inside and outside Bangladesh. We have organized a series of international level dialogues and events engaging the growing Rohingya diaspora from different parts of the world who virtually joined our discussions with high Bangladesh government officials. This is how we have tried to raise our voice and to remind the international community that they cannot forget about the Rohingya crisis.

**BV: In this delicate situation, how much of human rights language have you used in advocacy?**

**AA:** Obviously the Rohingya crisis is a human rights crisis. The international human rights conventions are the main idea here [for the basis of international legal standards]. However, the Bangladesh government did not agree with all the components of these

conventions, for example, on the right to food. The government is struggling hard to ensure the right to food for all Bangladesh people, then how can they ensure the right to food for Rohingya refugees?

I have to say, still, that the government of Bangladesh has been very much accepting of Rohingya refugees to receive them and provide support. The local community was also very much helpful and they were the first responders to the crisis. The Prime Minister was very keen and kind to make the decision [to receive and host the large number of Rohingya refugees] despite lots of debates and discussions from different corners. She was very straightforward that it was a humanitarian crisis and as humans we could not stop Rohingya refugees from coming here and taking shelter. So in that sense the government is very positive [with its acceptance of refugees] but it is difficult for the government to agree with international rights demands.

There are transboundary issues, geopolitical issues and there are safety and security issues for Bangladesh [in hosting the refugees]. They cannot agree with the rights entitlements according to international standards because even the host community who is residing beside the Rohingya refugee camps are not enjoying that kind of

rights entitlements. They do not have access to that kind of assistance that is, based on international standards, required to provide to the refugees. In that case there will be a conflict between the host community and the refugee community. So there must be a balance so that people do not become fatigued on the Rohingya issues.

**BV: Thank you for a very thoughtful reflection. If you can perhaps give one advice to PIN on the localization of HRBA, what would that be?**

**AA:** I would give two. First is the mindset of development of alternative and evidence-based advocacy. Through piloting and testing the alternative identified by the community, you can see if it helps solve the problem or reduce the vulnerability of the community. Based on its result and learning, you can do advocacy and lobbying with the government. Another advice is to include a power analysis in your HRBA process. Until a powerless community understands the power dynamics in their community they will not be able to change the structure and enjoy their rights. Powerless people should have the power of thoughts, of knowledge and information. That is why the power analysis is important for HRBA.

**BV: Thank you very much for the interview.**





The house in Shevchenkove, 50 kilometres from Kyiv, was damaged by shelling during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. People in Need with funding from EU repaired the roof to keep homes of people warm during the winter Photo: Petr Štefan

# Russia's war in Ukraine, convergence of humanitarian and human rights narratives

With Petr Drbohlav, Regional Director for Eastern Partnership and Balkans

**BV: Could you please start with a summary of what People in Need has done for Ukraine since March 2022?**

**PD:** Since February, actually. We started working immediately after the Russian aggression on Ukraine began. Russia attacked [Ukraine] on the 24th of February and we sent the first truck with humanitarian aid from Prague on the 27th of February. In many places in Eastern Ukraine we continued uninterrupted with water supply and the psychosocial support hotline. So basically I would say [we have provided emergency assistance for Ukraine this year] since 24th of February.

What have we done? People in Need has a unique position in Ukraine because we have been present there since 2003 [for human rights programming] and

then since 2014 with humanitarian programming. We actually had quite a decent contingency plan towards potential attacks by Russia. So when the war started we were able to react immediately. We became one of the key INGOs working on providing support for people affected by the Russian attack.

Up to now we have supported more than half a million people. In the very early days and weeks [of the conflict], it was provision of food, drinking water, hygiene items and other non-food relief items that we were transporting by trucks and by trains to Ukraine. [Within the first] 3 months since the Russian attack, we delivered more food to Ukraine than the World Food Programme (WFP).

Since then we actually stopped bringing humanitarian supplies to Ukraine and for whatever in-kind

distributions that we do in Ukraine, we do procurement inside Ukraine so that we also support Ukrainian economy and private sector.

The other important part of our programming is provision of multi-purpose cash assistance. So far we have selected more than 80,000 individuals to receive this support from us. The important aspect of multi-purpose cash assistance is that people actually make their own choices about what they need most. It's actually Human Rights-Based Approach, right? If you give this chance to people [to decide what they would like to use the cash on] rather than to give them some material support that might not respond to their most critical needs. Now as support towards winter preparedness, we also provide additional cash to extremely vulnerable households and individuals.

The other critical component of our work is the shelter program where we are working on reparation of houses damaged in the conflict. We are talking here about 9,000 light and medium repairs in the areas that were liberated North of Kiev, in Kharkiv and in the Southeast, in the areas that are close to the frontlines. In the shelter sector linked with winterization, we are distributing emergency shelter care, heaters, stoves and repairing collective centers that are accommodating internally displaced persons (IDPs) and preparing them for the winter.

Apart from that we are providing psychosocial support, protection assistance and working on education in emergencies, repairing schools, providing or creating digital learning spaces, creating child friendly spaces, providing trainings to teachers, and so on.

Perhaps as a separate sector, but very critical to our part of programming is provision of financial assistance to local [civil society] organisations. As part of this we have around 160 different organisations that have received cash support and grants from us to work in areas that were under the Russian occupation or that were very close to the frontlines, or even on the frontlines – so areas that are very hard to reach for us. We have built a very good rapport with these organisations because we have built our relationships based on trust with very light, let's say, demands in terms of diligence and compliance so that we can both act quickly [in time of crisis].

**BV: Had we already worked with these local organizations before the war?**

**PD:** Some of them we had worked with as part of our other projects, either humanitarian or COVID-19 related.

**Up to now we have supported more than half a million people. In the very early days, it was provision of food, drinking water, hygiene items and other non-food relief items.**

We were also one of the organizers of Vilnius Taskforce which was a platform of civil society actors that came together to provide recommendations to the government [of Ukraine] and to the humanitarian community what to do next in the Donbas region. From

the early days of the Russian invasion we have been working with these organisations that were part of the Vilnius Taskforce.

**BV: Geographically speaking, how did you identify the areas or the communities to provide humanitarian assistance for?**

**PD:** We basically ended up working across the whole country. Now we are trying to narrow down or stay more focused, let's say. We are looking after areas that are underserved or where

**The other important part of our programming is provision of multi-purpose cash assistance. So far we have selected more than 80,000 individuals to receive this support from us.**

we perceive to have some added value, where we believe we might be the first or one of the first to respond [to the emergency needs] and we might have pre-identified partners or established contacts with local authorities.

There are different driving forces in different parts of the country as the conflict context is different [across the country]. In the Northern and Central areas, it was the areas that were liberated that we really tried to support as quickly as possible. Then in the frontline areas like Donbas, we have contacts there already so it was obvious that we should be focusing [our assistance] there. In the West, we were basically the first INGO that started responding in February. All other organizations were taken by surprise by what happened, then evacuated their staff.

**BV: With these pressing emergency needs, did we though manage to hold any sort of consultation with actors or communities on the ground?**

**PD:** There's an element of coordination and sort of staying in line with the cluster recommendations by UN agencies and INGOs, hosting governments and local NGOs who came together and created sort of a standardized approach. In many cases including that of Ukraine,

[recommendations] came from consultations that happened before the war. For instance, about cash, there is a global recommendation that the amount of \$74 a month per individual that is being provided [as humanitarian assistance] is not sufficient to cover the needs of people. But this is something that Ukrainian government is very strongly pushing humanitarian actors to follow, as this is also the minimum pension or minimum social benefits that the government of Ukraine is providing so they want [the

humanitarian cash provision] to be in line with it.

In terms of other consultations, I would say that very often the information or the consultation comes from the people that are on the ground. So as we work with these 160 local partners and local authorities, we rely on them consulting the local or the affected population.

We are talking here about emergency response. Now that the needs are progressing, we are moving more towards recovery. I think now comes the most critical aspect where we will have to make sure that the affected population is included and that the recovery and reconstruction plans have consultative elements. We have to make sure that they are done in a participatory way in which people have a chance to provide their voices about what they believe the reconstruction should look like.

**BV: One of the biggest concerns about HRBA in humanitarian assistance is that in many contexts you have to stay away from the human rights narrative. But here in the context of Ukraine, we have seen a cooperation between both RDD and PIN Human Rights Department (HRD). How did that cooperation come into place?**

**PD:** I think this conflict is very different and also the position of the whole humanitarian sector is very different than in some other conflicts, say, in Africa. As a humanitarian actor you can decide and very often you will decide



to follow the humanitarian principles guided by the Geneva Conventions, especially the ones of neutrality and independence. In the case of Ukraine, it would be very strange to apply these two concepts. It is clear which party [to the conflict] is behind human rights abuses, and I don't think we as humanitarians can stay totally neutral and independent.

The same goes for localization if we want to work with local actors. If we want the local actors to be the driving force for the response, we cannot think or hope that they will be totally neutral

the annexation by Russia we had to close down the operations there. This gives us a space to be more vocal about what we see. We don't have to censor ourselves as much as before the annexation about how we call certain things.

**BV: You mentioned that in the specific case of Ukraine PIN can no longer be independent. But have you faced any backlashes or criticisms from other humanitarian NGOs for this decision?**

**PD:** Uh, a very interesting question. We are in a position that we are perceived

**“ We are in a position that we are perceived as a sort of a role model or someone who is setting the trend. I think a lot of NGOs actually think of our response as pushing the boundaries. ”**

and independent. Their country was attacked. They themselves and their families are attacked. You asked me specifically about the collaboration between RDD and HRD. Fundamentally, we are getting into a very different situation when you have one party to the conflict shooting missiles and shelling clearly civilian targets. You cannot stay silent. You have to be vocal about this.

One more thing specifically for PIN is that we had to be careful as both HRD and RDD in terms of international advocacy because of our [former] presence in the non-government controlled areas. With

as a sort of a role model or someone who is setting the trend. I think a lot of NGOs actually think of our response as pushing the boundaries. We see that the newcomers or the newly arrived NGOs really want to stick to humanitarian principles of independence and neutrality, which seems strange. I think we should push the boundaries and perhaps we will help them change their position as well.

**BV: I think the position that PIN is having now would be more feasible**

**in the context of international armed conflicts, when it's clear who has perpetrated war crimes. But for internal armed conflicts, it would be entirely different.**

**PD:** Exactly. For internal armed conflict, it will be very different, yes. But then, in the situation of Ukraine, we have areas that are occupied by Russian forces. There are some risks of retaliation as well for what we say. PIN is already on the list of undesired organizations in Russia. Basically Russia's list of organizations labelled as “extremist” and “terrorist.” So we have nothing to lose. This label also means that whoever is in contact with PIN, or has contract of employment or lease with PIN can face criminal charges and can end up in jail. That was the reason why we ended working in the annexed areas.

Because we don't want to put in unnecessary risk our staff, our partners, or even people who rent premises to us. We cannot exclude [the possibility that] our vocal position now could affect negatively some of the people that worked with us in the past [in the annexed areas]. [But considering] a country that is terrorizing the population of its neighboring country and that pays very little attention to the needs not only of the population that it occupies but also of its own citizens, what can we expect from this regime?



HUMANITARIAN CONVOY and hygiene items distribution in Chasiv Yar

Photo: Albert Lores



PEOPLE IN NEED is supporting local partner "Smile" who is running child-friendly space in the humanitarian hub in Zaporizhzhia  
Photo: Albert Lores

Only the worst I would say. If we were silent now, would it change anything? These people will still be at risk.

**BV: I notice in press releases or articles by humanitarian actors, when talking about conflicts, we always call on "all parties to the conflict" to refrain themselves from violence and so on. But it is not the case now.**

**PD:** Exactly. This was the UN position for very long time. Fortunately, the UN now has changed this position with

any more. This is, I think, thanks to the pressure by the Ukraine government and local civil society.

**BV: I would like to go back to the question of HRD and RDD collaboration in Ukraine. What is the added value that HRD has brought to the joint assistance?**

**PD:** When we were working with some of the partners behind the front lines, HRD was helping us with identification and screening of those partners, which for me was the biggest added

of social integration, and media and fundraising department. We all worked as a team because there was a common cause. For me personally it was very motivating.

**BV: I see. Now we will have to visit the question of duty-bearers. You mentioned that we worked with the government of Ukraine from that start of the war. Then how have we engaged them as the primary duty-bearers with the responsibility to protect and promote human rights during the war?**

**PD:** In this case you really see that the state is there to protect and to take care of its citizens and is doing everything possible to do that. Here is like HRBA in practice where you have a duty-bearer that understands its responsibility and you don't have to even remind the Ukrainian government about its responsibility. Of course, it might be different at the local level or subnational

**What we have seen after the Russian aggression was that basically the whole PIN came together. We all worked as a team because there was a common cause.**

the new Humanitarian Coordinator [in Ukraine]. They are calling out the attacks by Russian armed forces, and not "reminding all parties to the conflict" and so on and so forth

value. What we have seen after the Russian aggression was that basically the whole PIN came together. RDD and HRD senior management, and very soon afterwards, also the programme





HUMANITARIAN CONVOY and hygiene items distribution in Chasiv Yar

Photo: Albert Lores

level among some government officials or representatives, but the government as such, I don't really see that there would be a deficit of this understanding. Sometimes it is more about a deficit of capacities or resources, but not to the extent where you would see that the government doesn't really try to mobilize those resources. Sometimes even distribution of humanitarian assistance, especially in the frontline communities, is actually done by the local authorities.

**BV: Then it comes to the question of the annexed regions.**

**PD:** There was always the difference between our work in government-controlled areas and non-government-controlled areas. In government-controlled areas, before the Russian aggression, the Vilnius Taskforce was the vehicle through which humanitarian organizations and civil society actually pushed the Ukrainian government to take over as many responsibilities as possible for the government-controlled areas near the frontline. And they actually did. In many cases, like in the shelter sector, for instance, the Ukrainian government took full responsibility from the humanitarian actors. That was very different from what was happening in non-government-controlled areas where we know that if we wouldn't

do it, the de facto authorities would definitely not provide any support to the people. That was the difference already before the war and the war has only increased it. Based on the reports that we've been hearing, in the occupied territories of Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia, there are places that have been picked to showcase that the Russian state is providing some services and humanitarian aid to the population. But you have many other remote and small places [in these occupied regions] where people are left behind and we

the affected population as much as possible. For example, when we registered people for multi-purpose cash assistance initially they received one text message if they were not selected for the assistance. Now we are changing the whole process so that people receive several text messages in different stages of the process and people can contact a designated phone number to ask for explanation of the rejection. We also have a complaint and feedback response mechanism. It's a hotline

“ **Can we call on Russia to take care of these people? We could but realistically will it change anything? No.**

” have no access as humanitarians to those places. Can we call on Russia to take care of these people? We could but realistically will it change anything? No.

**BV: To conclude our interview, I would like to ask you about accountability. PIN has received very generous support from the people of the Czech Republic and beyond for our assistance in Ukraine. In that sense how have we ensured our own accountability to the affected population in Ukraine, as well to our supporters?**

**PD:** In general, we are trying to improve our accountability towards

where people can call. We have an e-mail address and telegram channel where people can reach out. We are also trying to have as many people as possible informed about these communication channels.

In terms of accountability towards people who contributed to our public appeal, there are some provisions by the Czech law that clearly stipulate what and how we have to report on the donations. I think we have gone way beyond these requirements by now. In the beginning, we were providing updates almost every other day or every three days. Now we provide monthly updates on our website.



MONGOLIAN CHILDREN play in a clean and safe environment free from air pollution and dangerous coal-fire stoves

Photo: Nomin Munkh, People in Need Mongolia

# Tackling air pollution: Human Rights-Based Approach

**Tim Jenkins**  
former Country Director in Mongolia

Mongolia is renowned and loved for its sweeping landscapes and majestic blue skies. From the days of Chinggis Khan's empire to modern Mongolia, the clear blue skies have been worshipped and admired by many. Today, however, as you approach almost any urban centre there is darkness on the horizon.

The capital city of Ulaanbaatar is often reported as one of the most polluted in the world during winter months, but now urban communities across Mongolia are now fighting to reduce rising air pollution. These high levels of air pollution are predominantly caused by, though not exclusively, the hundreds of

thousands of households burning fossil fuels inside of their homes for both warmth and cooking.

Indoor air pollution experienced by ger (yurt) dwelling families is much higher than WHO recommended levels – impacting the health and wellbeing of children across the country. To put this into perspective, one of the leading causes of death amongst children under 5 is air pollution-associated pneumonia.

But Mongolia is not alone in this struggle. Across the globe, [2.4 billion](#) people are exposed to dangerous levels of indoor air pollution because they cook, heat and light their homes using solid fuels like kerosene, wood, animal dung, charcoal and crop waste. Sadly, according to WHO, 3.2 million people die each year

from indoor air pollution. To tackle air pollution, People In Need in Mongolia takes 'Human Rights-Based Approach' – using this framework to ensure human right principles and standards are integrated into our programming.

## Building momentum

In Mongolia, we began our journey to tackle air pollution through our EU and Czech Development Agency funded project, 'Right To Breathe', which saw the rollout of the nation's first independent indoor and outdoor air quality monitoring network.

Over the years, we worked closely with [Breathe Mongolia – Clean Air Coalition](#) and [Public Lab Mongolia](#) – two local civil society organizations



dedicated to environmental justice and data transparency. Together we continued to expand our air quality monitoring network and developed a series of IEC materials to help educate the public on the dangers of prolonged exposure to air pollution.

Through these efforts we were able to bring attention to hundreds-of-thousands of families across Mongolia on the dangers of air pollution – particularly in schools, homes, and hospitals. Highlighting that everyone, everywhere in Mongolia has the right to clean air.

These collaborations helped to lay the foundation for PIN and our partners to understand how air pollution was impacting the lives of people, particularly the most vulnerable.

### **So how do we do this practically?**

Today, we have moved beyond just data collection and towards solutions. We have found, along with our partners at UNICEF, that by introducing our ‘cooking, heating, and insulation products-CHIP’ – which removes the need for coal-fire heating in homes – we can liberate women and children from the burden of unpaid labour, toxic levels of air pollution, and fire hazards.

On average, by removing coal stoves, women in Mongolia report regaining 41 minutes of time a day. We have nearly eliminated burns in more than 1,000 households using our products.

And, all of this, while significantly improving indoor ambient air quality.

Namuuntsetseg from Ulaanbaatar told us, “Installing the CHIP package has solved all of our problems. Now I get to control the heating temperature and it has been great for my children [as it keeps them safe]. And I no longer have to wake up early, constantly going in and out to prepare the coal and wood for fire.”

Our Human Rights-Based Approach to our work on air pollution allowed us look at this challenge comprehensively – considering everything from gender, child environmental rights, health, safety, and even land rights.

This approach and perspective have also lead PIN and UNICEF to



CHIP household in Urantogs District

Photo: People in Need

make significant advances with advocacy efforts. In 2021 and 2022, the local governments themselves invested more than 1 million USD to expand CHIP – recognizing the potential to improve the quality of life of households living in gers within their communities.

But it's not just PIN, UNICEF, and governments financing this transition. In fact, it's largely households. Roughly 90% of the nearly 2,000 CHIP households are financing the technology using a combination of their own funds, green loans, and some small subsidies.

Both local governments and households across Mongolia are finding the means to make the transition to cleaner and safer

heating technologies. However, across the globe, there's more to be done. Without strong policy action and international investment, 2.1 billion people are estimated to still lack access to clean fuels and technologies in 2030.

This is unacceptable in modern society. It's imperative for the wellbeing of our children and societies across the globe that we find solutions to speed-up the transition to deploy cleaner cooking, heating, and energy technologies.

People In Need in Mongolia and beyond remains committed to advancing the rights of everyone, with an emphasis on supporting the most vulnerable, as everyone, everywhere has the right to breathe clean air.



DISCUSSION PANEL "Human Rights and Climate Justice"

Photo: Karolína Kvačková

# Supporting environmental defenders – PIN's practice

**Karolína Kvačková**  
Regional Desk Officer for Latin American  
Programme, Human Rights Department

## First of all, who is an environmental defender?

Land, Indigenous, and environmental human rights defenders (EHRDs), are individuals, groups, and communities who strive to protect the natural environment and hence the rights of current and future generations that depend upon it. These defenders work at the intersection of human rights and the environment to safeguard the planet from any or all of three interlinked environmental crises — pollution, biodiversity loss, and climate change — by asserting their human rights and political freedoms, including their rights to participation; freedom of expression; a right to a clean, safe, healthy, and sustainable environment; and recognition of their land and territory.

## What do we do?

We, in People in Need's Human Rights Department, have 3 major lines

of work. First is direct assistance to politically persecuted individuals and organizations. It can be relocation, or funds for new equipment, training fellowship, and so on. In addition, we provide capacity building and support to civil society, which combines and mixes, depending on the needs of individuals and organizations we support, mental health and psychosocial support, advocacy trainings, communication and storytelling trainings, cybersecurity trainings, etc. Lastly, we focus on advocacy to promote human rights through conferences, public statements, and direct engagements with policy makers and international community.

We provide this support to human rights defenders, journalists, activists, afro-descendants, LGBTQ+ communities and any other part of civil society. And environmental defenders are also part of this set of beneficiaries.

## Case study: Guapinol case

Honduras has become one of the deadliest countries in the world for environmental and land defenders.

More than 120 people have died since 2010, according to a Global Witness research, and many more have been silenced as a result of fabricated criminal charges.

Guapinol is a village located in the valley of Bajo Aguán in the municipality of Tocoa, north of Honduras, about 100 kilometers from the Caribbean town La Ceiba. The population of the Bajo Aguán valley has long suffered due to land and water conflicts, leaving over 150 people dead or disappeared.

For the residents of Guapinol and surrounding areas in the valley, the Guapinol rivers are an essential part of life as their principal source of drinking water. In 2014, these rivers and lives of people dependent on the water source were put into danger when the state of Honduras gave a mining concession in the Carlos Escaleras National Park to Honduran company Inversiones Los Pinares (ILP). It was done without sufficient prior consultation with the residents of the area despite the effect mining activities and the contamination of rivers can impose on their daily life.



ILP is now licensed to use a vast area of land to build facilities and roads for the mining operation. Even before the mining activities started, the construction of mining facilities has already polluted the water several times. According to the report of Guapinol Resiste (2020), both Guapinol and San Pedro rivers were polluted when roads were built for the mining project and an estimated 14,000 residents were affected. During the course of three months in 2018, the contaminated and muddy water reached the homes of the residents of the Guapinol community, preventing its consumption and use for domestic purposes.

To oppose ILP's extraction plans, members of tens of communities including Guapinol and San Pedro in Tocoa stood up to defend their environment and organised a series of protests. The efforts of activists in Tocoa have been met with a systematic crackdown including arbitrary detentions enforced by the state and violence used by ILP's private forces. Interventions by police and the military also have supported the company's interests. ILP is the largest landowner in Honduras with close ties to the Honduran ruling party.

Eight environmental and human rights defenders have been in prison for more than a year. They faced various accusations ranging from land usurpation and robbery to unlawful association. Amongst many environmental defenders those who are most visible and influential have been targeted for persecution and imprisonment.

After ILP filed criminal complaints, 31 people, including one man who died three years before the alleged incidents, were charged with multiple offences. On October 13 2020, Arnold Joaquin Morazán Erazo was murdered in the community of Guapinol. He was one of those facing a criminal inquiry due to a community protest in defense of the river.

Support from the international community plays a significant role in amplifying the voice of Guapinol defenders. In October, the European Parliament selected Guapinol defenders, together with activist Berta Cáceres who was shot dead in 2016, as 2020 Sakharov Prize finalists. But this could



GUAPINOL HONDURAS action

Photo: Paul Fitch

only happen thanks to INGOs, including People in Need, and local partners who brought this case to the attention of MEPs and policy makers.

International advocacy and campaigns, combined with pressure from local movements, can serve as a powerful force generating political pressure on the Honduran government because whether jailed activists will be liberated or not is rather a matter of politics than of law. Due to change in the government at the beginning of 2022, the activists had the opportunity to defend themselves in front of a court and were liberated on basis of administrative mistake during the filling of a lawsuit. But this could happen only because the political environment in the country slightly changed and because of serious pressure from INGOs like People in Need, local human rights organizations and foreign governments.

### Lessons Learned

This case serves as only one example of how our advocacy campaigns are helping people on the ground. Other ways of support we can deliver is connecting legal support to those facing

charges, and providing them with tools of how to tell their story and what media instruments to use to be more effective with their information dissemination.

This also goes hand in hand with advocacy trainings, because we have to prepare the activists to understand the very complex international system of laws and opportunities to advocate for their rights. In the end, we want the activist to ask the right and difficult questions and to be vocal with their stories, not to be dismantled by technicalities.

One pristine example of this is the Conference of Parties (COP), the climate change conference happening now every year. PIN has been present two times so far as an observer. We as the Human Rights Department are going especially to observe the inclusion of civil society perspectives (and the lack thereof). We hope to support more CSOs and activists to go and to be heard by the influential audience there. Nonetheless, for that to happen, the activists need to understand the system of UN negotiation, national determined contributions, and all the influences that are present.



OWIS DEMONSTRATION LESSON in one school in Lubango, Huíla province. Majority of the schools do not have proper screening set ups in their classrooms. The team and teachers had to be creative to create as good conditions as possible  
Photo: People in Need

# Human rights education with documentary films

Kristyna Sosnovcova  
Youth Civic Engagement Advisor

Which skills and knowledge should young people acquire during the years they spend at school? Are the current school curricula providing these? If it comes to values, attitudes towards human rights, and soft skills necessary for participation in democratic society, teachers are often left without practical guidance and knowledge.

To bridge the gap, People in Need has been working with teachers on interactive learning materials based on documentary films to bring human rights education to regular school lessons. Since 2001 the One World in Schools (OWIS)

**The story of the film appeals to the students, they are drawn into it, they don't fall asleep in class and we spend the lesson in an effective way. That's what I love about it.**

Jan Kubicek, Teacher at the Lyceum in Prague

methodology has been used by teachers and educators in more than 4000 schools across the Czech Republic, and has also been introduced in 14 countries.

In 2020, for the first time, it was applied in the African context in Angola as part of the Youth 4 Change project. As a result, many inspiring

**The OWIS lessons and students' initiatives make a big social impact. Firstly, it is a great opportunity for students to put their ideas into practice. And secondly, students can apply their knowledge to search for solutions to social issues.**

Isaias, the scientific projects coordinator at Colegio123





student and community projects flourished.

## Inspiration from a film festival

It is interesting to start with what stands behind the name "One



# Example of an OWIS lesson

TOOL	LEARNING PURPOSE	DESCRIPTION	
	A documentary film “Gabriel reports on the World Football Cup”.	The story presents particular human rights (or violation thereof), e.g. right to property, right of peaceful assembly.	14-year-old Gabriel makes an investigative reportage on the im-pact of the FIFA World Cup on inhabitants of his city district in Brazil.
	Reflection of emotions after the film screening.	Process the immediate emotions.	E.g. in a round every-one shares one word that sticks with them after the film screening.
	Interactive activity “Round table”.	Get deeper into the topic, train soft skills and empathy.	Through a meeting simulation students train discussion and argumentation skills, expressing their rights, and critical thinking.
	Follow-up project activities.	Actively contribute to social change, apply knowledge and skills.	Grants for students initiatives / Awareness raising campaigns / Advocacy / Extra-curricular student clubs / ...

World in Schools". The original idea sparked from PIN's "One World" film festival that promotes human rights. The idea was to bring the storytelling tool – a documentary film – to schools. And thus, the name. The OWIS team closely cooperates with teachers to fully understand their needs, as well as with representatives of the Ministry of Education and teachers' platforms to monitor trends in society and to design up-to-date, effective and teacher-friendly teaching materials. Importantly, teachers and educators can access tested and constantly upgraded materials from the online platform JSNS.cz.

## For the first time in Angola

The project Youth 4 Change targeted youth population in Huíla and Bié provinces of Angola through capacity development of youth Civil Society Organisations (non-formal education sector) and introduction of OWIS into schools (formal education).

As a pilot initiative, five public and private high schools and two universities implemented the One World in Schools lessons and students' initiatives.

## Results and lessons learned

-  In Huíla and Bié provinces, PIN achieved good reputation through work in sectors such as agriculture, WASH, and health. Yet, the first step for the OWIS team was to present the approach to the provincial representative for education. While the team received the green light in one province, in the second the whole approach had to be rephrased to erase human rights and activism wording.
-  Selected schools' representatives, teachers and extra-curricular activity coordinators were trained in the OWIS methodology and received OWIS toolkit and films. The trained educators then co-facilitated demonstration lessons in the 7 schools. We took an important lesson for the next project to add more methodological support, e.g. refresher trainings, regular teacher support groups, record each OWIS lesson that teachers can watch.
-  Besides teachers, school directors and pedagogical directors were included in the activities. Thus, it created an open and supportive environment for the teachers to conduct OWIS lessons. Regular communication, and explanation of different project phases and activity aims is essential to avoid misunderstandings and false expectations.
-  Overall, more than 1100 students participated in at least one OWIS lesson. Each school then implemented students' initiatives promoting human rights and active citizenship. For example, students of one high school started a campaign to improve safety at the road in front of the school, as a reaction to a traffic incident that happened to one of the students. Step by step, they got the town hall to install new traffic safety elements. At another school, a tree planting project was selected. Students who participated highly appreciated the interaction with the community during the planting and the experience of contributing to a better living environment in their neighbourhood.
-  Although the majority of the students participated only in one OWIS lesson by the end of the project, they shared how much the lessons inspired them to search for ways to do something positive in their surroundings. Students were able to name different human rights violations presented in the films and associate them with similar situations in their neighbourhoods. In addition, they demonstrated understanding of the means they, students and young people, can use to demand duty bearers to promote and respect human rights.



PEOPLE IN NEED  
[peopleinneed.cz](http://peopleinneed.cz)

People in Need is a Czech, non-governmental organisation (NGO) that has been providing aid in troubled regions and supporting respect for human rights since 1992. People in Need has since grown to become one of the largest NGOs in Central Europe. Today, its work focuses on relief and development aid, advocacy for human rights and democratic freedom, field social work, and education, awareness and information.



ALLIANCE 2015  
[alliance2015.org](http://alliance2015.org)

Alliance2015 is a strategic partnership of eight European NGOs engaged in humanitarian and development activities. Besides People in Need (Czech Republic), Alliance2015 members are ACTED (France), Cesvi (Italy), Concern Worldwide (Ireland), HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation (Switzerland), Hivos (The Netherlands), Ayuda en Acción (Spain) and Welthungerhilfe (Germany).



CZECH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY  
[www.czechaid.cz/en](http://www.czechaid.cz/en)

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