

B - Governing Document

Policy on Human Rights



Approved by: The Board of Directors

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Introduction

Digni and its member organisations are part of the worldwide church, which God has called to stand up against inequality, unjust power structures, the discrimination of the poor and other degradations of human life. God desires to empower the powerless and lift the oppressed, and to be part of this endeavour is to work for securing basic human rights for all. With the privilege of power comes a moral duty given to us by God to care for each other and his creation.

Through its member organisations and their partners, Digni's mission is to work with people who live in poverty for their empowerment, in particular individuals and communities left behind, who experience marginalisation, discrimination, economic deprivation, violence, hunger, consequences of climate change, social exclusion, exploitation and abuse of power. We are called by God to resist the powers that hold people in the bonds of poverty and injustice, and we do so by revealing the love of God through practical ways.

Digni's approach to development work is through taking a stand for human rights, which is fundamental to building a just society. The basis for Digni's approach is *that every human being is created in the image of God and have the same intrinsic value and rights. Upholding the inherent dignity and human rights of all people is the basis of freedom, justice, peace, and sustainable development in the world. The global agenda set by the UN Sustainable Development Goals represents an important opportunity for action*¹. God's love for us is unconditional. His love embraces all people irrespective of their age, social and economic status, gender, ability, ethnicity and religion.

Digni considers the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations and the Human rights conventions derived from this an important standard in all development work.

Goal of the policy on human rights

The goal of a human rights-based approach to development work is to affirm the value of human life. This includes strengthening the powerless and their organisations in their efforts to challenge those in power to respect, promote and fulfil their basic human rights obligations.

The purpose of Digni's human rights policy is to define, operationalise and offer recommendations for future priorities, i.e. to contribute to realise Digni's overall strategy in the years ahead. The document is normative for Digni's entire operation. The spirit of the document is to be infused in every project, program, development effort and communications work supported through or carried out by Digni.

¹ *Digni 2030: Statement of Principles, Overarching strategy for Digni*

Digni's approach to human rights

The normative foundation: The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “All humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in spirit of brotherhood.” For Digni, Christian values and the Biblical message of social justice are the normative foundation and justification for our fight against poverty, injustice, and the abuse of power. Digni considers that the UN Human Rights Conventions are in line with these Christian values. Human rights are an important foundation and resource in the fulfilment of compassionate Christian values and struggle for justice.

Poverty is much more than simply not having enough money to buy food, clothes, and material necessities. Poverty also hinders people's opportunities to influence their own lives and life decisions. Some of the major root causes of poverty are socio-economic inequality and lack of power. Social relations and power structures determine access to available resources, the demands we can make on government and society, the choices we can make, and the control we have over our own and others' lives. Since people are not born into the world with the same socio-economic privileges, many people are powerless to change their own situation or the status quo. In a human rights approach to development, marginalised people who are participating in a project are actors working for their empowerment. Individuals and groups are seen as subjects with rights and who have a voice, rather than passive receivers of support. People living in poverty are considered 'rights-holders', with the ability and the right to participate in the formation of their own development.

Digni supports a human rights approach that seeks to:

- *empower the poor and the marginalised and their representatives (rights-holders) to:*
- *challenge and hold people with power (duty-bearers) accountable for bringing change to discriminating and oppressive social structures*

In a human rights approach, the state is seen as the primary duty-bearer, in terms of respecting, promoting, and fulfilling the human rights of its citizens. However, injustice, the violation of human rights and poverty are not solved simply by challenging governments and their institutions. Oppressive structures and discriminating power relationships are complex, with many actors involved. Persons or institutions with power to influence and change a situation must also be challenged and held accountable. Churches, traditional and religious leaders, elders, fathers, mothers, local and international organisations and businesses are all examples of 'secondary duty-bearers'. Human rights and responsibility go hand in hand. A rights-holder in one situation can be a duty-bearer in another situation. In a human rights-based approach, Digni, along with its member organisations and partners, not only represent and work for the interests of people living in poverty. Digni, members and partners must also be held accountable for how power, resources and position is used towards project participants (i.e., downwards accountability) as well as external stakeholders such as Norad and the Norwegian public (i.e., upwards accountability). Simultaneously, we uphold each person's individual responsibility to utilise his or her talents in becoming agents of change, both in his or her own life and in society.

Principles for human rights-based approach

The value of human dignity: Projects with funding from Digni must promote the dignity and value of human life.

Equality and non-discrimination: A human rights-based approach promotes inclusion and equality in development processes. Digni will work against discrimination tied to age, gender, ethnicity, religion, ability, sexual orientation or personal health. To address an oppressive structure, it may be necessary to initiate a 'differential treatment' process – focusing on and prioritising marginalised groups, such as women, minorities or people living with disabilities – to achieve the realisation of equal rights for everyone. Special attention must be made to secure that activities or resources used do not enforce or maintain existing unjust power imbalances.

Empowerment and participation: Development work must be formed with and from the perspective of people living in poverty. The goal is to strengthen rights-holders' skills, resources, capacity, opportunities, and influence to bring change, so that they can become key actors and influencers in their own life and the development of their society. Participation of rights-holders is a right, as well as a key to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This participation should include genuine power to influence context analysis, project design, decisions, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and a real contribution to sustainability after completion of projects. Through organising and mobilising rights-holders, as well as strengthening local civil society organisations, we can work towards the goal of sustainable development without aid dependency. A central aspect of reaching this goal is ensuring that development work with funding from Digni is done in cooperation with local partners that have solid contextual knowledge, good relationships with communities, and legitimacy.

Accountability: According to context, rights-holders and their organisations should be strengthened and encouraged to engage and challenge the governing authorities to take responsibility in ensuring the basic rights of their citizens. Increased accountability can be achieved by engaging, cooperating with, and presenting new knowledge to authorities and public service providers. Digni will also emphasise the importance of holding 'secondary duty bearers', such as churches, NGOs, local leaders, parents and religious leaders, including ourselves, accountable.

Transparency: When it comes to public service delivery, openness and transparency in budget processes, decision-making of governing authorities shows the degree to which these authorities are fulfilling their responsibility as duty-bearers and are preconditions for active participation and effective quality control. Civil society should therefore work for greater transparency and accountability of their governments and authorities, in accordance with the civic space available in their respective contexts. At the same time, civil society organisations must also be working for greater transparency within their own organisations. Open communication and access to information regarding decision-making processes, finances, and achievement of results, creates the opportunity for financial donors and rights-holders to review and monitor the quality of their development cooperation with the organisations.

Addressing root causes: The goal of all human rights work is to contribute to long-term and consistent change in society. Project measures must be based on a deep understanding of context and power structures, addressing the root causes of poverty.

Norms and language: Human rights work must be adapted to context, culture, tradition, cooperating partner organisation, and project participants to create optimal conditions for positive change. Rights-holders and their organisations must define their own strategies in their struggle for human rights, ensuring that bottom-up perspectives and approaches prevail. This also applies to the 'language' and forms of expression used. Language and norms used in promoting human rights may be based on religion, stem from those found in the UN Declaration of Human Rights or be based on local traditions and customary terms. What is essential to Digni is that rights-holders use the language and norms that they find most appropriate and have the greatest potential to fight injustice and promote human rights. The requirement of Digni is that the form of expression chosen is in line with the principles of human rights found in this policy. When tensions arise between various groups due to a conflict of norms and values, Digni will promote a dialogue imbued with respect for diverse viewpoints, using the principles stated in this policy as its compass.

Conflict sensitivity: Conflict sensitivity must be taken seriously in all the work undertaken. The struggle for human rights addresses various conflicts of interest. It is important that rights-holders are not exposed to danger and that violence in the project context must not increase because of a project activity. This is in line with Digni's commitment to the principle of "Do-no-Harm".

Responsibility

Digni's leadership is responsible for:

- Ensuring that *the staff* of Digni has an awareness of and competence in human rights and a human rights-based approach to development work.
- Systematically work to ensure that Digni's *member organisations and partners* have competence in human rights and human rights-based approach, and that an awareness of human rights is apparent in all activities supported by Digni.
- Actively challenge Digni's secretariat, member organisations and partners, particularly church partners, to protect the rights of the oppressed and marginalised groups.

Implementation

Within Digni Secretariat: Digni will work to ensure that a human rights perspective permeates all activities planned and performed by Digni. This will be expressed in Digni's competence-building measures, both internally and with the member organisations, as well as in other attitude-influencing measures created for its member organisations and partners, such as in the review of applications and in reports, evaluations, development work, information and communication, networking, as well as other tasks performed by Digni.

Member organisations and partners: Digni will work to ensure that a human rights perspective permeates all efforts financially supported by Digni. This means that the principles of a human rights-based approach (the empowerment and participation of rights holders, holding duty bearers accountable, transparency and accountability, equality and non-discrimination) are present in all measures in terms of analyses, goals and methods. At the same time, there will always be a need to consider the local conditions and opportunities of each project, as well as contextual limitations and the capacity of the organisation.

Definitions

Rights: *“Rights are judicial, social or ethical principles on freedom or duty; this means that rights are fundamental normative rules on what is permitted for people, or obligations expected from them, in terms of a system, social convention or ethical theory.”*² Rights are legitimate demands that *rights-holders* can expect from specific *duty-bearers*. The legitimacy of these demands comes from an anchoring in legal, ethical, religious, or cultural principles and values. This means that the perception of what is right and wrong, what is considered unjust, what a person has the right to demand, and what a person is obligated to do for his or her society, has a broader foundation than in rules and laws. Rights are always objects used in political battles, and in negotiations between parties. Rights must be defended; they can be reduced, increased, and negotiated.

Human rights are foundational universal rights that apply to every person – irrespective of race, sex, religion or any other status – that ensure the value and dignity of human life.

Human rights contain fundamental obligations that a state must respect and secure for each of its citizens. In 1948, the United Nations ratified the 30-article ‘Universal Declaration on Human Rights’. The UN later ratified nine conventions that define what is meant by human rights. For example, human rights deal with life and security, freedom from torture, the right to education, protection against discrimination, religious freedom, the freedom of thought and expression, the right to work, the right to health, and more.

A human-rights-based approach to development work is an approach used by many in the development sector, to promote positive change in power relationships in a society, and to strengthen the human rights of all people to live a life of dignity. There are two main groups of actors in human-rights-based development: *rights-holders* and *duty-bearers*. A rights-based approach deals with 1) identifying rights-holders and duty-bearers; and 2) develop strategies for empowering rights-holders to demand their rights and to hold duty-bearers accountable to respect, promote and fulfil those.

The rights-holders in a project or initiative are the direct project participants who experience that their fundamental human rights are being violated. It is important to emphasise that a rights-holder in one situation can be a duty-bearer in another situation. Rights and responsibility go hand in hand.

² Encyclopaedia Britannica

The duty bearers in a project are institutions or persons with power, that are obligated and have a responsibility to fulfil the rights of rights-holders.

- **The state as primary duty bearer:** In a human-rights-based approach, the state is the primary duty bearer. Since each nation and state has different administrative and economic capacities to realise the human rights of its people, what is looked for in each nation is a progressive and positive development. The minimum requirement to states in terms of human rights is that *human rights are to be respected*, meaning that the state is not to resist the realisation of these rights for its citizens. The next level is that each state should work to *actively promote human rights, and furthermore* work to fulfil them for their citizens.
- **Secondary duty bearers:** These are persons or institutions that have power to influence the rights situation of rights-holders. This may include churches, religious leaders, fathers, mothers, local leaders, NGOs, and businesses. In other words, there are many 'levels' of duty bearers. It is therefore important for rights holders to complete a 'power analysis' to identify the specific duty-bearers – before they begin demanding their rights.

Resources

Digni RBA evaluation: <https://digni.no/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Faith-and-Rights.pdf>

Swedish Mission Council: Policy on Human Rights Perspective.

<https://ihs.smc.global/documents/F1A4378D-8E77-412C-BAB8-B2B7B323D127/Policy%20human%20rights%20perspective.pdf>

SIDA: Methods and tools for applying a Human Rights Based Approach.

<https://www.sida.se/en/for-partners/methods-materials/human-rights-based-approach>

ACT Alliance: Joint Position Paper on HRBA from a Faith Perspective https://actalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Joint-Position-Paper_ENG-scherm.pdf HRBA from a faith perspective

Church of Sweden:

<https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/filer/2075408/Guideline%20on%20Human-Rights%20Based%20Approach.pdf?id=2120634>

UN_OHCHR: Tool Kit on Faith4Rights:

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/Faith4Rights.pdf>