

HUMAN RIGHTS BASED APPROACHED AT CONCORD GENERAL ASSEMBLY 5-6 June 2012 - Brussels

1 General Information

What is a Human Rights Based Approach to development?

A human rights based approach to development is built on the belief that all human beings have certain rights which cannot be taken away from them and which enable them to make claims on others when their rights are being denied or violated.

A human rights based approach (HRBA) to development creates a framework for a rights based and more inclusive, participatory way of doing development, and highlights the accountability of governments and other development actors to fulfil obligations and responsibilities towards their citizens according to international commitments. For CSOs, this approach is also enshrined in Principle 1 of the Istanbul Principles for CSO development effectiveness.

A few key concepts underpin the HRBA:

- 1 **Rights are universal:** creating the need to focus on issues of diversity and on the most marginalized.
- 2 **Rights are interdependent:** creating the need to take a holistic approach.
- 3 **The holders of rights are subjects:** creating the need for a participatory approach.
- 4 **Rights imply an obligation on the part of someone else to safeguard those rights:** creating the importance of supporting and challenging those with statutory responsibility (i.e. States).
- 5 **The HRBA is a way of doing things:** the inclusive, non-discriminatory, mutually accountable way of working applies not only to states, but all development actors, including civil society

In practice, this means that:

- All programs of development co-operation, policies and technical assistance should further promote the realization of human rights as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments. For CSOs such as Concord, this means also being guided by the Istanbul Principles.
- Human rights standards contained in, and principles derived from, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights instruments should guide all development cooperation and programming in all sectors and in all phases of the programming process.
- Development cooperation contributes to the development of the capacities of 'duty-bearers' to meet their obligations and/or of 'rights-holders' to claim their rights.

Five inter-connected elements are internationally recognized as forming the core of HRBA. These elements are:

- 1 Explicit, accurate use of the international human rights framework;
- 2 Empowerment as a precondition for effective participation - as of right;
- 3 Participation in development decisions - as of right;
- 4 Non-discrimination and prioritization of groups vulnerable to human rights violations; and
- 5 Accountability of duty-bearers to rights-holders.

As part of its 2009-2015 strategy, CONCORD has decided to prioritise the HRBA as one of its strategic approaches (together with gender) and CONCORD has a task-force working to ensure that the HRBA is implemented both in CONCORD's external work, and its internal ways of working.

2 Methodology and sources

CONCORD's Human Rights Based Approach task force (HRBA TF) has suggested monitoring the extent to which the HRBA is applied in CONCORD's internal ways of working. . As a part of this work, the HRBA TF chose to audit the CONCORD's General Assembly on the following aspects:

- Accessibility of the site for people living with a disability
- Ability for people living with a disability to participate in discussions
- Representation of women on panels and discussion
- How often are women interrupted when speaking by men?
- How many percent of the time are men speaking as opposed to women?
- Are there any constraints for LGBT people to participate, including any heteronormative assumptions in discussions and decisions?
- Are debates and decision-making processes accessible to everyone (e.g. language problems etc)?
- Are there any transparency problems in the way things work?

In order to ensure objectivity in the audit, an external auditor – Aurélien Daydé from the European Disability Forum - was engaged to carry out the audit.

This report primarily draws on observations made during the CONCORD General Assembly on 5 and 6 of June 2012 in Brussels.

Prior to the General Assembly, the HRBA TF has decided that the audit should focus on:

- quantitative observations;
- qualitative interviews: five interviews have been conducted with a representative panel. Each aspect of the HRBA has been questioned: accessibility, gender, LGBT and transparency. The qualitative interviews have been foreseen as an opportunity to raise awareness about HRBA among the participants. Interviews remain anonymous;

Based on the observations at the General Assembly, the HRBA TF will outline a set of recommendations at the end of this report.

3 General Assembly Audit

The audit and this report will focus on 3 key steps to assess the General Assembly (GA)

3.1 Registration process

3.2 Events at the GA

3.3 Communication / documents sent to participants before, during and after the GA

3.1 The registration process

3.1.1 Accessibility of the registration process

Recommendations

- ✓ For an i¹nclusive registration process, the host organization should ensure that email communications are accessible to screen readers. The accessible registration form might propose to specify: *“Are there any accessibility requirements that the organizer should take into account?”*

This question addresses persons with reduced mobility (PRM), or with e.g. visual impairments, hearing impairments or learning disabilities.

This question can also benefit people who don't consider themselves as persons with disabilities but who require special attention.

[The European Blind Union \(EBU\) proposes online accessible guidelines here](#)

Contact EBU: ebuinfocom@euroblind.org

Observation

- The extranet of CONCORD is accessible to screen readers.
- The necessary documents to follow the general assembly were online before the events.
- Some documents are available in the following formats: doc docx xlsx and pdf.

Recommendations

- ✓ Screen readers can access all word documents (doc and docx), but cannot access some pdf documents, especially when they are scanned documents or if they haven't been generated from an accessible word document.
- ✓ It is also worth mentioning that screen readers can access Excel and Word tables. Tables are read from left to right and from top to down. Therefore, sophisticated and multiple entry tables might be difficult to understand for a screen reader user.

3.1.2 Gender and LGBT issues in the registration process

Recommendations

- It can be considered tactless to ask the gender of a participant on the registration form.
- If it is desired to know how many women participated in the event, it is better to avoid the choice of ticking a gender box which can be only answered by women or men. The most convenient way is to specify when asking the question: *Gender (any gender you identify)*.

3.1.3 Accessibility of public transport to the venue

Observations

¹ A screen reader is a software application that attempts to identify and interpret what is being displayed on the screen (or, more accurately, sent to standard output, whether a video monitor is present or not). This interpretation is then re-presented to the user with text-to-speech, sound icons, or a Braille output device. Screen readers are a form of assistive technology (AT) potentially useful to people who are blind, visually impaired, illiterate or learning disabled.

Metro Porte de Namur (the nearest metro station to the venue) is an accessible Metro station. Bus #71 is a bus-line accessible to Persons with Reduce Mobility (PRM).

Recommendations

- ✓ The accessibility of public transportation in the area of the meeting should be checked.
- ✓ An accessible station allows the audience to avoid extra cost and other negative constraints associated with private transport.
- ✓ Accessibility of public transport also benefits other persons with reduced mobility who don't consider themselves as persons with disabilities such as older people, injured people, pregnant women and travellers carrying luggage.
- ✓ Therefore, it would have been valuable information to add in the practical information: *"both metro and bus station (bus#71) at Porte de Namur are accessible to PRM. More accessibility details for persons with reduce mobility can be found online on www.stib.be"*

3.2 Accessibility of the venue

Observations

The Hub Brussels (37 Rue du Prince Royal, 1050 Ixelles) presents multiple accessibility challenges:

- the entrance portal-door doesn't allow wheelchair users and PRM to enter the facility independently;
- the elevator from the ground floor offers an alternative to the steps to reach the first floor, but when opening its doors on the first floor, there is a 60 cm step preventing wheelchair users or PRM from reaching the venue of the meeting;
- the panel of the meeting is accessible to PRM;
- the entire floor is flat and so is the access to the toilets;
- the toilets have different genders signs and none of them are accessible to a wheelchair user.

Recommendations

- ✓ Asking the participants if *"there are any accessibility requirements that the organizer should take into account"* gives participants with disabilities an opportunity to communicate their needs ahead the event.
- ✓ It is always best to check the accessibility of a venue before the meeting:
 - the organizer can ask for accessibility arrangements such as ramps installation or necessary refurbishment to allow access to all participants.
 - if some aspects of a place are not accessible, that should be specified in the invitation, but it is necessary to always offer an alternative such as *"we are sorry not to be able to provide an accessible venue, but our staff will be happy to support you: contact: name and mobile phone"*
- ✓ There are two important elements to take into account:
 - carrying a wheelchair user in stairs is not an option
 - accessible toilets are necessary to ensure the participation of a wheelchair user

3.3 Accessibility of the documents at the venue

Observations

No alternative versions (including Braille) of the meeting documents were available at the venue.

Recommendations

The registration form should ask if the participants need any alternative version of meeting documents: this could include a braille version of documents for blind participants or the production of easy-to-read documents for persons with learning disabilities or a limited knowledge of English.

- ✓ **Easy-to-read** is one of the accessible information formats along with large print, Braille and audio recordings. It is mostly used by people with intellectual disabilities, as well as other groups, including older people and speakers of other languages. Sentences are shorter and simpler, using words that are easy to understand. The design is clear and avoids complicated designs.

More information on how to produce easy to read documents is provided by Inclusion Europe here: <http://inclusion-europe.org/en/more-information/contact>

Contact Inclusion Europe: secretariat@inclusion-europe.org

- ✓ **Braille:** more information on how to print in braille in Brussels is provided here: <http://www.braille.be/fr/services/>

3.4 Accessibility to the content of the panels and discussions

Observations

The projection of a presentation is a great tool to illustrate a speech or specify technical information. Nevertheless, when there is a person with visual impairment in the audience, the numbers of a finance table or small letters in general can be impossible to read.

Recommendations

- ✓ For participants with visual impairments, it is better to focus on big letters and avoid sophisticated tables and small fonts;
- ✓ For a blind participant, it is important that the speaker describes the important elements of a presentation during his/her speech;
- ✓ For deaf participants or participants with hearing impairments, it is necessary to contract Sign Language interpreters. There are as many different Sign Languages. Therefore, when in touch with the participants throughout the registration process, it is convenient to ask the participant about his/her Sign Language preference;
- ✓ For deaf participants or participants with hearing impairments and participants with limited knowledge of English, an alternative solution which can only be complementary (and not a replacement of a Sign Language Interpreter) for the organizer is to contract a palentypist. A palentypist is contracted to type what is being said on a phonetic keyboard and to project it on a screen.

[More information is available online in the Sign Language Interpreter Guidelines from the European Union of the Deaf \(EUD\) and the European Forum of sign Language Interpreters \(EFSLI\) here](#)

Contact EUD on www.eud.eu

3.5 Access to meals, coffee break and social event

Observations

- The meals and coffee break of the General Assembly were generally accessible.
- The access to the social event at the end of the General Assembly was also accessible.

Recommendation:

It is important to keep accessibility in mind for social events to avoid the exclusion of persons with disabilities:

- ✓ Visit the venue beforehand the event to ask the host for any necessary arrangements;
- ✓ When a social event provides high tables to allow the audience stand-up chat, PRM or wheelchair users will need lower tables in order to be included. Adjustable tables are recommended;
- ✓ When planning to contract Sign Language Interpreters, it is important to foresee that they will work during breaks, meals and social events so that their own break has to be taken into account.

3.6 Gender balance among delegates

Observations

84 women and 74 men registered for the General Assembly

Recommendations

- ✓ Mainstream a gender check at the early organizational stages to ensure a balanced proportion of women and men representatives ahead of each General Assembly. If a substantial under-representation of women is observed (20% difference), take measures to rectify balance immediately:
 - call for gender balance of the delegates from each association if more than one representative;
 - require an annual alternation in the gender of the delegate from each association if there is only one representative.

3.7 Representation of women on panels and discussions

Observations

The gender of all panelists was taken into account:

First day:	mainly decision-making	9 men	4 women
Second day:	mainly discussion	5 men	4 women

Recommendations

- ✓ Mainstream a gender check at the early organizational stages to ensure an equal proportion of women and men chairs and panellists. If a substantial under-representation of women is observed (more than 20% difference), take measures to rectify balance immediately:
 - actively encourage qualified women chairs and panellists by contacting member organizations, women's associations or expert groups as necessary;
 - keep a database of women panellists/chairs and regularly update contacts of women experts.

Contact the European Women Lobby for more details: www.womenlobby.org

3.8 What percentage of the time are men speaking as opposed to women?

Observations

The amount of time women and men spoke at the GA was timed. Every person who addressed the audience was taken into account, whether he/she was a chairperson or a participant. The conference organized in the afternoon of the last day hasn't been taken into account.

First day mainly decision-making:	31 men spoke for 4,5 hours	10 women spoke for 30 min
Second day mainly discussion:	24 men spoke for 51 min	17 women spoke for 1h17 min

Recommendations

- ✓ See above to ensure balanced representation of women and men among organised speakers. Mainstream a gender check prior to the event to ensure balanced speaking time is allocated between women and men organised speakers.
- ✓ For Q&A and comment sessions, ensure the Chair is instructed to give the floor to a balanced proportion of women and men speakers. Set a time-limit for each intervention.

3.9 Hetero-normative assumptions in the discussions and debates

Observations

Hetero-normative assumptions weren't observed during the discussion and debates.

Recommendations

- ✓ Hetero-normativity is a term used to describe any set of lifestyle norms which divide people into distinct and complementary genders (man and woman) with presumed natural roles in life. It also assumes that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation, and states that sexual and marital relations are conducted between a man and a woman. Consequently, a "hetero-normative" view is one that involves alignment of biological sex, sexuality, gender identity, and gender roles.

To avoid hetero-normative behaviour, it might be convenient to add a 'mutual respect' clause or disclaimer in the conference pack:

Example provided by ILGA Europe staff: *"We are delighted that this event has drawn a very wide variety of delegates with different identities, views and experiences. Therefore it is particularly important that everyone demonstrates mutual respect and avoids comments that are hurtful or dismissive of other's experiences. While we encourage respectful debate about*

points of view we trust that delegates will avoid personal or prejudiced comments and allow everyone space and time to express themselves. Please contact the registration desk or XXXX's email if you have any questions, concerns or witness any inappropriate behaviour"

4 Qualitative interviews

Five in depth interviews were conducted with a representative selection of GA participants. Each aspect of the HRBA was discussed: including accessibility, gender, LGBT issues and transparency. The qualitative interviews provided an opportunity to raise awareness about HRBA among the participants. Interviewees will remain anonymous.

When accessibility has been mentioned, most of the interviewees realized the venue wasn't accessible to persons with reduced mobility. While claiming that this new venue was a lot better than conference rooms previously used in e.g. hotels, all interviewees acknowledged that more attention could be paid to accessibility issues. All interviewees mentioned that they believe that CONCORD's members usually support a blind member with accessing information, venues and discussions. Therefore, most of them were surprised to realise that CONCORD's documents are not available in Braille. One of them mentioned that extra attention to these issues could bring more members with disabilities into the General Assembly and into the decision making process.

All interviewees agreed on the obvious lack of gender balance during the first day of the event. On the one hand, most of them expressed that there is wide attention given to gender balance within Concord. On the other hand, the same interviewees claimed that the election of a female President of the confederation is a natural step ahead towards a better gender balance in the governing bodies and might bring a new balance also in the discussions and interventions. One interviewee highlighted that the colloquial connotations in the 'team building' discourses and presentations were dominated with the symbols of masculinity (rugby, football, the captain of a boat, etc). As a conclusion on gender balance, another interviewee explained that equality is not achieved yet and that CONCORD's members will have to make extra efforts.

LGBT is a topic that everyone agreed was not an issue within CONCORD's General Assembly. Nevertheless, one interviewee suggested that it could be addressed in the same way that gender issues are addressed within existing working groups or a specific task force. This would ensure that the topic is covered within CONCORD work when the question of discrimination is raised.

Finally, the interviewees were unanimous in finding the decision-making processes within CONCORD transparent. One of them recognised that the vote on the budget is more sophisticated than other topics. The interviewee highlighted that it is important that members read and understand all the documents before the General Assembly. This interviewee concluded that if the documents would be available earlier, that would certainly make it easier for the delegates to ensure that they were fully prepared to make decisions in a transparent manner.

5 HRB checklist

The following checklist consists of suggested items that can help CONCORD's staff and members implement a better Human Rights-Based Approach in their governing bodies' meeting and events. This is not an exhaustive list, however hopefully it can give examples to encourage CONCORD's staff and members' thoughts on how to better organise their own events in accordance with the principles of the HRBA.

- ✓ The accessibility to information is crucial: the registration emails, the documents and every other step of the registration process has to be accessible to screen readers used by blind representatives;
- ✓ The accessible registration form should invite the audience to specify: *"Are there any accessibility requirements that the organiser should take into account?"*;
- ✓ The registration form should not ask if participants are male and female without any further options;
- ✓ As venues are never perfectly accessible to every person with disabilities, it is necessary to explain the accessibility limitations in the registration process. A contact person can be provided to detail the issues and find alternative solutions if requested by the participants;
- ✓ Information about the accessibility of public transport to access the venue is a must;
- ✓ Remember that carrying a wheelchair user in stairs is not an option;
- ✓ Alternative documents can always be provided on request to accommodate every special need;
- ✓ Sign Language interpretation has to be provided for deaf participants;
- ✓ Breaks, meals and social events have to be as accessible and inclusive as the discussions;
- ✓ Mainstreaming a gender check at the early organisational stages is important to ensure a balanced proportion of women and men representatives ahead of each General Assembly;
- ✓ Chairs of sessions must pay attention to ensure that discussions and questions from the floor are as gender balanced as possible.
- ✓ To avoid hetero-normativity behaviour, it would be useful to add a 'mutual respect' clause or disclaimer in the conference pack.

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