The Four Principles of Right Based Approach to Development in a Christian Understanding

Danish Mission Council Development Department (DMCDD) works with a Right Based Approach to Development based on four different principles. These principles are described and explained in a Christian understanding with examples of biblical stories reflecting each of the principles.

Empowerment

**Definition:** Building the social, political, legal and economic capacity of rights-holders to address those with rights obligations (duty bearers), voice their rights and access remedies for violations or abuses.

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional process that helps people gain control over their own lives and be in a position where they can voice their own rights as well as those of marginalized groups in their community. Empowerment lifts the natural gifts and dignity of human beings, taking place in mutuality, in partnership and in a spirit of power-sharing.

The process of empowering people should consequently address social, political and legal power as well as economic power, in order to empower people to:

- analyze and understand their life situation and the rights that apply
- set agendas, act on development issues and promote the access of equal rights for all
- control resources and influence decision-making through advocacy, etc.

In *Diakonia: Creating Harmony, Seeking Justice and Practising Compassion* (2005) by WCC it says: ‘Empowerment is at the heart of diaconal and justice seeking activities and can be seen as an overarching characteristic or goal of much of the work of the churches and church-related organisations. Empowerment activities in a Christian framework address the dignity of humanity and reveal to each person and group their inherent gifts and abilities so that they may actively work towards transformation’.

A biblical story of empowerment

The stories about Jesus in the New Testament show his focus on the empowerment of people, asking them what they want him to do for them (Mark 10:51). In the encounter with the blind man, Jesus did not take for granted that the man wanted to be healed, but asked him first what he wanted him to do for him. Respect for the autonomy of every human being, and faith in peoples ability to think on their own and contribute to changes in life, should also shape today’s professional diaconal encounter between people. Jesus encouraged people to stand up, take their bed and go. Thus, diaconal authority should contribute to empower people to manage their own lives.
Participation

**Definition:** Engaging rights-holders - actively and meaningfully - in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of activities that impact their lives.

Participation can take on multiple forms and serve many different purposes, but genuine participation is closely linked to empowerment and redistribution of power. Participation implies that the rights-holders are able to and provided with space to influence the development process, to voice their views and to propose solutions. Without a certain redistribution of power, participation becomes an empty and frustrating process for those who hold the least power. Empowerment will consequently be a prerequisite for genuine participation in many cases.

As shown in the figure below, there are several levels of participation. It is important to reflect on the principle of participation both in relation to 1) own organization – to what extend is e.g. staff given space for influence and decision making? 2) Project design, implementation and follow up – to what extend are the target group and rights holders invited to give input and make decisions all through the project cycle? 3) What ambition of participation are we aiming for as goals and impact in various projects, e.g. for women?

There is a close link between participation and ownership. When community members participate in and are able to influence the activities in their communities, the sense of ownership is strengthened, which promotes the continuity and management of the activities.

**Figure 9: Ladder of participation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Type of Participation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Citizen Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Delegated Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Placation</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Consultation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Informing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Therapy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Manipulation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DMCDD RBA review report, p. 18

**A biblical story of Participation**

The Bible gives many stories of how Jesus invites people to participate in issues of relevance to them and their community in a dignified manner. One story is from the gospel of John, where Jesus perform a miracle by transforming five breads and two fish into the feeding of 5,000 people – and 12 baskets were collected with left over breads. (John. 6:1-13). Jesus could have performed the miracle all by himself without relying on the involvement of his disciples and a random boy. Instead he chose to involve them to demonstrate that everyone has something to participate with, that there are resources and assets available in all communities and within all people to make use of, and by using them, a miracle can take place.
Non-discrimination

**Definition**: Giving priority and support, principally and in practice, to the most marginalized and vulnerable in society and to the groups most affected by rights violations and abuses regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, health status etc.

Non-discrimination is a principle, which applies both to an organization’s internal procedures, e.g. the employment policy and how they select and recruit new staff, as well as to the actual program work. Non-discrimination in program or project work should guide all of the phases in the project. In the design phase, special attention should be given to identifying a target group, where people in vulnerable situations are included. During the implementation phase it should be ensured that all people can access the activities and benefits, also e.g. people with disabilities. In the follow up phase, similarly the principle would cause special attention to how the project results benefitted the most marginalized target groups rather than measuring only ‘overall successes’ etc.

**A biblical story of non-discrimination**

The principle of non-discrimination resembles traditional Christian values represented in the Bible. A well known scripture often quoted to emphasis equality is this: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Jesus’ life style also resembles a way of including people that came on his way regardless of gender, ethnicity etc. One story is when Jesus after a long journey arrive to a well in the midst of Samaria and ask a woman for water. She engages in a dialogue with him. (John. 4:1-30). The principal of non-discrimination is applied as: 1) Jesus goes beyond cultural barriers and makes positive contact with a women, who had lower status than men and were not supposed to be spoken to by men. 2) Jesus as a Jew makes contact to a Samaritan, which was perceived with lower status in the society. After the conversation, Jesus leaves the Samaritan women with a feeling of dignity, hope and encouragement for her life.

Accountability

**Definition**: (1) Operating in an inclusive and transparent manner that ensures downwards, inwards and upwards accountability; (2) Identifying the relevant duty-bearer and working towards a situation where these duty-bearers have the will and capacity to enforce the human rights standards, and where there exists mechanisms for holding them to account if rights are being violated.
Accountability is a principle, which supports trust building, responsibility and credibility in the various relationships linked to the project cooperation. Accountability refers also to values of transparency and good-governance. The figure below describes the different levels of relationships.

**Upwards accountability** towards partners/donors showing that you have fulfilled your objectives and obligations (reports, accounts, evaluations, etc.)

**Inwards accountability** towards own congregation/members/staff ensuring and showing that you are able to fulfill your responsibilities and mission (internal policies and procedures, reports, accounts, evaluations, etc.)

**Downwards accountability** towards key stakeholders (rights-holders and duty-bearers) ensuring that you fulfill your responsibilities well (transparent budgeting, information about expected results, complaint mechanisms, beneficiary representation, etc.).

Secondly, accountability refers to the relationship between the rights-holders and the duty-bearers. Accountability means that the duty-bearers take responsibility for the fulfillment of human rights. Also that the duty-bearer can be held to account for their responsibility towards the rights-holder in an on-going dialogue. One can say in a simple way that accountability in this regard is applied, when projects are designed to facilitate this dialogue between the duty-bearer and rights-holder – rights-holders are empowered to voice their rights and duty-bearers’ are addressed and capacity built to be able to respond.

**A biblical story of Accountability**
In the book of Acts, there are examples of procedures followed by different disciples or apostles, where the principle of accountability is used in various forms. One story is in Act 6:1-7, where a need arise for additional deacons to be selected and recruited to engage in the social work, making sure that the widows were benefitting and included during the food services. There are two main observation in the story;

1) The 12 disciples want to be accountable with the church’s social work and ensure that the right people benefit. They are listening to the community people, who complains that their widows do not benefit, and respond with a suggestion to scale up resources. This is an example of a church being downwards-accountable to the target group and community.

2) The selection of the deacons take place openly, as the 12 disciples had invited the whole church (group of disciples) and presented the problem and asked them to select the deacons. This refer to inwards accountability - involving church supporters. Promoting participation, democracy and transparency.

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