

A brief summary of the differences between a needs-based approach and a rights-based approach¹

	Needs-based approach (NBA)	Rights-based approach (RBA)
Vulnerability	Vulnerability is addressed as a symptom of poverty or marginalisation.	Vulnerability is seen as a structural issue, both caused by and leading to unequal power relations in society.
Justice	An increase in justice may be achieved as a by-product of meeting needs , but it does not explore the injustices that led to the deprivation in the first place.	Justice is the focus of the efforts. Thus it tends to challenge traditional, social, cultural and even legal practices and norms that may foster injustice.
Discrimination (e.g. based on gender, creed, caste, economy)	Tends to work with the symptoms of discrimination, rather than causes.	Deals with the causes of discrimination, because it works with the power imbalance between authorities and vulnerable groups that support such discriminations.
Power relations	Does not engage with the issues around the power imbalance between authorities and vulnerable groups. In fact the latter are likely to approach the current power-holders for help, thus unconsciously enhancing their power .	Focuses on addressing the differential power issues that underlie poverty and disadvantage – and tries to re-draw the power equations .
Accountability	In NBA projects, accountability is only in terms of outcomes – so that the funding agency (governmental or non-governmental) is satisfied that funds are used for what was intended.	Works towards ensuring the accountability of the state and other service-providers , and push them to fulfil their obligations to respect the rights of all, especially of marginalised people.
Citizenship	Citizens are perceived as beneficiaries who hopefully enjoy the largesse of the government.	Citizens are seen as significant actors in a democratic state , and so emphasise opening up direct channels of communication

		between citizens (and other people living within a state's jurisdiction, such as refugees) and the state's officers/institutions.
Conflict	The aim is to avoid upheaval and discontent by somehow arranging to satisfy the needs of the community.	By opening up space for expressing demands and multi-way communication among stakeholders, RBAs create possibilities in conflict prevention, although at times they may also function in a conflictual manner. Grievances simmering beneath the surface can be and are brought into open debate for negotiation or challenge.

¹ Based on UK Interagency Group on Human Rights-based Approaches, 2007.

Moving from a needs-based approach (NBA) to a human rights-based approach (HRBA) – an example from the Action Learning Initiative.

At the programme implementation level, this involved asking the question: have we been able to analyse our work from an HRBA perspective, that is move away from analysing 'operational' blockages to understanding and dealing with the 'systemic' blocks?

Most countries who participated in the Action Learning Initiative reported that the HRBA has gradually improved their ability to analyse systemic blocks, especially during the Country Strategy development process. Some, however, recognised the challenge of moving from targets and building infrastructure towards sustainability and systemic change.

Comparison between the actions WaterAid Malawi would have taken under a traditional service delivery approach and those it took as part of the HRBA pilot.

The case of Mpira Dam, Balaka District

Because of its community management policy, the government handed over the water scheme to a local trust, which failed to manage resources properly, causing the infrastructure to fall into disrepair and the water source to degrade. Meanwhile, the 150,000 residents with no access to water became disillusioned with the process.

Service delivery project approach	HRBA pilot actions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build capacity of local council on support to trust • Train trust on governance and management • Train waterpoint committees • Support rehabilitation of pipes and tanks • Support the catchment area rehabilitation by the local council • Work directly with Water Board on water distribution for the local community • Count number of people reached with services and capacity improvements to assess success of the project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilise affected communities and build understanding of citizens' experiences (past and current) of issues around the water scheme and of their aspirations • With the community, identify relevant stakeholders and their roles, interests and power within the catchment area of the scheme • Provide capacity building to citizens on their rights and responsibilities • Support the continuous engagement between citizens and relevant duty-bearers – adding more layers of duty-bearers as informed by continuous analysis • Engage the media to amplify the citizens' voice and increase awareness of the different issues stakeholders raised • Count number of people reached – 53,000 • Produce a paper on sustainability and initiate dialogue on effectiveness of the community management model for rural piped water schemes • Record the institutional changes taking place as a result of the engagement • Continuously engage the government on the issue while gathering support from other stakeholders <p>Support the development of a multi-stakeholder action plan on the issue of access to the rehabilitated water scheme, and who has rights to this.</p>