

Making sure people count in a disaster

Human rights don't disappear the moment an earthquake, a hurricane or a tsunami strikes. We witnessed after the Indian Ocean tsunami, the earthquake in Haiti and many other disaster situations that during relief and recovery efforts the protection of human rights gains in importance as it can safeguard the dignity of those affected.

United Nations Inter-Agency Standing Committee (2011) Operational Guidelines on the Protection of Persons in Situations of Natural Disasters

Recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.

Preamble, Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Human Rights Approach underpins disaster management, before, during and after the event:

READINESS

Preparing

- Educating and planning – all information available, understandable and accessible to all communities.
- Ensuring systems and processes in place for a coordinated response that protects people's human rights.

RESPONSE

Protecting

Protecting affected communities and individuals:

- Ensuring relevant and important information is available, understandable and accessible to all communities.
- Ensuring vulnerable groups and individuals are not further disadvantaged.
- Maintaining and protecting links to family/whānau and communities.

RECOVERY

Monitoring and accountability

- Monitoring the human rights of people affected to ensure their rights are given effect to.
- Keeping people at the centre of recovery activity to ensure positive outcomes.
- Working together to resolve problems in situations where human rights are overlooked or abused.

Decision-making

- Are decisions in-line with international human rights standards?
- Have communities been involved in preparedness education and disaster risk management planning?
- Is all this information available in appropriate languages and accessible formats to ensure it reaches everyone in the community?

Participation

- Are those directly affected involved and informed in decision-making which affects them?

Non-discrimination

- Do those affected have the same rights and responsibilities as others?
- Are the human rights of those affected the same of those who haven't been?

Empowerment

- Can those affected use their human rights to make change and have a say in decisions that affect them?

Accountability

- Can those affected complain about decisions that affect them?
- Can those affected have their complaints about decisions or matters affecting them resolved in a timely and effective manner?

Balance

- Is there conflict between different rights?
- Try to balance these different rights so everyone's rights are respected.
- Where appropriate, give priority to the rights of the most vulnerable.



Human rights approach checklist

- 1 Non-discrimination among individuals and groups through equal enjoyment of rights and obligations by all.
- 2 Identifying all relevant human rights involved and balancing rights. Where necessary, prioritising those of the most vulnerable people, to maximise respect for all rights and rights-holders.
- 3 Emphasis on the participation of individuals and groups in decision-making that affects them.
- 4 Empowerment of individuals and groups by their use of rights as leverage for action and to legitimise their voice in decision-making.
- 5 Accountability for actions and decisions, and enabling individuals and groups to complain about decisions adversely affecting them.
- 6 Linking decision-making at every level to human rights standards set out in the relevant human rights covenants and conventions.
- 7 Effective review and complaints processes.