Combining our strengths

Exploring the complementarity of human rights and systems strengthening approaches

MAKE RIGHTS REAL

AGENDA FOR CHANGE

WASH United

WaterAid

END WATER POVERTY
SANITATION & WATER FOR ALL

UTS Institute for Sustainable Futures

Both approaches share the same objective. To achieve,

Access to universal, inclusive and sustainable water, sanitation and hygiene

What are we talking about?

Human rights based approach
Government is the primary duty bearer for realising water and sanitation services for all. Human rights require the integration of the principles of non-discrimination and equality, participation, access to information, accountability, and sustainability into policy and practice.

Systems strengthening approach
Systems strengthening involves analysis of barriers to inclusive, sustainable, universal access to WASH. It involves taking actions to address these barriers that exist within a complex system of actors, factors and interactions. There is more than one pathway to change.

Who are we talking about?

171+ countries obliged to realise HRWS as part of international legal obligations – and numerous other sources that commit to the realisation of water and sanitation

15 Agenda for Change members & numerous other (I)NGOs that apply SS

A large number of CSOs that use the human rights to water and sanitation to demand more from government

E.g. Making Rights Real approach

E.g. Claim your water rights campaign

What about you? Which approach do you apply? Why?

Only human rights

Both human rights &
systems strengthening

Only systems strengthening

Human rights principles & systems' building blocks

Non-discrimination & equality

Active & empowered people and communities

Gender & social inclusion

Participation

Institutional arrangements

Financing

Sustainability

Coordination & integration

Monitoring

Accountability

Policies, strategies and plans

Government leadership

Access to information

Service delivery & behaviour change

Accountability & regulation

Environment & water resources

Key questions to explore:

- Are the two approaches mutually exclusive?

- Do these two approaches overlap?

- Is one approach part of the other?

Combining our strengths: Key complementarities between human rights and systems strengthening

The obligatory nature of rights can add new strategies and open new alliances to systems strengthening

Integrating human rights more consciously into systems strengthening approaches can provide guidance to advance the realisation of rights through systems strengthening

Systems strengthening can give human rights an analytical framework to better align with larger WASH sector thinking

… and more!!!

QUESTIONS

Human rights are often referred to in a normative sense in SS work, but without reference to the principles and criteria that come with it. What opportunities might arise if SS looked at rights more deeply? Answer might be the use of different strategies where SS always seeks to engage – and new alliances that can open up. What if SS does not lead to changes in the government systems that are needed to realise services for all - and confrontation/enforcement is necessary to address the bottleneck – rights claiming strategies can help there. E.g. the question of services for people who are systemically excluded, as is often the case in e.g. informal settlements

What is the added value of human rights in the district wide approach? It provides a normative/obligatory foundation for what is described as „good" in SS but without explanation or definition – i.e. SS is largey based on assumptions about how to define good (it's implicit). Answer could be about working with community advocates who constructively engage the government – but on the basis of entitlement and an expectation of seeing government action.

What are the barriers WITHIN organisations to combining the two? Often, systems work is down to programming people, while rights work is done by policy people – and the two don't seem to connect. Also, systems strengthening work is always close to infrastructure and finance, while rights work is often closer to research and learning? Internal barriers can also include skills, capabilities and understanding of the human rights principles. External barriers are also important, as even if accountability/HR is a key building block, it is very political and requires a more open political space for engagement compared to strengthening coordination, institutions, etc.

How do we change the systems of exclusion and injustice? What kinds of rights-based strategies are effective to make structural changes and how?

Why are we still not looking at exclusion – and the underlying reasons for it? Women, people with disabilities, people in informal settlements….

How can civil society work best with government to shift the needle and use human rights to strengthen systems that transform injustice and exclusion?

What value do system strengthening tools or frameworks (e.g. building blocks) and the idea of a system (being a network of actors, factors and interactions) have in designing WASH interventions that advance the realisation of the human rights to water and sanitation? (Rodolphe)

What are we doing to make sure that human rights principles are included in systems strengthening? (We need a conversation about how we make systems work better so they work for the poorest, most excluded).

Systems strengtheners – do you see human rights as a distraction from core business of taps and toilets? Can also touch on the point that a legal guarantee does not mean that it is achieved for everyone TODAY – that does not mean the guarantee is meaningless. (Kevin)

How does SS address structural, "hard" legal barriers to formalized services? – like in informal settlements, tenure insecurity, dependence on shady (unaccountable) landlords (Kevin)

Systems strengthening can be perceived as highly technical. The state obligation and citizen engagement are missing links in systems strengthening. How can we make systems strengthening tools more comprehensive? (Kevin)