



Strategic Evaluation of the Human Rights-Based Approach within Austrian Development Cooperation

- ❖ The Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) is **well established** within the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC) overall.
- ❖ Human rights (HR) as a **normative principle** is the **most embedded** of the three HRBA intervention levels within ADC, followed by HR as a **programmatically intervention** and HR as part of **political dialogue**. Effective coordination between these three levels of intervention is happening but not as part of an overall agenda with shared HR objectives.
- ❖ **Resources** for HRBA are **thinly spread** and steering of the HRBA is not formalised. In addition, there is a **lack of clarity** on the **long-term HRBA objectives**. HRBA implementation is thus heavily dependent on the knowledge and commitment of individuals.
- ❖ There is **room for improvement in knowledge management**, especially with regards to allowing room for dialogue on the context-specific implementation of the HRBA.
- ❖ **ADC's HRBA draws on Austria's unique and longstanding support for human rights** building on the 1993 World Conference on HR in Vienna. At the same time, there is a perception that ADC could do more to consistently champion HR externally.
- ❖ The full report can be accessed at: <https://www.entwicklung.at/en/ada/evaluation/evaluation-reports/evaluation-reports-2017-2021>

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Human rights have informed ADC's work since the 1990s. In keeping up with the developments of increasing conversion of human rights and development cooperation, ADC has implemented a human rights-based approach (HRBA) to development, specified in two key documents: (i) the ADC policy document on human rights (2006); and (ii) ADA's Human Rights Manual (2010) – hereinafter referred to as “the policy” and “the manual”. These two documents outline three **strategic intervention levels** for the integration of human rights in ADC: (i) human rights as a **normative principle**; (ii) promotion and protection of human rights as a **programmatically intervention area**; and (iii) human rights as a **component of political dialogue**.

THE EVALUATION

This strategic evaluation was conducted between June 2020 and February 2021 by an independent evaluation team of IOD PARC. The evaluation's **purpose** was two-fold: (i) to obtain evidence about the timeliness and adequacy of ADC's HRBA and to identify ways to further develop its application; and (ii) to pinpoint prevailing needs for further guidance.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation used a **mixed-method, non-experimental approach**. Elements of a human rights-based approach were applied as part of the evaluation process. Over 130 individuals participated in data collection through (qualitative) semi-structured key informant interviews, focus group discussions and an online survey. The participants included MFA and ADA staff, civil society organisations in Vienna, and ADC coordination offices and partners in four ADC priority countries. Qualitative content analysis was applied to a range of purposefully selected (policy- and strategic- as well as programme- and project-) documents for an in-depth analysis.

KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In general, the **HRBA is well established** within ADC. MFA and ADA staff are aware of the three intervention levels as outlined in the policy and manual and there is a **wealth of knowledge and skills** on HRBA application. In priority countries, HRBA implementation is strongly connected to the country strategies, which for most part are explicitly committed to human rights. This positive impression is **not always matched**



by the perceptions within ADC and expectations that the HRBA should be more consistent, prominent and comprehensive.

The evaluation identifies a **risk of dissipation** with regards to the prioritisation and positioning of human rights within ADC. Overall, **resources** (financial, human, time and technical) for HRBA implementation in ADC are **thinly spread**. Only one advisor in ADA is covering human rights along with two other thematic fields. The evaluation concluded that the ADC approach to human rights does not have high-level leadership providing direction from anywhere within the structures leaving HRBA application to be the responsibility of everyone. **What ADC wants to achieve** in the long-term **through HRBA** implementation at all levels is **not clearly communicated** internally.

The **human rights framework** can be perceived as **static and limited to those rights highlighted** the policy and manual, rather than dynamic. Internal and external stakeholders expressed the wish to be equipped with more in-depth knowledge and practical guidance on HRBA implementation. To this end, there is a strong **demand for increased dialogue** on HRBA implementation.

ADC has **unique HRBA foundations**, building on the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna. The policy and manual are relevant in that they lay the foundations of ADCs HRBA and reinforced Austria's commitment to human rights. But the **perception** prevails that ADC has not **consistently championed human rights** externally in recent years.

Out of the three HRBA intervention levels, the **normative principles** are the **most embedded within ADC**. They are well understood among all stakeholders. Except for private sector projects, normative principles are largely incorporated by all projects and programmes. Strong embedding of principles is also dependent on implementing partners' expertise.

Concerning the second intervention level, human rights as a **programmatically intervention area**, many stakeholders were not clear about the link to the HRBA when interventions had a **broader human rights scope** (e.g. in relation to economic, social and cultural rights).

Human rights as a **component of political dialogue** is the least visible and **integrated intervention level**. There seems to be effective coordination between MFA and ADA regarding diplomatic issues which include human rights, but **not as part of an overall agenda** with shared human rights objectives.

Integration of gender equality and human rights is less strong, as gender equality is structurally and politically prioritized. Therefore, among some stakeholders, gender equality is almost seen as a substitute for the HRBA framework.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Increase understanding and knowledge among ADA and Coordination Office programme staff regarding how HRBA is implemented in practice** by drawing on the existing wealth of knowledge and expertise both internally and through partners.
2. **Strengthen and make the alignment between policy dialogue and interventions more visible.**
3. **Increase generation and access to a diverse range and state-of-the-art formats of tools, guidance and resources** for ADA and Coordination Office programme staff to implement normative principles and technical human rights interventions.
4. **Create a visible direction and focal point for human rights that both promotes and brings together the combined levels of ADC's HRBA:** policy dialogue, normative principles and human rights interventions.
5. **Promote greater access to technical advice and create space for programme managers and partners** to engage with that technical advice to achieve a more systematic investment and commitment to integrating HRBA into all projects.
6. **Use the opportunity of this evaluation to engage with a wider range of internal and external stakeholders regarding ADC's HRBA.**