The Role of the Church in Promoting Rights-Based Approaches to Disaster Management

This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the Master of Arts Degree in Development and Emergency Practice, Oxford Brookes University

Centre for Development and Emergency Practice (CENDEP)
School of the Built Environment

Ian Verhaeghe
August 2009
Abstract

We exist in an era of unprecedented disasters, both in severity and frequency. With the increasing unpredictability of natural processes and their impacts on vulnerable populations in many developing countries, the consequences of disaster put many lives and livelihoods at stake. The church is one institution that, because of its proximity to vulnerable communities throughout the developing world, as well as its ubiquity within many contexts, is able to respond quickly and compassionately to those affected by disaster. Indeed, for decades the church has been helping communities mitigate, prepare for, and recover from disaster. However, despite the church’s efforts, there is still a growing disparity between the victims of disaster and those with the power to limit its destruction.

There are many tools, methods and approaches within development that are effective in helping agencies and institutions engage with complex issues like poverty, vulnerability, inequality and institutional corruption. This study proposes that, if the church incorporates rights-based approaches within its work in disaster management, its work can be made more effective. Thus, the research question that this paper aims to address is: How can the church promote rights-based approaches to disaster management? If the church adopts a rights-based approach to disaster management, will its advocacy work become more effective, as it engages with the higher levels of society in order to ensure that the marginalised are getting their fair share of inputs before, during and after disaster occurs?

In exploring the role of the church in incorporating rights-based approaches within the context of disaster management, this thesis analyses 3 case studies from Kenya, Niger, Malawi and the Kashmir region of India through the lens of rights-based approaches. As the moral core of the rights-based approach lies within a Christian contextualisation of human rights, it is upon the basis of a holistic gospel – what the Micah challenge calls ‘integral mission,’ – that the church incorporate rights-based approaches into the work of disaster management, a field it has much experience in.

Over the past few decades, development methods and frameworks have shifted drastically, as livelihoods-based, needs-based and charity-based approaches to development (to name only a few) have all flourished and faded with time. Now the development paradigm has shifted once again and it is now unthinkable to respond to poverty, disaster and oppression without talking of ‘rights’. Where other approaches to poverty and development have come and gone with time, it is unlikely that the rights-based approach will be put on the development shelf anytime soon. We now exist in an era of human rights, where the only holistic response to poverty and issues of inequality is a framework that integrates human rights into processes of engaging with stakeholders while both protecting and promoting those rights.
## Contents

Abstract 2  
Contents 3  
Acknowledgements 4  
Methodology 5  
Tables and Figures 6  

**Part 1 Introduction** 7  
1.1 The church 8  
1.2 Why the church? 8  
1.3 Disasters 10  
1.4 Understanding disasters 10  
1.5 Who is affected by disaster 11  
1.6 Disaster management 12  

**Part 2 Human Rights and Rights-Based Approaches (RBAs)** 13  
2.1 Human rights context 13  
2.2 Understandings of human rights terminology 14  
2.3 Human rights theology: A Christian contextualisation 15  
2.4 Rights-based approaches (RBAs) 18  
2.5 The UN and rights-based approaches 20  
2.6 Strengths of RBAs 21  
2.7 Limitations of RBAs 22  
2.8 Concluding remarks 23  

**Part 3 Illustrative Case Studies** 24  
3.1 Case study 1: Pumwani, Kenya – Advocacy 25  
3.2 Case study 2: Niger – Advocacy for disaster response 26  
3.3 Case study 3: Malawi – Disaster mitigation 27  
3.4 Case study 4: Kashmir, India – Disaster recovery and DRR 28  
3.5 Concluding remarks 29  

**Part 4 Integrating the Church, RBAs and Disaster Management** 30  
4.1 Rights-based approaches within the church 31  
4.2 The church in scope and scale 33  
4.3 An integrated tool 33  
4.4 Concluding remarks 35  

**Part 5 Recommendations and Conclusion** 36  
5.1 Recommendations 36  
5.2 Conclusions 37  

Appendix 38  
Bibliography 39
Acknowledgements

Though this paper is primarily a synthesis of literature that seeks to integrate the subjects of rights-based approaches into the church’s role in disaster management, there are a number of people who offered practical suggestions during its preparation. Their comments and encouragement are greatly appreciated and were instrumental in providing scope and guidance. Special thanks are due to Ian Davis, Bob Hansford and Charles Clayton. I am also grateful to have been tutored by David Sanderson, who has a wealth of practical experience and an infectious enthusiasm to back it up. I would like to thank my beautiful wife; for her loving support and her generous spirit. I am forever indebted to her for her wisdom and encouragement. Finally, thanks be to God.
Methodology

This dissertation is based primarily on desk research conducted during the summer of 2009. Following a broadly scoped literature review, this paper surveys the theory and practice of the two major components of this paper – the church’s involvement in disaster management and what has come to be known as rights-based approaches (RBAs). This paper commences by providing context for the church and its involvement in disaster management, as well as a brief synopsis of the international human rights system as foundation for rights-based approaches (RBAs). This paper attempts to synthesis key arguments, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of rights-based approaches. In some respects this paper is unconventional in that it aims to provide history, theory, advocacy, guideposts, spaces for reflection, as well as propositions and steps forward – all within the same narrative. This paper culminates in a call for the church to incorporate rights-based approaches into its work with disaster management and provides a conceptual framework for doing so.

This paper benefits greatly from some informal conversations with three influential development practitioners and academics, which has provided colour, as well as the element of humanity that helps bring life to any desk-based study. While there are many manuscripts, books and working papers that deal independently with rights-based approaches, disaster management (DM) or the role of the church, there are fewer that integrate any two of these elements into one account. Even still, I have not yet come across a manuscript that draws all three components of this paper together succinctly. Though incomplete in many respects, this dissertation is my attempt at weaving the threads of rights-based approaches, disaster management, and the role of the church into one coherent narrative. Despite its strengths, this dissertation has multiple weaknesses. Time and funding were the primary constraints on being unable to conduct research in a country where the church is actively engaged in disaster management work. Where the church is active in disaster management, very rarely is there documentation to confirm its use of rights-based approaches. Thus, much of the research relies upon the principle of knowledge transfer from non-church organisations’ involvement in DM to church-based involvement in DM. Perhaps the greatest weakness of this study is the point at which an RBA framework is laid over case 3 studies in an attempt to analyse how often elements of RBAs were used within the DM programming, as well as how effectively they were used. This proved to be an extremely imprecise scientific method, using blunt objects as instruments but enjoying the process of learning.

Tearfund resources have provided much of the baseline data for this study. Upon this foundation I have endeavoured to employ the UN’s common understanding of rights-based approaches framework to analyse and synthesise case studies taken from a broad range of contexts and locations. Much of the reason for engaging with this study is motivated by my experience with Tearfund; and though my time there has not been extensive, I have been very fortunate to have developed wonderful relationships with friends and colleagues there.
Tables and Figures

Table 1 UN RBA Elements 20
Figure 1 A drowning person needs a rope, NOT a sermon 30
Table 2 Niche areas of the church in DM 31
Table 3 Traditional and Rights-based approaches to DM 32
Figure 2 Disaster Crunch Model and RBA 34

Cover Photograph by Paul Sherar, 2008.
**Part 1 Introduction**

This study is three-pronged in that it seeks to explore how the two distinct threads of the church and rights-based approaches can be woven, in tandem, through the complex fabric of disaster management. While underpinned with development and human rights theory, this paper seeks to present itself as a manual whose aim is to provide practical tips on how the church can promote rights-based approaches to disaster management (DM). Myers (1999) in speaking about personal and social transformation, writes, ‘only changed people can change history. If people do not change, little else changes in the long term.’ Therefore, this paper aims to inspire real change in personal and communal lives and to challenge the reader to find his/her place within the process of bringing life to the role of the church as it employs a rights-based approach to disaster management.

**Part 1** will cover the subjects of what the church is and why it is an effective vehicle for the work of disaster management in local communities. This section will also provide baseline definitions for disaster, taking into account the factors that must be present for a disaster to occur. Concluding, this section will provide some context for disaster management.

**Part 2** will cover the human rights movement, providing a brief history before exploring a Christian contextualisation of human rights, including debates and conflicting schools of thought within the Christian perspective on human rights.

**Part 3** will examine case studies in light of the elements of rights-based approaches outlined by the UN in its ‘common understanding’ document.

**Part 4** will discuss the integration of the church, disaster management and rights-based approaches. Providing context of the scope and scale of the church, locally and internationally, this section will supply a conceptual model that incorporates a right-based lens.

**Part 5** will go on to provide some ‘next steps forward’ ideas within the framework of recommendations. After collating a number of recommendations, this section will conclude the study of how the church can promote rights-based approaches to disaster management.

**Defining the Terms**

For the purposes of providing clarity and continuity throughout this paper, it is important to provide a working understanding of what is meant by the term ‘church’ and to establish that the terms ‘church’ and ‘church-based organisations’ are used interchangeably. Before I begin addressing rights-based approaches, I will first identify key terminologies used within this paper.

---

1 Myers, B.L., pp. 149.
1.1 The church

Despite popular opinion and assumption, the ‘church’ is not about buildings. Tearfund UK’s publication of ROOTS 11 (2007) provides some perspective on the ways in which the New Testament uses the term ‘church’:\(^2\)

- a meeting of Jesus’ followers. (Most common use of the term)
- a gathering of believers that meet in a house
- all Christians in a particular locality – the people who belong to a group of believers even when they are not gathered together
- believers in a particular locality under the care of a group of elders [or leaders]
- all believers everywhere – the worldwide church

Some of the common elements that weave the descriptions of the church together are as follows:

- the church consists of a group of people that are followers of Jesus Christ
- ‘the church is the community in which God lives by his Spirit’

Underpinning the church’s mandate in all that it does is an ethos based on what the Micah Network defines as ‘Integral Mission.’ Thus, integral mission envisions that the church not settle for a separation of communicating the faith from social involvement, and asserting that ‘justice and justification by faith, worship and political action, the spiritual and the material, personal change and structural change belong together.’\(^3\)

This paper assumes identical uses of the terms ‘church’, in its many facets, as outlined by Tearfund UK. The church’s role in promoting rights-based approaches to disaster management must be both integral and transformational. It is vital to understand the role of the church in this context as well.

1.2 Why the church?

Despite all of its flaws and, at times, its perceived and practised irrelevance, the church is at the same time one of the most resilient, as well as one of the most ubiquitous social institutions there is. Obviously the church is not solely a social institution, as its purpose lies within a spiritual foundation. The church is often located in areas where there is a high concentration of vulnerable people, where there is the most physical, psychological and spiritual need. The church is often fastened to the same community for decades and generations; come rain, shine, disaster, peace-time or war. In speaking of the church’s organisational capacity, Raistrick (2006) notes that in addition to its ability to gather people together for a common purpose and initiate joint action, in many communities, the church is possibly the only reliable institution there is.\(^4\)

Dr. J. Hayward, executive director of the Jubilee Centre in Cambridge, suggests that, ‘in many places, Christians constitute the only credible civil society organisations. Wherever they have focused on both the physical and spiritual needs of people, they have

---

\(^2\) Blackman, R., 2007, pp. 7.
\(^4\) pp. 2.
succeeded in transforming local communities for the better.' And though it may prove difficult in parts of Asia and the Middle East, the church is a voice of credibility and a catalyst for positive change in many places throughout the world. After all, in the great scheme of things, ‘if you want to deliver the Millennium Development Goals [MDGs], then in Africa you have no option but to work with and through the churches, as they are the most universal and the most credible civil society organisations in context after context, country after country […] in Africa the Church has been utterly indispensable.'

In terms of the church’s work in disaster, there are a number of reasons why the church plays a key role within the community. Davis and Wallis state (1991), that the church is able to act quickly because they are already present within the communities affected by disaster. Additionally, after relief is provided, the local church can follow-up with reconstruction efforts because they are part of the natural infrastructure. Therefore, the church is uniquely placed in communities before, during, and after times of disaster, whereas, relief agencies come and go.

In fact, with the spiritual foundation and compassion-based care that it provides, the church has a wide array of unique strengths and abilities in terms of disaster management. Among many other strong points, the church provides a local presence with knowledge of local languages, resources and social/community structures, as well as a massive volunteer base. In many places around the world the church is a voice for positive values and is an institution that often maintains useful links with other churches, both nationally and internationally, through church membership and diocesan links. Its more intangible strengths lie in its ability to provide ‘ministry’ that is marked by joy and resilience, its capability to provide a message of hope beyond death and destruction as well as its commitment to provide pastoral support, offering counsel and a compassionate, listening ear.

Despite its strengths in various areas, the church is not without its fair share of weaknesses and constraints in terms of disaster management. Raistrick (2006) suggests that, in many cases throughout the world the church has chronic low capacity due to lack of technical knowledge regarding disaster mitigation and recovery, low rates of literacy, lack of experience in responding effectively to disaster, as well as an absence of basic infrastructure to deal with disaster scenarios without becoming overwhelmed. Some churches may be unwilling or unable to balance disaster management work with the tasks of communicating the faith and discipleship, while others may have ‘mixed motives’ for becoming involved in disaster management or have a sense of disunity with other churches in the area. Even still the reputation of the church amongst government and NGOs may inhibit the church’s involvement in disaster management. Even if these constraints are remedied, there remains the persistent problem of measuring, monitoring

---

6 Dan Damon (2007) BBC Radio World Service
7 pp. 44.
8 Raistrick, T., 2006, pp. 1.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
and evaluating the church’s signature contributions in times of need; e.g. an increase in people’s dignity or a person’s willingness to live, or the impact of a hug, smile, or a word of encouragement.  

On the other hand, ‘development can make the mistake of valuing only the things it can measure empirically. The church’s version of sustainable development involves things you cannot measure – hope, love, self-esteem. How do you measure love on a logframe?’ It is with these understandings of the role of the church in mind that the study progresses to the issue of disasters.

**1.3 Disasters**

We exist in an era of unprecedented disasters, both in severity and frequency. Managing and reducing the risk of disasters are some of the foundational aims of development. To provide some context for the destructiveness of disasters, according to the World Bank, ‘developing countries suffer the greatest costs when a disaster hits – more than 95 percent of all deaths caused by disasters occur in developing countries; and losses due to natural disasters are 20 times greater (as a percentage of GDP) in developing countries than in industrialized countries.’ With the onset of global climate change, both traditional and conventional disaster mitigation methods and coping mechanisms are no longer enough to guarantee the safety of villages, communities or even entire societies.

**1.4 Understanding Disasters**

A disaster can be defined as a serious disruption in a society, community or project that causes widespread or serious human, material, economic or environmental damage and loss, which surpasses the society’s natural ability to cope using its own resources. There are essentially two factors required in order for a disaster to occur. The two factors are hazard and vulnerability and are explained below.

*Hazards*

There are primarily two kinds of hazards; natural and man-made. Natural hazards refer to natural processes and phenomena that affect the biosphere in such a way that result in a destructive event and include a wide range of scenarios; from earthquakes, drought, windstorms, hurricanes, and tidal waves, to floods, volcanic eruptions, forest fires, freezes and mudslides, or any combination of the above. Man-made hazards, also referred to as ‘technological’ hazards are those hazards which occur after the failure of technological systems ranging from industry, buildings/structures, transportation and infrastructure.

---

12 Boyd, S., 2009, pp. 32.  
Vulnerability
People can be vulnerable in a variety of ways – physically, socially, culturally, economically and politically. Vulnerabilities must be viewed as interconnected because quite often one individual’s or group’s vulnerability is the result of, or predecessor to, another vulnerability. To provide a theoretical illustration; Kennel and her family are physically vulnerable because they live in a slum and have no access to electricity or running water. Additionally, Kennel and her family belong to the lower caste within their country and are thus socially vulnerable and are stigmatised because of who they are, where they live and because of the unsavoury types of work they must do in order to survive. Kennel and her family are certainly vulnerable economically as they must save their every financial resource just to stay alive and are most likely vulnerable in a political sense because their social status dictates that they do not reserve the right to participate in political processes. Kennel and her family are considered voiceless by the governing authorities, the elite and the power holders. When their vulnerabilities impact on a hazard such as a flood or fire, and the disaster that ensues ravages their slum, Kennel and her family will most likely receive penance, if anything at all, in terms of government efforts to help with recovery, reconstruction or preparation for the next disaster. And the vicious circle continues.

Disaster formula
A disaster only occurs when a hazard impacts on vulnerability. Indeed, a natural phenomenon without vulnerability is not a disaster – it is only an earthquake, volcanic eruption, wind, flood, or drought. Likewise, a population may be vulnerable to a disaster for many years, yet without the hazard acting as the trigger event, a disaster does not occur. A conceptual formula to illustrate the relationship between hazards, vulnerabilities and disasters may be helpful:

\[ V \text{ (Vulnerability)} + H \text{ (Hazard)} = D \text{ (Disaster)} \]

1.5 Who is affected by disaster?

When a disaster occurs, everyone is affected in some way, shape or form. For some, disaster creates new opportunities, however most people are completely unprepared for the disaster when it occurs, and are shocked at the loss of life, property and hope. Though everyone is affected and vulnerable in disaster scenarios, the most vulnerable populations are minorities and indigenous people, as well as children. In fact, within the next decade, ‘up to 175 million children are likely to be affected each year by the kinds of disasters brought about by climate change.’ Quite often, due to poor accountability among and within governing structures, and little to no protection offered and no easy form of redress, the poor are the most vulnerable victims of disaster. Most detrimental is the fact that disasters have the ability to rip the most basic rights of individuals away from them.

---

17 Raworth, K. et. al., 2008, pp. 7.
It is especially within disaster scenarios that human rights abuses go unchecked and the rights of individuals and groups alike often go unnoticed and are easily abused.

In brief, regardless of the location and safety of a society, region or community, there will always be inherent vulnerabilities that meet natural or man-made hazards. When vulnerabilities meet hazards, it is almost guaranteed that a disaster will occur. Therefore, it is important to respond in a proactive manner in order to reduce the risk of disaster. This is called disaster management.

Some questions to ponder and discuss:

- What kinds of disasters occur where I live, in my village, region, country?
- What types of hazards exist where I live; in my village, region, country?
- What types of vulnerabilities exist where I live; in my village, region, country?
- What are my personal vulnerabilities; how is my family vulnerable?

1.6 Disaster management

For the purposes of this paper, disaster management (DM) is a term broadly used to describe the multi-faceted tools and processes used to prevent, prepare for and recover from disasters. Disaster management is, ‘a term used to cover a broad range of inter-related activities which focus on reducing disaster risk, including: emergency response and recovery, preparedness, mitigation, advocacy and development education.’

Coppola (2007) refers to disaster management as ‘disaster risk management’ and defines it as, ‘the systematic process that integrates risk identification, mitigation and transfer, as well as disaster preparedness, emergency response and rehabilitation or reconstruction to lessen the impacts of hazards.’ Included under the umbrella of disaster management are the following tools:

- Disaster mitigation
- Disaster preparedness
- Disaster prevention
- Disaster response
- Disaster recovery
- Disaster risk reduction (DRR)

---

19 pp. 520.
Part 2 Human Rights and Rights-Based Approaches (RBAs)

‘Outside the cocooned world of the academy, people are still victims of torture, still subjected to genocide, still deprived of basic freedoms and still dying through starvation. We should remember these people before we decide to forget about rights.’

Though they may seem disconnected, the church’s involvement in disasters set the stage for discussing rights-based approaches. It is essential to obtain a basic grasp of human rights, for it is human rights that underpin global concepts of justice, freedom and dignity. Human rights also underpin the subject of discussion found later in this chapter – rights-based approach (RBA). This section provides a brief history of human rights, after which is given a short study on a Christian contextualisation of human rights, which encompasses an abridged examination of opposing schools of thought among Christians.

2.1 Human rights context

We exist in an era of human rights. In Western civilisation, the concept of human rights extends back further in time than what is generally thought of as the germination of human rights discourse, which began in 1945, and led to the establishment of the original 1948 UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Actually, it was during the mediaeval age that the first notions of human rights were articulated within the term ‘rights’, and were, in those days, specifically related to the individual – the concept of ‘group’ rights had not yet been debated. As soon as the relationship between ‘justice’ and the individual person had developed, the foundations were laid for the (re)construction of Western European legal systems, which bolstered the obsession of individualism and autonomy that so easily characterised the Eurocentric world at that time. Moving through the early 18th century, with John Lock, the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of Virginia (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789), it was at this time that the notion of rights had become an extremely controversial way of doing politics. Throughout the course of the next hundred and fifty years, as time churned through the statesmanship of such men as Edmund Burke, Jeremy Bentham and many others, and the socio-political philosophy offered by Karl Marx, history comes full circle to the 1940s, when the desolation caused by World War II and the terror of the Holocaust forced the great Western powers’ hand to draw up the United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights. It was then, with the rise of intergovernmental adjudicative bodies ranging from the European Court of Human Rights to the UN Human Rights Committee in which nations vowed that these tragedies would never be allowed to happen again. This was the dawn of the institutionalisation of human rights; the human rights regime – encompassing human rights law, politics and morals.

---

22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
The field of human rights is vast indeed, and though there are many levels of human rights, this paper is primarily concerned with international human rights. The international human rights regime is essentially that collection of international laws that declare and protect the inherent dignity and rights of all individuals based on the simple fact that each person is a human being. In addition to its foundational roots in religion and philosophy, within a global context the human rights system is founded on the United Nations (UN) framework and human rights are thus part of international law. These rights are inalienable, universal, indivisible and interrelated. In addition to customary law, within the human rights system there are both moral and legally binding obligations, made manifest in declarations and treaties (also referred to as ‘conventions’ or ‘covenants’). When a state signs a declaration, it is bound by a moral obligation to its citizens, however, when a state signs a treaty, it is bound by a legal obligation to its citizens. Human rights are enshrined in various declarations and treaties, though the most widely noted and arguably the most essential is the International Bill of Human Rights which includes:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

### 2.2 Understandings of Human Rights Terminology

The meaning of human rights is terribly disputed, often involving moral and legal debate, which contributes to the complexity of defining human rights to begin with. As with many concepts, meanings will vary according to who defines them. While there is no universally agreed upon definition of human rights, this section will outline commonly used human rights terminology and concepts in order to avoid confusion. These definitions are starting points, and are critical in the foundations of this paper. Thus, the following are working definitions and will be used as such.

**Human rights** can be described as the human entitlement to enjoy basic capacities such as dignity and freedom where every individual and group retains the right to life without fear of torture or detention. Human rights can also be described as: (1) ‘universal legal guarantees protecting individuals and groups against actions and omissions that affect their freedom and human dignity’ (2) ‘basic minimum standards based on human needs’ (3) ‘universal and inalienable i.e. all people are born with the same rights everywhere, at all times, and they cannot be taken away or given up’ (4) indivisible and interdependent, i.e. all rights are equally necessary for human life and dignity.

**Justice** upholds what is fair for all people, particularly for those who are marginalised and disadvantaged. ‘Working for justice means building a society which affirms the rights and responsibilities of all people.’

---

25 Ibid.
26 UN Declaration of Human Rights, 2009, pp. 1.
Equity can be understood through these two principles: ‘equal opportunity and avoidance of absolute deprivation.’

Rights / Claim holders are people (individuals and groups) who are entitled to rights, entitled to claim those rights, entitled to hold the duty-bearer accountable, and have a responsibility to respect the rights of others.

Duty bearers are people, or groups, (though more commonly thought of as institutions), that have the obligation to respect, protect, and fulfil the rights of the rights holder(s).

2.3 Human Rights Theology: A Christian contextualisation

Human rights and Christianity do not mix as well as one would think. When it comes to the church’s role in protecting and promoting rights within its community, in addition to its work in disaster management, it seems that everything hinges on theology.

Though historical records of the church’s involvement in human rights are vague, it is widely known that many Christians both supported and were advocates of slavery. On the other hand, many Christians led and supported the anti-slavery movements on both sides of the Atlantic throughout the 19th century – many of which were evangelical Christians in Britain and Scotland. In the United States, as far back as the 1680s Quakers were heavily involved in protesting slavery. Historically, Christian groups advocated for an end to inhumane prison conditions and ill-treatment of inmates, and even helped set up the Red Cross organisation, as well as the Geneva Convention on the Conduct of War and Treatment of Prisoners and Non-combatants. Despite some Christians being complicit with tyranny, many others, theologians included, were motivated by their Christian faith to oppose the Nazis during the Second World War. Even Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s failed attempt to assassinate Hitler on 20 July 1944 was largely motivated by his Christian conviction. Though largely forgotten by many Christians and churches, Fred Nolde, described as a devout Christian, was instrumental in the creation of the United Nations Charter of Human Rights. It should also be noted that the World Council of Churches was established during this time and continues to be involved in the UN’s work in human rights. Even within the current debates within human rights, historical roots are vital to discuss. Today, how can the church build upon lessons learned from its long history in human rights?

The Christian viewpoint of human rights is centred upon concepts of righteousness, justice, mercy, reconciliation, equity and hospitality. On the subject of Christians and human rights, Wright (1979) examines that many Christians and churches work in difficult environments where human rights are abused and neglected every day. Daily, the

29 Ferreira, F., 2006. pp.19
31 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
rights that protect the freedom to choose religion, participate in political processes, meet with others for a common purpose, as well as the right to education, are all trampled upon. While maintaining a distinctly Christian perspective, churches and organisations need to be aware of human rights, their meanings, implications and consequences. While Christians and the church may accept injustice and violation of rights against themselves, they must remain committed to actively seeking justice and advocating the rights of others. This is ‘motivated by love rather than of law.’

Conflicting schools of thought
It may be easy to assume that there is a greater sense of human rights heritage among Christians than among non-Christians. Yet this assumption becomes a problematic one, as many people interpret human rights differently. Despite the church’s long involvement in human rights, there is often a great deal of tension between human rights and Christianity.

Though it would be a mistake to polarise Christians into just two categories with respect to human rights, there is not enough time or space in order to give a full treatment of each. In addition to this, there are already too many lines by which Christians divide themselves, and are divided. It would be an unwanted consequence if this study served to drive wedges deeper and in more places within and between the global Christian community. Though there is an abundant amount of literature to review within development theory on the subject of human rights, there is a gap in the current literature in linking Christian theology and human rights. For the purposes of this study, there are generally two schools of thought on the Christian perspective of human rights. They are briefly illustrated below.

Human rights as secular
For Christians within this school of thought, human rights are and will remain a secular issue due to the association of human rights with secular activism and the secular institutionalisation of these rights. Not to discount the fact that the hallmarks of Christianity are to love, respect and consider oneself equal with one’s fellowman/woman and to serve one another with equity. However, by and large human rights are not articulated as such within a biblical or theological context and are therefore not seen as being practised, even when Christians act justly and with equity towards others.

For Christians within this school of thought, because human rights are a secular issue they are therefore outside the bounds by which faith informs worldview, thought and lifestyle. Additionally, Christians may view that the only reason Jesus gave up his ‘rights’ was in order that he might testify of the love of God to the world through servant leadership. As His disciples, some Christians take the view that they should follow suit, forfeiting their every right in an act of selfless solidarity with the one whom they follow, in an effort to become true servants – as Jesus was. There are also adverse political consequences for ascribing to human rights – as one may be deemed as a liberal, which, depending on one’s politico-religious standing, can be very emotive and even offensive.

34 Wright, C. 1979, pp. 79.
Gordon (2003) suggests that the concept of human rights causes problems for Christians, because, for some, the emphasis on ‘grace’, which is elemental in the Christian faith and encompasses the meaning of ‘free gift’, strongly conflicts with ‘rights’, which are free, but must also be fought for. Still some Christians maintain that human rights is a secular concept and therefore should not be engaged with, while others react to the prevailing individualistic interpretation of human rights, where people, skirting any responsibility while demanding rights for themselves, do not consider their obligation to provide or protect the rights of others.35

**Human rights as holy**
What may be seen as secular by Christians who ascribe to other schools of thought is seen as wholly acceptable and even holy by the other. For the Christians that accept human rights as within the proper bounds of Christian support and action, human rights are based on the conviction and belief that every person is created equal, regardless of race, gender, religion, ethnicity, caste, social class, and political affiliation.36 One author articulates Christian’s acceptance of human rights by suggesting that, in Christian thought, the love of God bestows value on people, is spontaneous and unmotivated. In essence, this love creates value and should be valued by all.37 For Christians within this school of thought, there is an even richer symbolism as they realise that much of what the scriptures say is actually articulated within the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, albeit within a different context. It is important to note that Christians often recognise that what is articulated within the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is inspired, if not written, by people who truly understood the concepts of justice, inherent worth, dignity, and equal and inalienable rights. However, it is wise to note that, ‘although human rights are consistent with biblical perspectives and priorities, Christians do not own them.’38

Regardless of which schools of thought Christians and churches ascribe to, it is important that a personal or congregational stance on human rights not dictate differing responses when faced with injustice and inequality. For the sake of those whose rights are trampled upon daily, as well as for the sake of the vulnerable affected by disaster, it seems to be very important for the church to contextualise human rights. It is equally important for the church to continue to promote dialogue about the meaning and practise of human rights. In order to close the gap between human rights and practice, it is not only essential that churches foster a culture of commitment to, and practise of human rights within their congregations, but it is necessary to employ a framework by which human rights can be made practical within the context of the growing physical and social vulnerability found in communities throughout the world. The next few sections will deal specifically with one such framework.

---

35 pp. 224, 225.
36 DanChurchAid, 2007, pp. 5.
37 Sugden, C., 1996, pp. 3.
2.4 Rights-Based Approaches (RBAs)

At the moment, rights-based approaches are among the standards for development programming. Rights-based approaches bridge the gap between human rights theory and practical action – making the nebulous concept of human rights both tangible and operational for organisations working with vulnerable populations, whether in conflict or disaster contexts. As the ultimate aim of development is to enhance human freedom and as human freedom can only be achieved by the realisation of rights in all of its spheres – civil, political, economic, social and cultural – it is crucial to streamline the elements that protect and promote human rights in development agendas. However, ‘human rights’ and ‘rights-based approach’ are not mutually exclusive or even interchangeable terms. While ‘human rights’ refers to an agreed-upon, international regime for outlining, asserting and protecting the basic rights and freedoms that all human beings are entitled to, the term ‘rights-based approach’ seems to hint at a set of tools. These tools are designed to build rights-holders’ capacities to hold duty-bearers accountable for providing their rights and entitlements, while also building the duty-bearers capacities’ to provide these rights to rights-holders.

History of rights-based approaches
Prior to the 1990s, the fields of human rights and development were quite separate; human rights practitioners assumed the role of the defenders of human rights while lobbying governments to abide by international human rights law; and development practitioners worked primarily in economic and social spheres endeavouring to help meet people’s basic needs. However, in the 1990s, as developing countries began to demand, as their right, development outputs from richer countries and as developed countries began to stipulate good governance and democratisation in order for developing countries to receive aid and development, the once separate fields began to converge. This movement led to the birth of the rights-based approach (RBA). Thus, within the past decade institutions of all purposes, shapes and sizes have adopted ‘rights language’ as they have engaged with donors and shareholders as well as with the populations they seek to assist. While some institutions have mainstreamed rights-based approaches in their practical work with populations, others have undergone policy shifts in order to make room for this emerging trend.

Definitions of rights-based approaches
The rights-based approach seeks to use the principles and laws laid out by the human rights regime as a framework to guide disaster management aims and agendas. RBAs are broadly thought of as encompassing, promoting and ensuring the accountability of powerful institutions, the empowerment of vulnerable people as well as the rights and duties of all actors. One author suggests that rights-based approaches hold institutions and power holders accountable for their responsibilities to people and groups with less power. Differing from ‘needs-based’ or ‘welfare’ approaches – frameworks that usually create dependency on development agencies – rights-based approaches promote and utilise participation and empowerment to identify human rights violations, addressing

root issues rather than applying band-aids on human needs.\textsuperscript{41} Various organisations have sought to define RBAs. Some baseline definitions can be found below:

- **Tearfund** defines RBAs as: ‘a participatory and empowering method of development, which seeks to hold institutions and powerful people accountable for their responsibilities to those with less power.’\textsuperscript{42}

- **The Danish Institute for Human Rights** (2007) defines rights-based approach as: ‘a framework that integrates the norms, principles, standards and goals of the international human rights system into the plans and processes of development. It is characterised by methods and activities that link the human rights system and its inherent notion of power and struggle with development.’\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} Stephenson, P., 2008, pp. 1.
\textsuperscript{42} Tearfund, 2006, pp. 1.
\textsuperscript{43} Boesen, J.K., and Martin, T., 2007, pp. 9.
2.5 The UN and rights-based approaches

As ‘the United Nations has styled itself as protector of the internationally proclaimed rights of all’\(^{44}\), it seems fitting that, with the advent of rights-based approaches, it should also provide authoritative definitions and some context in order to make RBAs practical. As a result of a UN Programme Reform in 1997, and at the behest of the Secretary-General, UN agencies began to mainstream rights-based approaches within their specific mandate structures. In neglecting to provide an agreed-upon set of definitions and elements from the beginning, the UN let each of its agencies decide definitions, methods and frameworks for implementation rights-based approaches. Thus, in 2003, the UN issued a statement of common understanding, a document that highlighted, according to the UN, the primary elements of RBAs. Though specifically for UN agency programming, these elements provide departure points for other organisations, both large and small, in their interpretation and operationalisation of rights-based approaches.\(^{45}\) The table below captures verbatim what the UN has determined are the ‘necessary, specific and unique’ elements of rights-based approaches:

**Table 1 UN RBA Elements**

| a) | Assessment and analysis in order to identify the human rights claims of rights-holders and the corresponding human rights obligations of duty-bearers as well as the immediate, underlying and structural causes of the non-realization of rights. |
| b) | Programmes assess the capacity of rights-holders to claim their rights, and of duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations. They then develop strategies to build these capacities. |
| c) | Programmes monitor and evaluate both outcomes and processes guided by human rights standards and principles. |
| d) | Programming is informed by the recommendations of international human rights bodies and mechanisms. |

**Other elements of good programming practices that are also essential under a HRBA, include:**

1. People are recognized as key actors in their own development, rather than passive recipients of commodities and services.
2. Participation is both a means and a goal.
3. Strategies are empowering, not disempowering.
4. Both outcomes and processes are monitored and evaluated.
5. Analysis includes all stakeholders.
6. Programmes focus on marginalized, disadvantaged, and excluded groups.
7. The development process is locally owned.
8. Programmes aim to reduce disparity.
9. Both top-down and bottom-up approaches are used in synergy.
10. Situation analysis is used to identify immediate, underlying, and basic causes of development problems.
11. Measurable goals and targets are important in programming.
12. Strategic partnerships are developed and sustained.

Reproduced from UN (2003), *Towards a common understanding among UN agencies*.\(^{46}\)

\(^{46}\) pp. 3.
The 16 necessary elements above should provide two things: guideposts for the development of programmes that streamline rights-based approaches, and approximate indicators for how to monitor and evaluate the initial design, implementation and success of programmes that have streamlined RBAs. Essentially, these elements act as performance standards against which progress in realising development goals can be measured and evaluated.\(^{47}\)

### 2.6 Strengths of RBAs

A rights-based approach is a framework that seeks to make the norms, principles and goals of the international human rights system tangible for all people by promoting empowerment, participation and accountability. Though many of the strengths of rights-based approaches are hinted at within this basic definition, a brief exploration into its strengths is worthwhile.

**Coherent framework**

A rights-based approach provides a coherent framework for ensuring participation, non-discrimination and equality in development programming. Though the hallmarks of participation, empowerment and equality have been used within other development frameworks, the RBA enhances these core elements by securing, strengthening and extending them within one single approach.\(^{48}\) Additionally, the elements of RBAs lend to the approach’s adaptability to virtually any development programme.

**Ownership**

When people participate in their own development, the participation and investment of time, energy and resources automatically creates a sense of ownership. Rights-based approaches utilise local knowledge and preferences and are often context specific. As citizens become empowered and informed, they realise that they are essential stakeholders in their own development, and the programme that was initiated using a rights-based approach will continue long after the development agencies have gone.\(^{49}\)

**Accountability**

Increasing accountability is central to the rights-based approach. Often, there cannot be holistic transformation within communities without addressing underlying issues that *create* the symptoms of poverty and lack of access to resources. What is often missing from development programmes is accountability at and between the various levels of society. Rights-based approaches strengthen the ties of responsibility between duty-bearers and rights-holders.\(^{50}\)

---

\(^{47}\) Waterwiki.net, UN-related issues, 2009, pp. 1.
\(^{48}\) Ibid.
\(^{49}\) Ibid.
\(^{50}\) Ibid.
2.7 Limitations to RBAs

While the strengths of RBAs are more legion than the abridged treatment found above suggests, they are not without serious limitations. In many contexts there may be both a lack of awareness of human rights, as well as capacities which are much too low to enact rights-based approaches. As rights-based approaches touch on issues of accountability and empowerment, they may become politically sensitive very quickly; and depending on the location, this may have formidable consequences.\(^51\)

**Ambiguity**

From defining what rights-based approaches are, to interpreting how best to apply them, rights-based approaches are difficult to classify. With so many organisations and institutions jumping on the RBA band-wagon, it would seem that there would be a definition of rights-based approaches which organisations from various sectors all agree upon. While there are rights-based approaches to virtually everything – spanning development and ethics, to mainstreaming them within poverty reduction and HIV/AIDS programmes, the issue remains that because there are many understandings and definitions of RBAs, it is difficult to translate them into one definition or best practice approach. Despite some increasing consensus around some of the primary elements that comprise rights-based approaches, there is no single, unanimous definition, nor framework for interpreting rights-based approaches or making them operational. And though the wide ranging menu of definitions of rights-based approaches are generally underpinned by internationally agreed-upon human rights standards, for many organisations and institutions, interpreting RBAs for policy and streamlining them in programming are matters for improvisation. If community-based organisations (CBOs) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are at a loss as to how they might implement rights-based approaches into their disaster management programming, they need not feel left out. As recently as 2008, the Representative of the UN Secretary-General (RSG) found that not only were national authorities unaware of how to apply human rights approaches in the context of disasters, but that international agencies and NGOs are, ‘also at a loss as to how to incorporate a human rights-based approach into emergency relief and response, even though many of the laws and codes of conduct applicable in situations of natural disaster include such guarantees.’\(^52\)

**Cultural and national applicability**

Human rights are not honoured or practised in many cultures and nations around the world, nor are rights-based approaches. While some equate human rights and rights-based approaches with Western ideologies that have no applicability in places where ‘rights are given up for the common good’, in other nations there are no frameworks for enforcing the protection and promotion of human rights, no resource base for successful implementation, and sometimes no political will to explore such propositions. While traditional approaches to development which strictly focus on meeting basic human needs in the midst of poverty and disaster are often welcomed by many governments and cultures, sometimes there is simply no desire for an approach to development that seeks

---

\(^51\) Waterwiki.net, UN-related issues, 2009, pp. 1.

\(^52\) Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, 2008, pp. 8
to address the underlying causes of poverty and marginalisation by promoting and protecting the rights of vulnerable people. Additionally, in many places there is no rule of law, or the rule of law favours the elite while marginalising the poor and vulnerable. While some argue for an approach that has a universal reach in terms of cultural agreeability and application, there may not be one until all nations and cultures begin to both protect and practise human dignity.

*Time*

While tackling root causes is often highly effective, it simply takes time to address the underlying causes of poverty and vulnerability. Streamlining rights-based approaches means changing people’s minds, behaviours, attitudes and, sometimes, social norms. This not only takes time, but a long-term commitment from the initiator in order to ensure effective and accurate knowledge transfer.\(^{53}\)

### 2.8 Concluding remarks

It is important to keep in mind that human rights and rights-based approaches are not panaceas for development and disaster management. Yet they are an integral part of the church’s work in disaster. Just as human rights are to be approached as imperfect and in need of constant revision, so is the need to view rights-based approaches within the same light. They are living documents and concepts, neither flawless nor complete – they are true works in progress. Boasting strengths and laden with limitations, the rights-based approach provides a comprehensive tool that will further protect, promote and enhance rights-holders to experience a life of dignity, equality and opportunity, while holding duty-bearers to account. With regards to the RBA elements laid out by the UN, there are multiple levels of analysis. As these elements have been described in this section, it is important to visualise how they can work in practise. The next part of this paper employs the RBA elements listed within this chapter and uses these elements as a lens to view relevant illustrative examples.

---

\(^{53}\) Waterwiki.net, UN-related issues, 2009, pp. 2.
Part 3 Illustrative Case Studies

Some of the following case studies do not necessarily take place within disaster situations. However, in many places throughout the developing world, if not in the midst of disaster, many communities live their lives in pre-disaster or post-disaster situations. These disaster situations are results of both natural and human-made hazards that impact on community vulnerability. It should not be overlooked that many Christian communities and churches throughout the world are already involved in areas that support human rights.

This section suggests that churches can, and should, adapt what the UN has determined as the key elements and pillars of a human rights-based approach, in order to operationalise them within their work in disaster management. As disaster management involves the entire spectrum of a disaster scenario – from disaster prevention, and disaster preparation, to disaster response and recovery – different case studies will highlight various nodes on this spectrum. Because time and space will not allow for a full treatment of each element of a rights-based approach as found in the box above, this chapter will use illustrative case studies to highlight some of these elements. Within each of the case studies below, there are a number of examples that capture some of the elements of rights-based approaches (RBAs), as outlined by the UN. May it be noted that there may be many more examples or RBAs within each case study than the one’s extracted and highlighted here. However, in order to provide a flavour of the synthesis process, the findings are based on first-glance principles, utilising three (3) RBA elements per case study. If the relevance of the case study is not readily evident, may it be noted that there is often a deep well of transferable knowledge that can be applied across cultures, social structures and political contexts. For the purposes of this exercise in analysis, the UN key elements of RBAs will be used as indicators. Please refer back to Table 1 UN RBA Elements, provided in Part 2 of this paper for additional clarification of the below analysis.
### 3.1 Case Study 1: Pumwani, Kenya – Advocacy. (Adapted from: 54)

**Note:** Though not played out within the context of a disaster management scenario, the following case study illustrates how a Christian community centre partnered with other community hubs in order to address human rights abuses.

In terms of promoting human rights among oppressed populations, Gordon (2003) draws upon a case study from the slum dwellers of Pumwani, Kenya. In 2000, after years of the slum dwellers being subject to police brutality, illegal detention and extortion of money, the Pumwani Arts Academy, a group that educates people on human rights, partnered with St. John’s Community Centre, a Christian organisation that had worked within the slums of Pumwani. In an effort to address these human rights issues and abuses, together they organised a set of performances, which included plays and dances aimed at informing the community of their rights and encouraging them to challenge any and all forms of police harassment. St. John’s Community Centre and the Pumwani Arts Academy informed the police of these performances and invited them to attend. Unbeknownst to the community, police officers disguised as regular civilians attended the community’s performances and took careful notes in order to report the group’s efforts to senior police officers. Initially the community feared that there would be greater police brutality and a greater sense of distrust in response to the performances. However, because of the nature of the performances, the opened invitation for the police force to attend, as well as the general transparency of the community’s actions, the relationship between the slum dwellers and the police force improved markedly.

---

3. **Strategies are empowering, not disempowering.**

Because of issues of brutality and mistreatment, the most empowering strategy was to engage with the police force in a less direct way, while still engaging on the issue of brutality. Though there was an initial fear among the slum dwellers that police brutality would only increase after the performances, the residents of the slum became empowered when they realised that the relationship between themselves and the police force improved. Though the residents of the slum perhaps would have been empowered regardless of the outcomes of the performances, the empowerment is sustainable and contagious when there are signs of improvement.

6. **Programmes focus on marginalized, disadvantaged, and excluded groups.**

Slum dwellers are perhaps the most marginalized, disadvantaged, and excluded groups anywhere in the world. Often ostracised from every other level of society and excluded from democratic processes, when addressing issues of rights and accountability, it is essential to bring the slum dwellers into direct contact with authorities – in this case, the police force.

9. **Both top-down and bottom-up approaches are used in synergy.**

Though primarily a bottom-up approach to addressing issues of rights, St. John’s Community Centre and the Pumwani Arts Academy helped the slum dwellers engage with those at the ‘top.’ Though synergy denotes willing cooperation from various stakeholders in order to reach the same outcome, once the police force was involved with the issue, it could not escape the fact that it was being held accountable for its actions. The authorities, those at the ‘top’ must be engaged with at which ever level possible in order for grassroots movements to be successful – especially as many underlying rights issues usually emanate from those with authority.

---

3.2 Case Study 2: Niger – Advocacy for disaster response (Adapted from: 55)

Note: Though there is limited information provided within this case study, it may be assumed that the scenario is a slow-onset disaster such as a drought.

While working in partnership with Tearfund, a local church in Niger challenged the government’s early warning information that had incorrectly gauged the needs of the Tuareg, a marginalised pastoralist group. After holding it to account, the church made certain that the government provided the necessary aid to the difficult-to-reach Tuareg population.

1. People are recognized as key actors in their own development, rather than passive recipients of commodities and services.

While it is essential within an RBA to hold governments and institutions to account when they fail to uphold civil, political, economic or cultural rights, or when they fail to provide the basic means by which people can live healthy lives, it is important to remember that commodities and services, (and even aid, in times of disaster or emergency) are not substitutes for rights. This is especially so if duty-bearers see the dispatch of commodities and services as a method of quietening down those who are demanding rights.

2. Participation is both a means and a goal.

The level of the church’s participation with the Tuareg is unclear, and it could certainly be a case of speaking up on behalf of the marginalised without actually involving them. Perhaps a way to operationalise this RBA pillar would be for a member of the church to accompany a leader from the Tuareg in an effort to provide support as the leader addresses and lobbies the government her/himself.

12. Strategic partnerships are developed and sustained.

It would have been wise to conduct advocacy work on behalf of the Tuareg in such a way that any help provided would not be viewed by the stakeholders as a ‘one off’ intervention. It is important for the church and for the Tuareg to build their legitimacy with the government in order to make clear that they both play an important role in society. Build legitimacy through practical activities (e.g. caring for those in need, providing education, etc.)56

56 Gordon, G., 2003, pp. 68
3.3 Case Study 3: Malawi – Disaster mitigation (*adapted from:* 57)

In an effort to diminish the losses and effects of the slow-onset drought in Malawi in 2005, Christian Aid provided support to church partners who became involved in disaster management strategies. The church partners encouraged people to cultivate heartier crops such as sorghum and millet – crops that grow properly and produce substantial yields without large inputs of water; unlike maize, for instance. Christian Aid church partners also assisted in the construction of dams for irrigation purposes, and encouraged substituting compost for more costly fertiliser in people’s agricultural practises.

5. Analysis includes all stakeholders.

Above and beyond the church partners, farmers and local community members, it is not clear who the other stakeholders are. Ideally, all stakeholders affected by disaster mitigation efforts would be contacted and involved in process. District and regional governance structures should be informed as to the process of mitigation, and dialogue between those on the grassroots level – church partners, farmers, community members, etc. – and local / national government representatives should be opened up.

7. The development process is locally owned.

While Christian aid provided support to church partners involved in disaster management strategies, the process of partnering with people to cultivate heartier crops, construct dams and substitute compost for fertiliser was owned by local churches, pastors and community members.

11. Measurable goals and targets are important in programming.

Though there was most likely a goal in mind throughout the planning, initiation and completion processes, it is important for there to be dialogue between partners and stakeholders in order to share ideas, build capacities, and most importantly, to agree on measurable goals and targets for the programme.

---

On 8 October, 2005, an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.6 on the Richter scale hit the Himalayan region of Kashmir. Having left tens of thousands dead and just as many injured, making an additional 3 million homeless, the earthquake reduced cities and towns to rubble and turned schools into mass graves. Christian Aid partner SEEDS INDIA was involved with disaster management efforts ranging from first response to reconstruction efforts and disaster risk reduction techniques in preparation for the next disaster. With logistical support India’s National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) and the Indian Government, SEEDS India spearheaded the following efforts.

- **Disaster Response**: distribution of 100 tents and 500 blankets in various towns and cities. Provision of ‘family kits’ consisting of milk powder, notebooks and utensils.

- **Disaster Reconstruction – Poonch City, India**: Construction of prototype emergency shelter. SEEDS mobilised carpenters and masons from the SEEDS Mason Association to work with local construction workers and ‘beneficiary’ families. Community members provided labour and were supervised by SEEDS engineers. Widows, female-headed households and the elderly were given priority in reconstruction processes. Individual emergency shelters were built on each family’s land, near their damaged homes. Materials for reconstruction were culturally acceptable and identified through participatory approaches with community members. Participation of community during reconstruction process was chief concern.

- **Disaster Education**: SEEDS Mason Association facilitated informal knowledge sharing sessions with local carpenters on safe construction practises. SEEDS facilitated opened discussions and demonstrations about disaster preparedness.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation**: Individual emergency shelter was provided for each family on family-owned land. Local physical planning practises adhered to and universal standards ensured. Assessment teams evaluated construction outcomes as well as psycho-social aspects within community. Internal evaluation was carried out based on SPHERE and SEEDS systems checklists.

- **Follow up**: SEEDS revisited hundreds of families and provided support to ensure shelters were compliant with minimum water and sanitation standards. SEEDS facilitated shelter workshops and demonstrated appropriate technologies and materials for permanent structures, and trained local workers in proper use of materials and technologies. SEEDS provided reconstruction, repair and retrofit support for local schools, buildings and infrastructure. SEEDS established school safety initiative to ensure robust and risk reducing structural, as well as non-structural components.

- Project carried out according to SPHERE Standards and the International Code of Conduct. Participation of beneficiaries was an essential part of design and process framework.

**Pillar 4. Both outcomes and processes are monitored and evaluated.**

Internal and external processes were monitored and evaluated against SPHERE Standards, International Code of Conduct and SEEDS standards. Though perhaps not utilising RBAs specifically, these standards help to ensure that all processes and outcomes contribute to the ‘do no harm’ principle in development. Though it is not clear that the agencies worked with local populations to develop indicators that were context specific, it is ideal to develop monitoring and evaluation processes with the affected populations in order to ensure that they support and promote capacities to claim rights as well as hold duty-bearers accountable. It is essential for there to be complaint mechanisms by which those who have been helped by agencies can hold agencies themselves accountable for discrepancies, faults and abuses.

---

58 Seeds India, 2006, pp. 1.
**Pillar 10.** Situation analysis is used to identify immediate, underlying, and basic causes of development problems.

By involving local masons, carpenters, government officials and those directly affected by the earthquake, the situation was analysed in order to identify immediate, underlying and basic causes of the problems caused by the earthquake. The larger the pool of stakeholders involved, the more thorough the analysis of various issues, and the greater the chances of developing capacities to hold duty-bearers accountable while claiming specific rights.

**Pillar 8.** Programmes aim to reduce disparity.

Initial response, reconstruction, education, M&E, and follow up efforts all aimed to reduce disparity between the affected populations and those unaffected by the earthquake, as well as between different affected populations in various locations. Local capacities were developed through education programmes and informal knowledge sharing sessions helped spread crucial information across various stakeholder groups – which minimises the opportunity for information to remain in the hands of the few and powerful. Ideally, these programmes would aim to reduce disparity between the various stakeholders’ capacities to claim rights and hold duty-bearers accountable for those rights.

### 3.5 Concluding remarks

Simply incorporating RBA elements within disaster management programmes does not necessarily make for good programming. Good disaster management programming streamlines RBAs throughout the entire process of the programme – from the planning stage, to implementation, monitoring and evaluation, as well as through follow-up activities. The Danish Institute for Human Rights suggests that there are three (3) basic steps in RBA programming:

1. ‘Analysing the context: What issues, actors, problems and solutions to focus on.’
2. ‘Designing the programme: What to do about it.’
3. ‘Implementing and evaluating: How to carry this out in practise and how to learn from it.’

In concluding, after having analysed the case studies above, ask yourself:

- What are the similarities between these case studies and my community, country or region?
- What types of natural hazards are there in my area?
- What types of man-made or ‘technological’ hazards are there in my area?
- What kinds of vulnerabilities does my community have?
- Is there a history of disasters in my community, or in my country or region?
- What has my community done to respond to, prevent, or prepare for these disasters?
- What kinds of things can I implement in my community based on these case studies, programming ideas, etc.?

The next section will explore the integration of the church, rights-based approaches and disaster management.

---

Part 4 Integrating the church, RBAs and disaster management

‘The rights-based approach resolves one of the church’s great conundrums in that it bridges the gap between its responsibility to communicate the faith and its obligations for social action; people have a right to benefit from both.’ – Charles Clayton

In introducing a framework for integrating rights-based approaches into the church’s work in disaster management, it is important to note the disparity between theory and practise. Nicolas-Morago (2000) suggests that, ‘as we strive to reach a better understanding of the nature and practical implications of the rights-based approach, we also become more aware of the risk of falling into utopian discourses, lacking in coherence and realism.’ Thus, regarding the reality of human rights on the ground, and specifically the rights-based approach, the gap between words (sermons) and actions (ropes) is lamentably too wide.

Figure 1 A drowning person needs a rope, NOT a sermon


It is important to examine how the church is already effective within disaster contexts. While present in hurting communities – ‘with local knowledge, buildings, people and the motivation to respond’, the church often lacks the technical capacity, specific skills and resources needed in order to meet a community’s needs in an emergency. While the

60 Clayton, C., 2009. [Personal communication]
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
church boasts one of the largest volunteer bases in the world, one of its primary limitations is, ‘its reliance on volunteers who, though highly motivated, are usually limited in the skills and time they can offer. So most local churches are incapable of specialist responses.’ Due to its low capacity and proximity to communities affected by disaster, the church often becomes a partner with NGOs, and less commonly to government institutions, who, with greater technical knowledge, respond to or help communities prepare for emergency and disaster situations.

The box below captures, by way of rigorous research and years of partnership with the church, what Tearfund has identified as the church’s ‘niche areas’ in its work with pre- and post-disaster interventions, including those involving conflict.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
<th>Niche areas of the church in DM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In disaster scenarios, the church can be:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. A facilitator of community action</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A connector with the wider world</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. An advocate on behalf of the poor and marginalised</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. A community peacemaker</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. A provider of relational care and support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. An influencer and shaper of values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. A provider of resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. An immediate responder to sudden-onset disasters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


It is important to note that almost all of the church’s 8 niche areas reflect its relational capacity to work effectively within disaster and emergency situations. Keeping the church’s low capacity in mind, it is important to notice that only in niche areas (1) and (7) are there any hints of a more technical response from the church. If the capacities of the church are developed in such a way that it is equipped to respond efficiently and effectively to disaster scenarios, with the technical knowledge to offer specialist interventions, there is yet another conundrum in its ability to do so while mainstreaming rights-based approaches. Additionally, if the church is to promote rights-based approaches to disaster management, would it enhance its strengths while building its capacity to overcome weaknesses?

4.1 Rights-based approaches within the church

The church’s utilisation of rights-based approaches within disaster management frameworks provides a tool by which it can further seek to protect and further the rights of those affected by disaster. However, it is crucial to note that RBAs are not just another activity to be incorporated under the church’s umbrella of disaster management. Rather, it is an approach to disaster management that should be included in all stages of the disaster management cycle. Far from viewing those who have been affected by disaster as ‘victims’, a rights-based approach will allow the church to view people as they truly are, as survivors – with capacities, strengths and dignity. This is in stark contrast from more

---

traditional church responses to communities affected by disaster, many of which often perpetuate a victim or welfare mentality. The rights-based approach fosters a view of the ‘bigger picture’, and fosters a greater sensitivity to the issues of justice, ‘power balances, discrimination, insecurity, and vulnerability.’

When the church moves from a traditional approach to disaster management, to a rights-based approach to disaster management, an emphasis is placed on community participation and empowerment in an effort to promote rights, as opposed to creating a dependency on other agencies. The table below captures some of the primary differences between the rights-based approach and the traditional approach to disaster management.

Table 3 Traditional and Rights-based approaches to DM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Traditional approach to disaster management</th>
<th>Rights-based approach to disaster management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. View of ‘victims’</td>
<td>People affected by disaster are helpless victims</td>
<td>People are survivors with their own capacities and abilities to cope and have the right to use them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Victims are passive recipients of external aid</td>
<td>People have the right to own their assessments because they know their needs best</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Needs Assessment</td>
<td>Damage and needs assessments are rapidly done by external experts</td>
<td>Focus on building upon community’s capacities and assets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Aid Materials</td>
<td>Focus upon physical and material aid and technical solutions</td>
<td>Focus on building upon community’s capacities and assets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Focus</td>
<td>Focus on individual’s needs alone</td>
<td>Focus on the whole community has the right to equal assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Decision making</td>
<td>Donors decide what the victims need</td>
<td>Effected communities have the right to decide what they need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Responsibility</td>
<td>Providing aid is the responsibility of the disaster agency</td>
<td>The whole community has the right to decide what they need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Goal</td>
<td>Goals is to meet emergency needs and bring things ‘back to normal’</td>
<td>People have the right to be empowered in order to meet basic needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Hansford, Dellor and Macpherson, (2007)

The church’s methodology and attitude towards a rights-based approach should be to mainstream them in all disaster management activities. The church’s commitment to these issues is only as robust as its theological basis for involvement, as well as its capacity to act effectively. Myers (1999) stresses that ‘a Christian view of social sustainability will require a theology of civil society that defines the roles and responsibilities that individual Christians, voluntary Christian groups, and churches should play in order to add value to the societies in which they live.’ If the church engages with disaster management by adopting a rights-based approach framework, will it indeed add value to the society within which it lives? At this point it may be wise to provide context for the church in order to gain a more holistic understanding of its role.

---

69 pp. 131.
4.2 The church in scope and scale

The church is a worldwide network; one of the few movements that are both global and local. In terms of its scale, the church spans from a united global network, with complex institutional structures, down to regional and district church diocese, before reaching the grassroots levels of village and house-based fellowships – an international community that is infinitely larger than the sum of its parts. The church is present in urban slums throughout the world’s mega-cities and is an integral part of the social fabric in some of the most remote places in the world – operating at different levels within society depending on its various capacities. Thus, the church is no longer faced with the question of whether or not to expand its mandate in order to include disaster management using a rights-based approach. The question has become, ‘at which level does the church expand its mandate to include DM?’

Because of its scale and influence, the church is able to promote rights-based approaches to disaster management at every level of society in various ways. Firstly, it is at the global and institutional level that the church can expand its mandate to include disaster management work as an expression of love and mercy to all people, regardless of one’s faith. At another level, the church can provide disaster management training and build technical capacities at the local church level. The church can also allocate donor funds and other resources to disaster management projects that are implemented by churches at local levels, while influencing local, regional, national and international disaster management policy. After all, on the issue of Christian advocacy and the influential shaping of society, Weng (2004) suggests that ‘believers [Christians] should try to influence and shape public policy for the welfare of the economically deprived and socially marginalized.’ Underlying the church’s activities at the global scale is the role of clarifying and promoting practical and biblical theology that places an emphasis on the rights of vulnerable individuals and groups and how these rights might be expanded and nurtured by the church’s work in disaster management.

4.3 An integrated tool

This section recommends a new tool – albeit, ideally, in a more simplified form than is presented here. This tool can help churches, as well as NGOs and other institutions working with churches, understand the links between disaster management and rights-based approaches. Whether the church considers this tool a worthwhile investment, and whether its capacities can be substantially improved in order to utilise this tool is another matter. Perhaps the more important question is how the church may be able to rearrange the proposed tool and adapt it in order to best meet its needs, as well as the needs of the vulnerable populations it seeks to serve. Thus, what is needed is a multi-lens tool that integrates:

A. The 8 ‘niche areas’ of the local church in disaster management (Tearfund)
B. The Disaster Crunch Model through the lens of RBA
C. The UN’s 16 core elements of RBAs, (or a more simplified RBA framework)

---

71 pp. 90.
Disaster Crunch Model and RBA

Though this paper does not provide a full-treatment of a conceptual model that incorporates all the elements above, Figure 2 below depicts a model that seeks to capture what is prescribed in (B). Originally produced by Ian Davis, the Disaster Crunch Model below has been adapted to display the makings of a disaster viewed through the lens of rights-based approaches. The Danish Institute for Human Rights identifies the four international human rights principles that work for justice and dignity for every individual while employing the RBA. These principles are: (1) Inalienability, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, (2) Empowerment and participation, (3) Equality and non-discrimination and (4) Accountability. These human rights principles are mainstreamed throughout the RBA, and in turn, throughout the Disaster Crunch Model, to ensure that there is a proper focus on the four primary areas of concern in RBA programming. These areas are; (1) Most vulnerable groups, (2) Root causes, (3) Rights-holders and duty-bearers and (4) Empowerment. Note that many of these elements correspond to the UN’s outlines of the elements of RBAs.

Figure 2 Disaster Crunch Model and RBA

Adapted from Hansford, Dellor, and Macpherson, (2007)

---

73 Ibid, pp. 16.
74 pp. 8.
4.4 Concluding remarks

If rights-based approaches are streamlined when planning responses to disaster scenarios, and when performing disaster management activities, than those responses and activities are less likely to be undermined by institutions that may jeopardise holistic change by with-holding or compromising entitlements that they may be required to provide. Whether in pre or post disaster scenarios, and even in the midst of a disaster, the church has a crucial role to play in promoting rights-based approaches to disaster management. From building its own legitimacy with governments in order to hold leaders accountable in light of negligent building code enforcement, to its involvement in reforming antiquated or non-existent disaster recovery plans, or helping to ensure that the poor get their fair share of inputs provided during disaster recovery, the church is a key institution for advocacy, influence and disaster transformation. In linking the church’s established role in disaster management with the less defined tools and elements of rights-based approaches, it is, however, difficult to ascertain how much the church will benefit from the divide that has existed between them.

The church’s work is often difficult to track because so much of it is undocumented. If the church wants to build its legitimacy with communities and institutional partners, it may be crucial for the church to develop indicators for its work in promoting rights-based approaches to disaster management in order to chart its progress and impact. Therefore, it may be wise for the church, at some level, to incorporate monitoring and evaluation within its efforts. Nevertheless, it is important for the church to wrestle and engage with these issues. Faced with the fact that rights-based approaches to disaster contexts is extremely complex, the church must find a way to simplify an integrated approach that will allow for efficiency, care and replication. As the church is already involved in disaster management and advocacy, if its capacity is built to include rights-based approaches, the church may be able to extend its reach and impact throughout the region. The church certainly seems well positioned to bridge the gap between disaster management and rights-based approaches.
Part 5 Recommendations and Conclusions

5.1 Recommendations

By way of recommendations, firstly what is needed is a simplified version of the RBA elements and pillars in order for the church to incorporate them into its 8 niche areas within disaster management work. Perhaps this simplified version could be an adaptation of what the UN has outlined in its ‘common understandings’ document, and could be condensed into no more than 8 principles, for easy application and transfer. If the church uses this tool to streamline RBAs within the 8 niche areas it is already successful in, its effectiveness in working with vulnerable populations can only be increased, and the lives of the vulnerable can be improved even more holistically.

Secondly, it is essential to build the capacities of the church, at every level, and in all of its forms – from its small rural branches to its presence in city slums. In developing countries, ‘most church members have limited skills and resources: most are poor and uneducated and often their pastor is too. Even when they are envisioned to serve their community, churches can be limited to fire-fighting, reacting to need and lacking the capacity to tackle root causes.’75 Regarding the church’s role in disaster management, as the its capacities are built, it can expand its technical and specialist capabilities in order to envision how it might adapt institutional frameworks that more specifically address disaster management, including the tool of disaster risk reduction (DRR). With regards to the impacts and consequences of this paper, it is hoped that the church will consider the adoption of rights-based approaches as a meaningful and effective framework that can be incorporated and promoted, both within and outside of the church. Though rights-based approaches can be incorporated within every church-based programme, it is especially pertinent to do so within the sphere of disaster management, as disasters often reveal hidden prejudices, a lack of accountability, as well as broken social, political and economic systems that empower the elite while marginalising and creating vulnerability for the many, on national and regional scales.

Rights-based approaches should not be seen as a ‘silver bullet’, encompassing all the solutions for the church’s work in disaster management. Rather, RBAs should be viewed as a tool that provides the opportunity for understanding and challenging issues within disaster management – one step further in a new direction. Through examining the historical contexts of the human rights system and analysing rights based discourse, as well as the church’s own strengths and limitations, it is hoped that this study has proven the importance of this topic. In seeing the connections between rights-based approaches and disaster management, hopefully the church will integrate this approach into its work in order to transform human rights theory into practical action.

75 Boyd, S., 2009, pp. 25.
5.2 Conclusions

Regardless of whether we name them as such, rights-based approaches touch most aspects of human life and activity. Despite the controversial nature of this topic and its heavily debated discourse, its influence is progressively more widespread and discussed in many forums. Though human rights are engaged with through both religious and secular lenses, the church is especially well positioned to incorporate and promote rights-based approaches within its work in disaster management because the church is often anchored to communities most affected by disaster, and is often already an influential institution within those communities. This paper has examined different ways of applying this approach with a particular emphasis on the faith-based perspective. There continues to be a nexus between rights-based approaches and disaster management as made evident by the illustrative case studies and discussion of the integration of rights-based approaches within the church. The ways forward will be through the church’s dialogue and involvement with human rights issues via helping to bridge the gap between vulnerable communities and power holders. The church’s use of advocacy is crucial if the church is to bridge these gaps effectively. Truly, unless its technical capacities are developed in the field of disaster management, it seems as though the church’s most effective contribution in disaster management is advocacy with leaders and governing institutions in order to ensure that vulnerable groups receive an adequate share of inputs provided during pre, post, as well as during disaster scenarios.

As disaster management tools and processes require surprisingly more political will than they do cash, the church’s advocacy work now and in the future should consist of holding governments and powerful institutions accountable for how they spend their money. It is crucial for there to be accountability for how much governments invest in lining their pockets versus how much they invest in their citizens through allocating funding education, health care, technological infrastructure, social opportunities, as well as checks and balances to provide accountability mechanisms at every level of society – in effect, to begin and nurture the process of nation building. After all, it is important to recognise that ‘preventing disasters depends in part upon our ability to build just and equitable social, economic and political structures and processes, and affirms the moral duty of all people (particularly the non-poor) to accept and fulfil their responsibilities to uphold the rights and entitlements of the poorer members of our society’.

Every stakeholder, from the lowest and furthest reaches of the church to the highest levels of government should be involved in the process of nation building. However, even if nation building never occurs, it is proposed that if the church more fully realises its biblical mandate to care for the vulnerable, then it can also develop its technical capacities to more readily and more effectively fulfil that mandate. Though the church’s ideas of sustainability, accountability and what it considers to be effective interventions certainly differ from conventional development aims and programming, it is entirely possible for there to be a wholesome overlap between them.

76 La Trobe, S., and Davis, I., 2005, pp. 4.
Appendix

Appendix A: UN University / Munich Re Summer Academy Research Poster

Disaster Theology: The role of the church in rights-based approaches to disaster management.
Ian Frank-Marc Verhaeghe

FACT 1: We exist in an era of unprecedented disasters, both in severity and frequency. FACT 2: Increasingly, the world and its structures are adapting to the use of the language of universal human rights. FACT 3: Despite all of its flaws and, at times, its parochial tendencies, the local church is at the same time one of the most resilient, as well as one of the most ubiquitous social institutions there is.

A: With government and institutional corruption rife, little protection offered and no form of redress, the poor are the most vulnerable victims of disaster. B: A language of impartiality and non-aggression, the language of human rights allows its speakers to engage with politics without mentioning them. C: The church is often located in areas where there is the most physical, psychological and spiritual need.

Framing the question:
As the church has been involved in disaster management for decades, if it engages with social institutions and power structures by using the impartial language of universal human rights, what difference will it make?

* Diagram showing human rights as both a lens and a tool in pre- and post-disaster scenarios.

Conclusion: Imperfect though it is, universal human rights is the closest thing to the international language of responsibility and accountability. If the church contextualises rights-based approaches to meet the needs of the marginalised before, during and after disaster, it can bring about lasting change in every level of society.
Bibliography

BOOKS


JOURNALS


**ELECTRONIC JOURNAL ARTICLES**

Available at: http://tilz.tearfund.org/webdocs/Tilz/Footsteps/English/FS66_E.pdf

**ELECTRONIC RESOURCES**

Note: All websites and electronic sources accessed between May and August 2009.

Available at: http://www.humanrights.dk/files/pdf/Publikationer/applying%20a%20rights%20based%20approach.pdf

Available at: http://www.tearfund.org/webdocs/Website/News/thick%20of%20it.pdf

Available at: http://tilz.tearfund.org/webdocs/Tilz/Churches/8.3.9.%20Examples%20of%20practice.pdf

Available at: http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/1306

Available at: http://tilz.tearfund.org/webdocs/Tilz/Topics/DMT/GPG%20Disaster%20Risk%20Reduction.pdf

Available at: http://christianaid.org.uk/images/dont_be_scared.pdf
Available at: http://www.tearfund.org/webdocs/Website/Campaigning/Policy%20and%20research/Mainstreaming%20disaster%20risk%20reduction.pdf

Available at: http://www.actionaid.org.uk/doc_lib/111_1_rights_based_approach_practice.pdf

Available at: http://tilz.tearfund.org/webdocs/Tilz/Churches/8.3.3.%20Advocate%20on%20behalf%20of%20poor.pdf

Available at: http://tilz.tearfund.org/webdocs/Tilz/Churches/8.1.%20Strengths%20of%20the%20Local%20Church%20in%20Disaster%20Management.pdf

Available at: http://tilz.tearfund.org/webdocs/Tilz/Churches/8.2.%20Constraints%20and%20Challenges%20of%20Working%20with%20the%20Local%20Church%20in%20Disaster.pdf


**INSTITUTIONAL AUTHORS**

Available at: http://www.brookings.edu/~media/files/rc/reports/2008/spring_natural_disasters/spring_natural_disasters.pdf


UNPUBLISHED WORKS


(Clayton is former Executive Director of World Vision UK and World Vision Jerusalem)

MA Centre for Development & Emergency Practice (CENDEP)
Oxford Brookes University
August 2009

This paper was written by Ian Verhaeghe.

For further information on the issues raised in this paper please e-mail Ian Verhaeghe at: stoutheartedian@gmail.com

The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press.