

# Promoting a rights-based approach in civil society organizations in Rwanda

We empower civil society actors to claim citizens' rights.

## The challenge

In the preamble of the Rwandan Constitution, Rwanda commits itself to follow the principles of human rights. Rwanda has signed and ratified most human rights treaties, and Rwanda has made significant progress, especially in the area of social and economic rights. However, despite the success that has been achieved, Rwanda still faces some shortcomings in the realisation of some human rights.

One of the tasks of civil society, namely advocating on behalf of the most vulnerable citizens is not in the focus yet. Mistrust amongst civil society actors is widespread and the government emphasizes the role of civil society in service delivery. In addition, many civil society organizations struggle with capacity gaps both in terms of human resources and financial means.

## Our approach

The Rights-based Program (RBP) has existed within GIZ Rwanda since the end of 2013. The strategic design of this program began in 2012, in close cooperation with Rwandan partners. The concept underlying the approach is to create awareness and anchor human rights within Rwandan civil society. GIZ and its partner organizations worked together to identify joint interests and needs, which then formed the basis of the program concept.

Objective: The goal of the RBP is that Rwandan civil society organizations promote and strengthen human rights more effectively in their role as the citizens' voice through the application of the rights-based approach.

Currently the Rights-based Program cooperates with eight Partner organisations working on different human rights topics such as: Children and youth rights, social and economics rights (e.g. land rights and access to health care), gender equality, civil and political rights. The partner organisations receive support from six Development Advisors who are advising on the integration of the rights-based approach into programming but also on organizational development, communication, monitoring and evaluation. The RBP also finances local experts who are working in the partner organizations and are responsible for mainstreaming the rights-based approach in the respective organization.

Project name	Rights-based Program (RBP)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Rwanda
Lead executing agency	GIZ
Duration	01/2016 – 06/2018

The RBP supports partner organizations through local subsidies for projects which include the rights-based approach and especially projects which are implemented together with other partner organizations to foster cooperation.

The program offers trainings on human rights, gender sensitive programming, do no harm approach, fundraising and organizational development. As well as strengthening individual civil society organizations, the trainings foster and support networking and collaboration between Rwandan civil society organizations. The target of these measures is to raise awareness between the different civil society organisations and encourage them to cooperate with each other in order to become a stronger voice.



Photos: Workshops for representatives of civil society partner organizations and development workers of the Rights-Based Programme.

The collective learning environment and use of the rights-based approach should strengthen Rwandan civil society, rendering their human rights work more effective and promote the incorporation of internationally recognized baseline norms. Applying the rights-based approach also means that the most vulnerable population benefits from a constructive dialogue between civil society and government institutions which is guided by the international, regional and national legal framework.

## Our Impact

GIZ Rwanda's Rights-based Program increased the knowledge about human rights within civil society organisations and put the rights-based approach into practice. Most of the RBP partner organizations have mainstreamed the rights-based approach and consider human rights during each step of the programming.

The integration and application of the rights-based approach and capacity development in the area of advocacy enabled the RBP partner organizations to launch very effective and successful advocacy campaigns. Successful advocacy campaigns were also made possible through new partnerships among RBP partner organizations.

The Rwandan government has recognized human trafficking as a central human rights issue in Rwanda, and moved to sanction it more effectively than in the past due to an advocacy campaign of one of the RBP partner organizations. The advocacy from another RBP partner organization in the area of decriminalization of prostitution and abortion was taken into consideration at the latest review of the Rwandan penal code.

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	Registered offices Bonn and Eschborn, Germany	Addresses of the BMZ offices	<b>BMZ Bonn</b> Dahlmannstraße 4 53113 Bonn, Germany T +49 (0)228 99 535-0 F +49 (0)228 99 535-3500	<b>BMZ Berlin</b> Stresemannstraße 94 10963 Berlin, Germany T +49 (0)30 18 535-0 F +49 (0)30 18 535-2501
	Rights-based Program 41 KN St 17 P.O. Box 59 Kigali Rwanda T +250 252 573 57 F +250 252 572 439 E giz-ruanda@giz.de I www.giz.de/rwanda		poststelle@bmz.bund.de www.bmz.de	
Author(s)	Florian Hansen			
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