

# **A Human Rights Vision for Society**

## **Core principles**

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The power of human rights resides in the simple but profound idea that all of us have basic rights by virtue of our humanity alone, and that every person, family and community should live in equality, dignity and freedom, with the power to participate in and shape the government policies and institutions that impact their lives. A human rights framework protects civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of all people. From this understanding emerged the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -- the most translated document in the world, signed by all countries in the world.

But human rights have always been more than an idea or a legal system. Even before the formal United Nations system was created, many diverse movements, cultural and faith traditions around the world had embraced the inherent worth of every person, family and community as a central part of their vision. The abolitionist, women's, racial justice, and labor movements, just to name a few, have always taken a position that human beings have the right to be treated with respect and live in dignity simply because they are human. While human rights movements have global visions, most are locally anchored and emerge out of the concrete abuses and struggles of communities across lines of difference, including geography, race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexuality, age, class, and other characteristics. What these movements have in common is their belief in a universal vision of justice and an understanding that their struggles are bound up with other human rights struggles at home and around the world.

As part of the US human rights movement, we commit ourselves to a human rights vision for society, and the core principles below, in our practice of seeking social change.

### **Universality**

Every person, individually and as part of their families and communities, is entitled to all their human rights. All policy, legal and administrative proposals for solutions to our economic and social problems must respect the universality of rights, and social systems ensuring rights must be designed to serve all people and all communities. When policies, programs and other measures to protect rights and meet people's needs are universal in nature, they create a broad set of stakeholders that ensure their integrity and sustainability. Selective and narrow solutions that serve one group in society at the expense of others can lead to stratification and division, and fall far short of a human rights vision. To enable universal enjoyment of human rights, all policies must intentionally contribute to relieving the disproportionate burden carried by disadvantaged groups as a result of current or past discrimination and oppression.

## **Equity**

In order to protect human rights, the distribution of society's resources must be based on meeting people's fundamental needs to ensure a dignified existence for all. Equity guarantees equality in the practical enjoyment and exercise of all human rights for all people and communities, in the United States and abroad. Thus, the principle of equity requires not only equality of opportunity across the board, but also equality of outcome with regard to the protection of basic rights, fulfillment of fundamental needs, and the dismantling and prevention of all forms of discrimination. To achieve equity, society should ensure that with regard to fundamental rights, including healthcare, education, housing and decent jobs, everyone contributes what they can, and gets what they need.

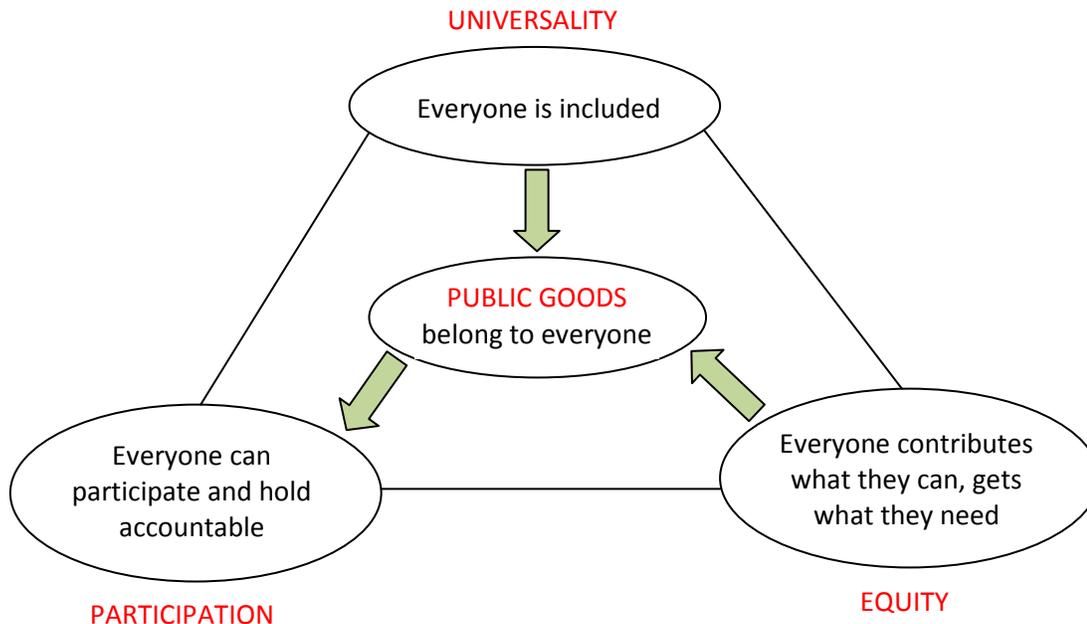
## **Public Goods**

In order to meet principles of universality, equity and participation, we must ensure that the material, economic, and social services, goods and infrastructure necessary to realize people's basic rights and meet their fundamental needs are treated as public goods, not as commodities. These essential goods and services must be provided collectively, on an equitable basis, not according to exclusionary market imperatives. Thus, privatization of core public functions that affect the protection and exercise of human rights obligations is unacceptable as it undermines accountability to human rights principles and democratic participation. The provision of public goods must be shared by all and serve to meet everyone's needs, not make profit or for any other purpose. Communities must be involved in making decisions about the financing, management and distribution of public goods.

## **Participation and Power**

At the heart of a vision grounded in democracy and human rights is the principle of participation. Every person, family and community in society is entitled to fully participate and exercise power in the political, social and economic systems, institutions and processes that affect the realization of their rights. Participation is not mere presence or voice, but rather requires that people be enabled and empowered to take part in shaping and influencing society and government. To achieve this aim, power itself must be structured in a way that is democratic, transparent and thus accountable to communities and the common good. Thus, all policies, programs, and practices relevant to human rights must be designed to meet the principles of accountability, transparency and participation. Collective structures must be developed to ensure that power rests with the people affected. As a necessary corollary, all obstacles to participation, such as unjust criminalization, disrespectful or undignified treatment, or other forms of discrimination, must be eliminated.

## Illustrated Summary of Core Principles



**Universality:** Public policies must ensure that everyone’s human rights are protected and their fundamental needs met. *Everyone is included.*

**Equity:** Public policies must enable equality of opportunity and outcome with regard to protecting human rights and meeting human needs. *Everyone contributes what they can and gets what they need.*

**Public Goods:** The services, goods and infrastructure necessary to realize human rights and meet human needs must be treated as public goods, not as commodities. *Public goods belong to everyone.*

**Participation (Power/Accountability):** Policies must be accountable and ensure the participation and power of the people. *Everyone is empowered to participate and to hold public and private sectors accountable.*