

The information in this document was collected in 2011 and may therefore be out of date. As this document refers to several pieces of legislation please ensure that you seek up to date information on the topics in this guide.

Using Human Rights Indicators to Create Change

Getting governments or public authorities to commit to change is difficult. But how can you ensure that those commitments then result in real change on the ground?

Using human rights indicators to create change was written by Nicola Browne, Director (Policy), [Participation and the Practice of Rights \(PPR\)](#)

[Participation and the Practice of Rights](#) (PPR) organisation was founded by human rights activist and trade unionist Inez McCormack in 2006. PPR works to put socio-economic rights at the service of groups and individuals who need them most. Below outlines PPR's approach to using human rights indicators to create change.

Step one

The first step in PPR's approach is to run a development programme with a group. The group identify a broad set of problems with issues such as housing/ health/ employment/ education in their community that they believe are in need of improvement.

They link many of these issues in to international human rights standards and select those which have the strongest basis in international standards, thereby framing the issues as human rights issues. They also consider which of the issues are best suited to a campaign. Following this process the group usually selects around 6 issues as indicators.

Under international human rights treaties to which the UK is a party, the UK government has an obligation to **progressively realise** economic and social rights. Essentially what this means is that things need to improve. Year on year, services and conditions should be getting better.

Step two

Through development sessions and action research, the group should then establish an evidential **baseline** through a number of methods including surveys, focus groups, photographic evidence, Freedom of Information requests etc. This assesses the extent to which these issues affect other people like them in their communities. It also provides evidence on what things are like now.

Step three

The group then finalise their **human rights indicators**. A human rights indicator is basically a measurement. The indicator is measured by the group over a period of time, usually a year. This shows:

- Are things getting better on the ground in this community?
- Are the government progressively realising rights as required by human rights law?

Step four

Time is not a neutral actor when change is urgently required by the most vulnerable. The groups must set targets for change or benchmarks. These **benchmarks** allow the group to identify the acceptable rate of change/progressive realisation of the right for them.

The value of the group's indicators is that they measure if the most vulnerable groups are actually feeling the benefits of money spent by government, and the policies and programmes put in place. They are charting the impact of government policies on the ground, in their communities.

Under human rights law, the state is also not a neutral actor. It is a duty-bearer, with an obligation to take positive action to realise economic and social rights, particularly for its most vulnerable groups. This exercise allows the rights-holder, the affected group to define what human rights progress looks like and campaign for it to be made real in their lives.

Case study

A key tool used by PPR with their groups is the development and measurement of human rights indicators to assess if change is actually happening on the ground. Human Rights indicators were originally envisaged as a tool for government to use to measure their progress in delivering on their human rights commitments. PPR has worked with groups to turn them into a tool to assist groups on the ground to campaign for the realisation of their rights. In November 2012, this work

was featured in a [United Nations publication](#) as a best practice example of 'how communities can use rights'.