



What Does Language Say about Human Rights-Based Approach in Finland's Development Cooperation?

In this brief, the Development Evaluation Unit highlights interesting findings from the data science component of the Evaluation of Human Rights Based Approach (HRBA) in Finland's Development Policy and Coopera-

tion. The data science methods provided the evaluation team with one stream of evidence that informed the inception phase and sampling as well as one of the evaluation questions.

How to read the results of the data science component?

- These methods yield **estimates**, not exact calculations.
- The findings of the data science methods should be understood as **one stream of evidence** that informs the overall evaluation. The focus is only on language and the use of terminology as they appear in the **selected** documents. Other documents that were not included in the data science analysis may contain further information on HRBA.
- **No direct conclusions about HRBA implementation** in actual terms or answers to evaluation questions can be drawn from the data science results.
- The results **do not explore the reasons why** a given result arises. Contextual or other factors explaining the levels of HRBA are not analysed by these methods.
- The results of the three **different data science methods are not comparable with each other**. They provide a different perspective to the issues. The comparison is against the MFA's internal HRBA markers and other variables.
- The **cooperation instruments are not comparable with each other** due to, among others, limitations in the types of documents used.

What was assessed?

The analysis covered seven development cooperation instruments used by the Ministry: Bilateral cooperation, multilateral cooperation, support to national and international civil society organisations (CSOs), institutional cooperation instrument (ICI), funds for local cooperation (FLC) by embassies, and private sector instruments (Finnpartnership). Country programming was treated as a stand-alone instrument, with its own programme documents and annual reports. The documents consisted of 820 planning and reporting documents that originate from a wide range of development actors in more than

60 countries and regions. The same type of document was selected for all interventions that belong to the same cooperation instrument. The documents were written in both English and Finnish and cover the time period of 2019-2021.

Methods used

Three specific analytical approaches were deployed. The first approach focused on the development of a **rules-based approach** (RB) that makes use of a tailor-made **analytical framework** based on the Ministry's HRBA levels of ambition set out in the HRBA Guidance Note 2015,

containing a set of rules for how to classify HRBA content **based on key words, i.e. explicit HRBA terminology**. The HRBA categories are blind, sensitive, progressive and transformative. Additional interim categories were added for partially sensitive and partially progressive to allow for more nuances in this progressive scale. The second approach used a pre-trained **machine-learning (ML)** model, exploring **probabilistic similarities with selected text extracts** of the various HRBA levels with more diverse language than the key words. The third approach was **content-based analysis (CA)** that probed documents for **nouns** content and frequency of occurrences.

Language is typically at transformative level when key words are tracked...

The most typical level of HRBA (mode) for the cooperation instruments was transformative, with the exception of institutional cooperation being most typically progressive and private sector instruments being often blind (RB).

...but varied when similarity with text examples are examined

Using machine learning, there was more variation in the HRBA levels (mode). Multilateral support was commonly assessed as transformative; bilateral support, country programmes and funds for local cooperation were estimated to be progressive. Support to CSOs, ICI and PSI were most typically sensitive (ML).

A great majority 57%–86% of documents do not match the self-assessed levels of the Ministry's HRBA markers

The analysis looked at how well the Ministry's own self-assessed levels of HRBA for projects and programmes done at the time of funding decisions matched the results from the data science methods. When looking at key words, only 14% matched the assigned levels, and 86% either above or below.

The largest match for planning documents was for the multilateral instruments (20.9%), followed by bilateral support (18.8%), and CSO instruments (18.5). For bilateral support and CSOs, the language in reports was a slightly better match with the self-assessed levels than in the planning documents (RB).

When looking at similarity with the text examples, the level of total matches between results and the self-assessment was much better (43.5% ML) The best matches with their original levels were for institutional cooperation and private sector instruments. Also for bilateral cooperation, 63% of reports matched their originally assigned HRBA levels. For the rest of the instruments the plans and reports matched original levels in around 30-40% of the documents.

About 60% of plans and reports have the same level of HRBA

Private sector instruments most frequently had the plan and report documents consistently at the same HRBA levels (89% RB). Country programs (54% RB) and CSO instruments (50% RB) were the next most consistent ones. Overall, 57% (RB) of all plan and report documents were found to match in their levels of HRBA.

Using text extracts, it was typically the ICI interventions (91% ML) and PSI (81% ML) that were most consistent in their level of HRBA across plans and reports. In addition, in both multilateral and CSO instruments about 62% (ML) were consistent. Overall, n. 61% of plans and reports in all cooperation instruments matched in their level of HRBA.

Plans are stronger in the use of HRBA language than reports

Overall, planning documents were mostly transformative (36.3% RB; 35.5% ML). The typical category (mode) for plans was transformative (RB) and sensitive (ML). At the same time, about 40% of the plans were below the minimum requirement of sensitive when key words were analysed (RB). However, when the machine learning was applied, only 1.3% were judged as blind. This may be due to excluding Finnish documents in the latter analysis where the bulk of blind categories existed and for one of the cooperation instruments.

Annual reports showed a similar pattern, with more than half (52% RB) suggested blind due to missing explicit HRBA language. The shares of documents with progressive (8.5% RB; 38.5 % ML) and transformative (28.0% RB; 23.2% ML) language were mostly less for the reports than for the planning documents.

The CSOs hold the biggest share at transformative level in the use of HRBA terminology

CSOs and multilaterals are the most represented instruments in the transformative category in relative terms (RB, ML). The biggest relative share in the HRBA blind category is by PSI when the explicit HRBA language is applied and by the multilateral channel when the more nuanced language is examined.

The most transformative sectors seem to be democratic participation and civil society, peace-building, and human rights

The OECD/DAC sector codes assigned to each project or programme were used in the analysis. Not surprisingly, democratic participation and the civil society sector (RB, ML) as well as civilian peace-building, conflict prevention and resolution sector (ML), and the human rights sector (ML) hold the largest relative shares of documents at transformative level.

The human rights sector has dispersed levels of ambition

Interestingly, projects and programmes identified as working in the human rights sector are a diverse group in their use of explicit HRBA terminology. Looking at explicit HRBA language, 21% of documents were transformative, 10.5% progressive, 20.5% partially progressive or sensitive, and 47.5% partially sensitive or blind (RB).

Using the text extracts and machine learning, the situation is more even, with the majority being at sensitive level (57%), 28% progressive and 43% transformative (ML), with no blind cases for this sector.

Africa and Asia are not very different

Africa and Asia both hold around a similar share of interventions at either progressive or transformative levels (RB, ML). Both have a share of about 40% documents as either progressive or transformative (RB). At the same time, both continents have about a half of all documents seemingly below the minimum requirement.

The situation is different when looking at text excerpts and similarity to them, with the majority of documents falling into the sensitive category (67% ML). The more detailed levels by country can be found in the report.

Country programme plans and reports use HRBA terminology quite well

Country programmes were treated as a separate stand-alone instrument in this analysis due to them having their own plans and reports and management structures as vehicles for development policy and cooperation. Overall, 73% of country programmes were transformative when it comes to the appearance of key words, 62% of plans and 85% of reports. About 11% documents were found below the minimum standard (RB). When looking at more elaborate language, 25% of documents were found transformative and an equal share of 38% at both progressive and sensitive levels (ML).

Bilateral cooperation uses language similar to progressive level but the instrument somewhat struggles with explicit HRBA wording

37.5% of all bilateral cooperation is transformative. At the same time, almost an equal share, about 36%, is below sensitive. Sectoral budget support, the best performing sub-instrument, has half of their documents at transformative level (RB).

When looking at text extracts, progressive level covers about 40% of documents. Transformative (35.9%) and sensitive (21.9%) categories are also notable (ML).

Multilaterals use transformative or progressive language diversely; multi-bilateral projects are the strongest on HRBA terminology

Around 38-39% of multilateral cooperation is estimated to be transformative (RB, ML). At the same time, about 35% is below sensitive according to use of key words. All sub-instruments include significant shares of documents below the sensitive level ranging from about 25% to 64% of documents.

Multi-bilateral projects, implemented by multilateral organisations, were found complying with the explicit HRBA terminology the most (about 52% transformative). When the text extracts were examined, almost 80% of documents are either transformative or progressive and only 18.5% sensitive (ML).

Civil society cooperation is strong on HRBA language except core support to UN-related NGOs

National and international CSO's interventions are predominantly transformative (55.5%) but also have around 27% documents below the sensitive level. Documents related to core support to various UN-related NGOs stand out as blind (60%) or only partially sensitive (40%) to HRBA terminology (RB) across 2019–2021.

The situation is better for the CSO instruments when the text extracts are analysed. Almost 60% of documents use language similar to transformative or progressive levels, and 42.3% similar to sensitive (ML).

Institutional Cooperation ranges from sensitive to progressive in its language

Half of the documents (54.5%) for institutional cooperation are progressive in their use of explicit HRBA terminology. When the use of more nuanced language was analysed, almost all interventions (95.5%) fall into the sensitive category. The HRBA level of plans only match with that of the reports in 27% of cases when key words are searched, which is the lowest of all cooperation instruments (RB).

Funds for Local Cooperation as an instrument is rather evenly represented at all HRBA levels

35% documents appear below the minimum level, 22% are sensitive or partially progressive, 15% progressive, 28% are transformative (RB). When the more nuanced language was looked at, the situation is better, with 26% sensitive, 41% progressive and 32% transformative. Plans are better in their use of transformative HRBA terminology than reports. Also, about a half of the plans correspond the level of reports (RB, ML).

Private sector cooperation is consistently at low ambition level

Private sector are overly represented in categories of low HRBA ambition. Plans and reports are also much in synch with each other at the low levels. No transformative cases were found in this instrument for the HRBA key words. Around 90% of all plans and reports were HRBA blind. Even when the more nuanced language was examined, 70-90% of plans and reports hit the category of sensitive. The templates used for this cooperation instrument for both plans and reports may have limitations in the extent to which human rights is covered, particularly for human rights situation analysis and human rights principles, which are the key elements for sensitive level.

'Violation', 'defender', 'mechanism' and 'right' appear together with human rights

These are the most frequent nouns that appear together with *human rights* in the English documents. Other frequent nouns included *woman, protection, implementation, situation, accountability, standard, development, victim, issue, discrimination, country, policy, principle, international, conflict* and *disability* in that order (CA).

'Training', 'woman', 'development' and 'partner' are the most common nouns in blind documents

When the documents that did not meet the minimum requirement of sensitive level were searched, the most frequent nouns (de facto) were *training, woman, development* and *partner*. The others were *school, target, difference, service, people, capacity, reason, access, addition, information, country, achievement, member, participant, community* and *youth* (CA). It may well be that some of these interventions address human rights aspects but in a highly indirect way that is even untraceable by the machine learning method. Such questions will be answered by the overall evaluation.



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