



**MMS Bulletin # 140**

*MMS Study: The Human Rights Based Approach in Sexual and Reproductive Health Programs*

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**Reflections and Statements from MMS Members**

**Addressing Human Rights is more important than ever**

By Carine Weiss

*The Network Medicus Mundi Switzerland is proud to present the “Survey among Medicus Mundi Switzerland Members on Human Rights-Based Approaches to Sexual and Reproductive Health”. The main purpose of this survey was to explore the experiences of MMS network members, including their partner organisations in operationalizing the human rights-based approach (HRBA) in the field of sexual and reproductive health.*



Human Rights  
Based Approach

The MMS members participating in the survey were encouraged to reflect on the benefits of a HRBA. In the opinion of MMS members, a wide range of aspects were found to be beneficial in working towards sexual and reproductive health for all. Here is a summary:

### ***In a HRBA people and their dignity are placed at the centre***

People do not realise that health services should be of a high quality. Socially, economically, physically and emotionally, we cannot talk about health and health services without talking about peoples' rights. It is not about health for health's sake. It is fundamental to talk about human rights. Humans have the right to quality of life, which means being healthy and also having the right to control over their own body. For example, women cannot be denied the right to decide at what point in their lives they want to become a mother. And when considering participation, a HRBA also helps to see children as actors/subjects rather than victims.

### ***The benefit of working with a human rights approach to health is the emphasis on the right to information***

A HRBA is very beneficial because people are empowered to learn about their rights and to understand that knowledge is power. When people are made aware of their rights, they can demand that these rights are enforced. There are still many taboos concerning the sexual and reproductive health of adolescents but if a human rights-based approach is utilised, dialogue can be more open e.g. about sexual violence in families or couples. This human rights-based approach causes an "opening" of people's minds.

### ***A HRBA allows everyone to create a better framework...***

... even when we are working on the practical level; we can ask: "What is the benefit?". We can say it is not only something to be sensitised about but also something that does not require negotiation. We can address government representatives by stating: "You have signed the Convention". This is empowering for everyone including government officials. The ratification of conventions provides a solid argument in terms of accountability.

### ***A human rights approach encourages the exploration of all aspects of a problem in a holistic way and encourages sustainable long-term change. However, it also requires more time before the effects become visible***

A HRBA does not only concentrate on service provision but instead forces a change in social structures and especially in power structures. This not only shapes the perspective on changing structures and the legal framework but also on the power structures in society. Through a human rights approach, the government is better enabled to listen to the needs of

the community. Everybody has the opportunity to voice their concerns; however, if the government does not know how to listen to the community, a human rights approach will not help.

*A big thank you to Jana Gerold, Sandra Staudacher-Preite and Sonja Merten from the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute for this survey. We've learnt a lot!*

And we have immediately addressed the challenges our network members are facing when they apply a HRBA on the basis of the results of this report: we conducted a 2-day workshop and filled the knowledge and skills gaps of our network members with regards to applying a HRBA to SRH programming.

The Network Medicus Mundi Switzerland is excited to stimulate further discussions and to engage in different learning processes regarding human rights and the HRBA in the future.



Workshop Human Rights Based Approach Day I (Photo: Carine Weiss/Medicus Mundi Switzerland)

***Happy reading!***

**Resources:**

- The full report can be accessed [here](#)

- The executive summaries are available here: in German, French, English and Spanish.
- Additional literature and resources can be found here



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