

# Human Rights Basics

## *Preparation:*

- *In this factsheet, the members will learn some basic knowledge of human rights. After this meeting, the members should understand what the basic human rights are and why human rights are important. They should also understand that some groups of people need extra support in order to make sure that they can enjoy their rights.*
- *The VAG leader should know where people (especially women and children) can go for help and advice on human rights issues (e.g. concerning the division of assets/ the right to have land after a divorce or the death of the husband). This can be a rights office, church organisations, NGOs, etc.*
- *The VAG leader should read through the factsheet and make sure that he/ she understands the content.*

## **What does it mean to be human?**

*Let the members discuss for a short while about what the purpose of a human being is. They can also discuss the importance of being a good person or citizen. Lead the discussion towards the next question.*

## **What does it mean to have a good life?**

*Let the members discuss for a short while about social, economic, cultural, personal and other elements that make up a good life. Lead the discussion towards the next question.*

## **What are “human rights”? Why are human rights important to us?**

- Human rights are those basic values without which people cannot live in dignity as human beings.
- They are those basic freedoms and rights that belong to all human beings and to their communities.
- These rights cannot be taken away.
- All over the world, people and their governments have agreed on what our human rights are. Therefore, they are a guideline for a life in dignity for everyone.

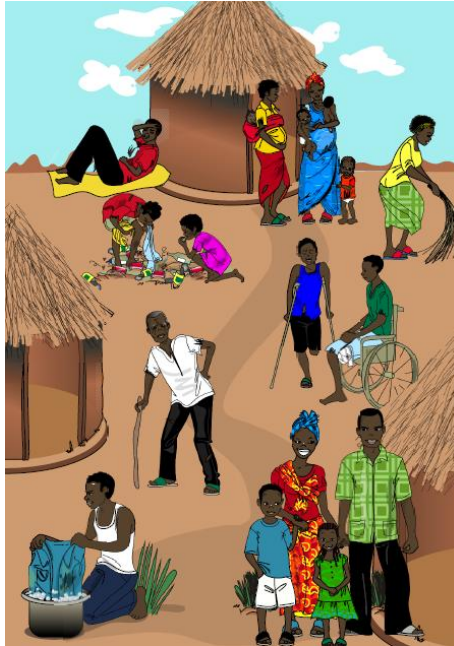
## **Can you mention some human rights?**

*Let them discuss freely and help them to formulate the rights. If some things have already been discussed, this is fine, just reaffirm. There are many human rights, but it is important to cover the basic ones that people deal with on a day to day basis.*

These are the basic human rights:

- The right to life (meaning just to be there).
- To adequate food, clothing, and shelter.
- To health care.
- To equal treatment for everyone.
- To a reasonable workload for everyone.
- To protection against torture, abuse and degrading punishment.
- To be free from slavery and forced labour.

*Show the drawing depicting an overview of several people in a community.*



**Considering the basic human rights that belong to all of us: is it easy, or possible, for everyone in our community to achieve a life in dignity?**

*Let the members discuss. The idea is that they determine which people in the drawing are vulnerable (and which people are not).*

These are the people depicted in the drawing:

- A sick person (lying down).
- Poor pregnant women or widows with small children.
- Orphans (eating in the dirt).
- Handicapped persons.
- An elderly person.
- A person busy sweeping.
- A prosperous family.
- A person busy doing the laundry.

### **Why is it difficult for vulnerable people?**

Possible answers:

- They cannot fully take care of themselves.
- They cannot work or fulfill their duties like other people, which makes it difficult to receive the respect of others.
- They don't (yet) understand what it means to live with dignity.
- They are powerless to demand their rights.
- It can be hard for them to defend themselves.

### **What to do**

- *Make sure the members have understood the meaning of basic human rights and why they are important; and that they understand that some groups need extra support.*
- *Plan actions for helping vulnerable people in the community to live in dignity. A lot is possible; let the members discuss freely about any actions they want to take. Write the actions down in the action list in the VAG meeting report.*

Some examples of possible actions:

- We can treat vulnerable people with respect: include them in activities, be friendly with them and help them when they are in need.
- Younger family/ community members can help the elderly by doing work for them that is dangerous or very heavy, and by helping them out with domestic chores.
- Parents need to protect their children from violence or abuse and make sure their children grow up in a loving and caring environment.
- Orphans can be helped by providing them with food or clothing, schooling and psycho-social support.
- Family members and neighbours can help sick or handicapped persons by providing them with food or clothing, or by making sure they get the (medical) help they need.
- Handicapped or chronically ill people can be helped by making sure they can participate actively in the ongoing activities in the community.
- We can help women who are divorced or widowed to understand their rights and how to obtain them. For example by showing them the way to a rights office, to tell them about their rights, etc.

**Finally, be aware that in our VAG meeting, we are enjoying two human rights that we haven't discussed yet. Which human rights do you think we are exercising in our VAG meetings?**

*You may just give them the answer below.*

- The right to freedom of peaceful assembly (meaning that a group of people should be able to come together peacefully and to act together).
- The right to freedom of opinion and expression (meaning everyone should be able to speak his/ her thoughts and opinions freely).

### **Key information.**

- Human rights are those basic values without which people cannot live in dignity as human beings. They belong to all human beings and to their communities.
- Some groups of people in the community are vulnerable and they need extra support from other community members to be able to live in dignity.

### **Concluding notes.**

- *Remind the members about the action points they have decided on.*
- *Ask if there are any further questions.*
- *Agree on the date, time, place and topic of the next meeting.*
- *Close the meeting.*