From a normative discourse to contextualised practices:
A case study of a Human Rights-Based Approach in Bangladesh

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Abstract

A human rights-based approach (HRBA) is a framework which integrates human rights standards and principles into development processes. It has been promoted since the late 1990s by the United Nations (UN), some bilateral aid agencies and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as an alternative discourse to needs-based and economy-centred discourses. The potential values and problems of a HRBA have largely been debated theoretically, with little attention to how it is understood and implemented in practice. With regard to human rights-based practices in development NGOs, the literature views local and organisational contexts as a constraint and local practitioners as lacking the knowledge and skills needed to implement a HRBA. This suggests a HRBA is viewed as a normative discourse, which should be applied by local practitioners as predetermined. Questioning this view, the thesis pays attention to changes in a HRBA influenced by the contexts and the roles of development practitioners.

This research explores the particular understanding and practicing of a HRBA in ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB). AAB was selected because it belongs to the federation of ActionAid international (AAI) which adopted a HRBA in 1998, and because it operates in a country characterised as challenging due to its hostility to human rights advocacy. The research has drawn on interviews with 15 AAB staff and 13 staff of its local partner organisations. The interviews were conducted in Bangladesh in 2012. The information obtained was supplemented by documents produced by AAI and AAB. The interview transcriptions and the documents were thematically analysed.

The findings of this research indicate that AAB has developed its own way of understanding and practicing a HRBA attuned to its contexts. For example, AAB’s differentiation between a HRBA and a rights-based approach (RBA) is related to the laws of Bangladesh. Combining a HRBA with a needs-based approach (NBA) is justified by AAI’s coinage of human rights and basic needs as ‘basic rights’ and by the fact that the needs of Bangladeshi residents are largely left unmet. AAB shapes its own HRBA influenced by the context of both AAI and Bangladesh.

This research suggests AAB’s HRBA is the product of contextualisation of a HRBA. In this thesis, the term ‘contextualisation’ means the process of shaping the HRBA to fit
organisational and national contexts. This thesis argues that NGO practitioners play an important role in contextualising a HRBA, encouraged or moderated by their contexts.

The research participants displayed their agency in challenging and recreating a HRBA. Exploration of the contextualisation process reveals that the exercise of agency requires some understanding of and commitment to a HRBA, which is conceptualised as 'internalisation' in this thesis. Noting the varied degrees of internalisation, this research provides a plausible explanation in terms of two factors: the extent of their exposure to a discourse and their involvement in field practices. Those who strongly internalised a HRBA tend to contribute toward shaping a HRBA to be relevant and applicable to their contexts.

The discussion draws attention to context-related knowledge, which enables contextualisation of a HRBA. This research shows that individual workers’ knowledge about contexts is mostly implicit and informally transferred to colleagues. Organisational support is needed for amplification and legitimisation of individuals’ contextualised knowledge.

Heightened understanding of the contextualisation process can contribute to both new knowledge and development practice. Building on theories about discourse and agency, the thesis adds knowledge of internalisation and contextualisation of a discourse. As a result of examination of contextual influences and the agency of local practitioners, it suggests a HRBA is an interactive process rather than a predetermined normative framework; and development practitioners are proactive discourse creators rather than passive discourse users. This study also provides development NGOs with practical insights into how to incorporate contextual consideration into a HRBA for relevant and appropriate practices. It emphasises the importance of organisational supports for the generation and circulation of context-related knowledge. In doing so, this thesis contributes to the field of development practices involving human rights principles and NGOs.
Declaration by Author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

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Publications during candidature

Noh, JE (2012). “Money or right?: Addressing women’s inequality in Bangladesh”. The Australian Sociological Association Conference, hosted by The University of Queensland, Brisbane, 26–29 November.


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Keywords

human rights-based approach, development, human rights, NGO, discourse, human agency, context, contextualisation, internalisation

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<td>ActionAid Bangladesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAI</td>
<td>ActionAid International</td>
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<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Community Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>Convention on the Rights of the Child</td>
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<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education For All</td>
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<tr>
<td>HRBA</td>
<td>Human Rights-Based Approach to development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICESCR</td>
<td>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights</td>
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<td>Log frame</td>
<td>Logical framework</td>
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<td>LRP</td>
<td>Local Rights Programmes</td>
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<td>Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights</td>
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<td>PCD</td>
<td>People-Centred Development</td>
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<td>PCM</td>
<td>Project Cycle Management</td>
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<td>PRA</td>
<td>Participatory Rural Appraisal</td>
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<td>RBA</td>
<td>Rights-Based Approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>REFLECT</td>
<td>Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques</td>
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<td>SAPs</td>
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<td>SHD</td>
<td>Sustainable Human Development</td>
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<td>SHG</td>
<td>Self Help Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>UDHR</td>
<td>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UQ</td>
<td>The University of Queensland</td>
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<td>WB</td>
<td>World Bank</td>
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Preface

My interest in a human rights-based approach (HRBA) was fostered during my experience over a five-year period with a Korean non-governmental organisation (NGO) in the development sphere. In Korea, a HRBA was relatively unknown to the development community. One newly established NGO introduced a HRBA in 2006 to a group of development practitioners and I was one of them. A review of documents published by the United Nations (UN) and some European NGOs resulted in the recognition that a HRBA can improve development practices with its promising and revolutionary principles.

However, the organisational culture and the Korean national context were not favourable to a HRBA. Many development NGOs in Korea distance themselves from human rights, mainly due to the political image associated with human rights. Historically, in Korea, human rights have been used to fight for democracy under the military dictatorial regime or to criticise the leadership of North Korea. Human rights have been traded for the rapid economic growth under the repressive regime. As a result, many people in Korea, including my former colleagues, think that development is one thing and human rights are another. The former involves charity, good will and professional techniques, while the latter invokes images of radical and political activism. Even when the importance of human rights principles in development is generally agreed, the term ‘rights’ is preferred in order to avoid the political and Western flavour of human rights.

This experience led me to question if a HRBA can be differently understood and practised according to contexts and if the difference should be understood as either an adjustment for contextualised practices or a compromise damaging the intrinsic values of a HRBA.
Chapter 1  Introduction to the thesis

1.1. Background

Development discourses have evolved through the addition of new concepts to specify and improve development practices. One of the recently emerging concepts in development discourses is ‘human rights’. The link between development and human rights has developed since the late 1990s in the name of a ‘human rights-based approach to development’ or, more commonly, a ‘rights-based approach (RBA)’ or a ‘human rights-based approach (HRBA)’.

Although there is no single definition of a HRBA (UNHCR 2001 in Harris-Curtis 2003), HRBA is generally understood as ‘a framework that integrates the norms, principles, standards and goals of the international human rights system into the plans and processes of development’ (Boesen & Martin, 2007, p.9). It emerged, following historical events such as the end of the Cold War, the declaration of the rights to development in 1986 and the Vienna Conference on human rights in 1993 (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2005; Hamm, 2001). A HRBA became a normative discourse with wide recognition, particularly in the United Nations (UN), some bilateral aid agencies and renowned international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (Nelson & Dorsey, 2003; Plipat, 2005). As these organisations that adopted a HRBA are powerful in setting development agendas and mobilising resources, attention to a HRBA is increasing throughout the development community.

A HRBA has been promoted in response to growing questions about the rationale for and ineffectiveness of international aid (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2005; Gready & Ensor, 2005; Slim, 2002). Firstly, a HRBA can legitimise development intervention by reframing it in terms of internationally agreed human rights and by pushing the boundary of duty bearer from the state to various development players (Hamm, 2001; Nelson & Dorsey, 2003). Secondly, a HRBA is expected to be sustainable in terms of impacts through tackling underlying causes of poverty (De Greiff & Duthie, 2009; Uvin, 2004). In this way, the enhanced legitimacy and sustainable impacts of a HRBA have been largely
theoretically debated, but there is little understanding of how a HRBA is legitimised and implemented in practice. Previous attempts to demonstrate its practical implications are limited to the process of adopting a HRBA in head offices of international NGOs (Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001) or to HRBA-led changes by global campaigns and advocacy in developed countries (Rugendyke, 2007). Accordingly, further research on local practices of a HRBA is needed for to understand its practical implications in developing countries. In particular, the critique on the Western centrism of human rights (Nyamu-Musembi & Musyoki, 2004) invites research which illuminates its implications in different cultural contexts.

In development NGOs, a HRBA has been embraced in a range of ways: as a philosophy that highly values human rights; as a model with underlying theories and practical guidelines; and as a methodology which consists of specific methods and techniques. However, its adoption is generally not comprehensive. Some take a HRBA just as a moral value without any significant changes in practice and some take it as a set of tools using them technically. This fragmented adoption of a HRBA provokes criticism that rights language is used to repackage old practices (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004; Uvin, 2004) and that elements are selectively accepted (Frankovits, 2008). It would be valuable to understand the reasons behind the diverse interpretation and practices in the name of a HRBA. The diversity might be caused by the inherent features of a HRBA or the contexts in which a HRBA is implemented.

A further issue highlighted in existing studies is that a HRBA is understood to be practised in line with standardised criteria. For example, Plipat’s study (2005) identifies the variance of rights-based practices in three NGOs by reference to the use of specific methods and techniques. Crawford (2007) compares development projects in three different countries with reference to the key principles and expected outcomes of a HRBA. The analytical tools and highlighted principles used in these comparative studies distinguish a HRBA from other developmental approaches. However, they may also reduce a HRBA to a set of predetermined criteria and technical tools. This reduction can jeopardise the presumed advantages of a HRBA, such as overcoming expert-driven technical intervention (Slim, 2002) and valuing local participation and empowerment (Ife, 2002). Furthermore, when a HRBA is understood as a normative framework, local contexts and local workers are
regarded as barriers to rights-based practices. The above mentioned comparative studies locate the reason for the gap between desired practices and observed practices in cultural and political constraints (Crawford, 2007) and note that local staff have insufficient knowledge and skills in rights-based techniques (Plipat, 2005). This thesis questions the perspectives that see local contexts and local staff as barriers to putting a HRBA into practice.

This research proposes a HRBA as a dynamic process, which is open to changes reflecting influences of local contexts and human agency of local practitioners, rather than a rigid and normative framework. The relationship between a HRBA and local contexts including local practitioners will be explored, drawing upon the theories of discourse and agency. A HRBA can be understood as one of a range of current development discourses, which legitimise specific ideas and practices for development (Grillo & Stirrat, 1997). Variances and changes in the discourse can be explained by the concept of agency, which needs to be contextually understood (Long, 2001). In short, this research looks at the process of adapting a HRBA discourse into contextualised practices through the agency of local practitioners.

1.2. Rationale for the research

There is substantial literature on the theoretical and historical background of a HRBA and its potential as an alternative discourse to economy-centred and results-oriented development approaches. As mentioned earlier, most of this literature regards a HRBA as a normative framework focusing on its principles. This research looks at the process of understanding and establishing the principles of a HRBA, rejecting the view of these as predetermined. One of the distinctive principles of a HRBA is its linkage to international human rights laws and conventions. Although the values of human rights are universal, their meanings and implications can be different in every country. Despite the argument that human rights should be discussed and redefined to have meanings in context, little reference to local perspective is found (Gready & Ensor, 2005). In particular, some studies suggest human rights as a Western idea (Nyamu-Musembi & Musyoki, 2004) and report resistance in some developing countries (Banerjee, 2005; Crawford, 2007). Clearly, it is necessary to explore how the concept of human rights is perceived and constructed in
developing countries to understand the practical implications of a HRBA.

In addition to country contexts, an organisational context is imperative to examine development practices of an NGO. A HRBA in NGOs tends to be understood by simplified typologies. Compared to government organisations, NGOs are expected to be value-driven and innovative (Dichter, 1999; Hudock, 1999). With these presumed advantages in terms of HRBA practices, some scholars suggest NGOs should move toward a HRBA. For example, Korten's (1990) NGO categories, expressed as ‘generational evolution’, place an advocacy-centred approach in the final stage, which comes after experiencing a needs-based approach and community-based empowerment approach. This implies that NGO approaches are clear-cut and changes occur in a transformative manner and that there is a clear hierarchy. In reality, the NGO label, which is earned from self-representation, does not capture its complicated and often contested practices (Hilhorst, 2003). For example, tensions are discernible between right-oriented principles and strategies for survival or scaling-up, and between transformative changes and adherence to the current system (Gottlieb & Belle, 1990; Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001). In order to advance the debate beyond the assumed fit or the observed misfit between a HRBA and NGOs, the complex contexts of an NGO should be considered to understand what led the decision to adopt a HRBA and how the NGO deals with challenges of aligning itself with a HRBA.

With attention to contexts, particular attention is paid to the role of NGO practitioners in the shaping process of context-specific practices. Earlier studies on a HRBA rarely note the importance of local practitioners. Perhaps this is because a HRBA is understood to be transferred from the international community to the local community through intermediary development organisations. In such a discourse transfer, the role of local practitioners is limited to the delivery of a HRBA as planned externally. In addition, the transfer of a HRBA is found to be impeded by local practitioners who are short of knowledge and skills (Plipat, 2005). The rejection of a HRBA as a predetermined framework and the attention to contextual influences on a HRBA lead to examining the role of practitioners in developing a HRBA that is context appropriate.

To summarise, the distinctions between this thesis and the existing literature are threefold: a HRBA is understood in this research as a dynamic interactive process, rather than a
predetermined normative framework; national and organisational contexts are viewed as critical to understanding how a HRBA is constructed and challenged, rather than as obstacles to implementation of a HRBA; and development practitioners are considered as proactive discourse creators, rather than passive discourse users.

1.3. Research aim and questions

This research aims to explore how a HRBA is understood and practised in an NGO based in a developing country. Central to this aim is to understand the contextualisation of a HRBA in a specific organisation in a particular country, drawing upon literature and collected data. Contextualisation here means the process of reshaping the standardised discourse into particular practices to fit organisational and national contexts.

To accomplish the above research aim, this research has two primary research questions and three associated questions:

Question 1: How does the contextualisation of a HRBA take place in a local affiliate of an international NGO?
   a) What characterises the HRBA of the NGO?
   b) To what extent can the characteristics of the HRBA be explained by its organisational and national context?
   c) How are NGO workers influenced by a HRBA and the contexts, and how do they influence contextualisation of a HRBA?

Question 2: How can this contextualisation process be theorised?

The three sub-questions associated with the first research question clarify the contextualisation process by looking at the influence of contexts and NGO workers. The second research question focuses on addressing theoretical implications by examining existing theories and data-generated knowledge.

1.4. Research method

This research employed a qualitative case study to explore the contextualisation process of a HRBA in a specific context. The case is ‘the’ HRBA of an International NGO working
in Bangladesh. The definite article is used to distinguish the NGO's HRBA including its particular understanding and practices, from 'a' HRBA in general discourse.

ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB) was selected as a research site for this case study. ActionAid International (AAI) was founded in the UK in 1972. Its headquarters are now in Johannesburg, South Africa, with operations in 45 countries involving more than 15 million people (ActionAid, n.d.). AAI is a federation, comprised of self-governing affiliates and associations¹ and the International Secretariat which coordinates them (ActionAid, 2011). AAI has officially changed from a charity approach to a HRBA since 1998 (AAI, 2012). The ActionAid federation has been described by some authors as bold because of its focus on policy advocacy campaigns (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004).

Among NGOs which explicitly declared the adoption of a HRBA, AAI is known for its strong commitment to a HRBA (Gready, 2013; Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004). AAI is an appropriate NGO to explore the contextualisation process because: AAI has a long tradition of valuing local engagement for social change, as a comparative study suggests that AAI’s HRBA is centred on grassroots movements unlike other NGOs which focus on campaigning or referring to conventions (Plipat, 2005); and AAI’s decentralised federal structure leaves more room for local staff to make decisions. Given these characteristics, ActionAid is an appropriate vehicle for exploring the influences of organisational contexts on a HRBA and the exercise of agency of local staff members. The reason for selection of AAB among AAI’s members is discussed in the following section.

1.5. Bangladesh as context

Bangladesh was chosen for the richness of local development discourses and the reported challenges of human rights work. Bangladesh is one of the least developed² (UNDP 2014),

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¹ Affiliates are nationally governed legal entities which meet criteria in terms of the governance process, accountability mechanisms and organisational performance. Associates are in transition to Affiliates or independent organisations which share values, vision and mission with AAI. (AAI webpage as of 2011)
² Bangladesh is ranked 142 of 195 countries by the Human Development Index (HDI) with 49.46% of population living in poverty (UNDP, 2014).
disaster-prone (Glasius et al., 2004; Raihan, 2010), densely populated\(^3\) (World Bank, 2015) and corrupt countries (Transparency International, 2015)\(^4\) in the world. Bangladesh has shown improvement in the areas of the GNI (gross national income) per capita, school enrolment and life expectancy (World Bank, 2015) over the last couple of decades, however, there is less improvement in the area of human rights (Zafarullah & Rahman, 2002).

In terms of local development discourses, the fact that most other NGOs in Bangladesh operate in the microfinance sphere provides an interesting context in researching a HRBA. NGOs are acknowledged for their contribution to development in Bangladesh since its independence from Pakistan in 1971 (Zafarullah & Rahman, 2002). They are particularly renowned for their microfinance programmes, implemented by 92\% of Bangladesh-born NGOs (Gauri & Galef, 2005). Microfinance was pioneered in the late 1970s by Dr. Yunus, the founder of Grameen Bank and the winner of Nobel Prize in 2006, and has been operated by many local NGOs including biggest ones such as BRAC, ASA and PROSHIKA (Khalily, 2004). As a locally initiated approach, microfinance became a new paradigm of development (Fowler, 2000). Apart from the mixed evaluation of microfinance programmes (Bateman & Chang, 2012; Khandker 2005), human rights-related activities are reported to be weak where microfinance NGOs operate (Banerjee 2005). This implies that the existence of competing local discourses can limit the applications of a HRBA.

The fact that, Bangladesh is described as challenging for human rights work, also makes it worthy of selection for study. Bangladesh has ratified many of the major human rights conventions, but with reservations.\(^5\) For scholars such as Zafarullah and Rahman (2002),

\(^3\) Bangladesh has 156.6 million people as of 2013, on its land of 147,570 square kilometres (World Bank, 2015).
\(^4\) Bangladesh is ranked 145 of 175 countries by the Corruption Perception Index in 2014 (Transparency International), and in 2001 was rated as the most corrupt country (Banerjee, 2005).
\(^5\) For example, Bangladesh ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 with a reservation to article 14 (the freedom of religion) (http://treaties.un.org). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was signed in 1984 with a reservation to article 2 (state responsibility) and 16 (1) (c) (marriage and dissolution) as they conflict with Sharia law based on Holy Quran and Sunna (http://treaties.un.org).
the government of Bangladesh, the primary duty bearer, has failed to protect the human rights of women, those with a disability, religious minorities and workers. It has been accused of human rights violations such as the detention and murder of political opponents (2002). Generally, NGOs operate in Bangladesh without restriction. However, human rights-related NGOs face difficulties, as seen by the rejection of Amnesty International’s application for government registration (Zafarullah & Rahman, 2002).

Development NGOs which work in the framework of a HRBA also experience threats from local people, Islamic fundamentalist groups and the Bangladesh government (Banerjee, 2005; Crawford, 2007; Hasnain & Jasimuddin, 2012). Such a hostile environment is created by the negative images associated with the cultural and religious roles of NGOs (Tvedt, 1998; Hasnain & Jasimuddin, 2012; Ulvila & Hossain, 2002). Consequently, the selection of Bangladesh can be justified by the research purpose of exploring national contexts which influence NGO workers and their practices in a HRBA.

Recent events in Bangladesh are worth mentioning, even though they occurred after my field work in 2012, as they assist in understanding Bangladesh as a context in which a HRBA is implemented. The factory collapse of Dhaka in April 2013 was recorded as the worst industrial disaster in the world this decade with a death toll of about 1,200. Reports showed that it was caused by poor construction and the government’s deregulation and, more fundamentally, by the global supply chain which drives low-income workers into hazardous working environments (Gifford & Ansett, 2014). This tragic incident provides a strong example that the international business community and the Bangladesh government have ignored human rights; and that the socioeconomic context of Bangladesh, notably its labour surplus, prevents workers from asserting their rights (Thompson & Tapscott, 2010). Another notable event was the political turmoil throughout 2013, which highlights political instability and the influence of religious conservatism on it (Burke, 2013). This volatility worsened the economic situation of Bangladesh following the factory collapse, and also raised human rights issues such as the excessive responses of security forces and a suspension of legislation that the government had previously proposed (Sifton, 2013). Such events strongly suggest that the political and religious contexts of Bangladesh should be studied to understand their influences on rights-based practices. The poor record of human rights in Bangladesh is suggested as both a reason for and a result of these recent events.
1.6. Overview of the thesis

The next chapter reviews literature on a HRBA with a focus on its position in development discourses, its implications for NGOs and the related agency of NGO workers. In accordance with the research aim and questions, Chapter Three introduces a theoretical and conceptual framework. Drawing on the literature, this research locates a HRBA within discourse and agency theories, and regards an organisation as interacting with wider contexts. Research methodology is presented in Chapter Four, which also offers the rationale for the research design of the case study and the selection of the case and data collection methods. Detailed process of collecting and analysing data reflect the cross-cultural nature of the research: That is, a Korean researcher, undertaking a research course at an Australian university and conducting field work in Bangladesh.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven present the findings. Chapter Five identifies themes and links between them. The themes show how theoretical concepts of discourse, agency and contexts are experienced and constructed by research participants. Chapters Six and Seven respectively illustrate a contextualised understanding and practice of a HRBA. Both consider the influence of contexts (organisational and national) and the roles of NGO workers in identifying and understanding the features of the HRBA.

This thesis has a separate chapter discussing how the findings can be theorised. Chapter Eight initially explores research findings in relation to existing theories on discourse, agency and organisational learning. Then new knowledge is added, driven by data which suggests differences in understanding of and commitment to a HRBA among research participants; and the importance of individuals’ implicit knowledge to changes in a HRBA. Drawing upon theories and data-generated knowledge, this chapter provides an explanation for the interactions between discourse, human agency and contexts. The process of influencing each other is conceptualised as ‘internalisation’ and ‘contextualisation’.

Chapter Nine concludes the thesis by examining how core findings contribute to answering the research questions and discusses their implications for theory and practice. Directions
for future research are suggested after considering the strengths and weaknesses of this thesis.
Chapter 2  Exploring a human rights-based approach (HRBA)

This research is informed by my work experience as a development NGO worker in Korea, where a human rights-based approach (HRBA) is not welcome. The experience led me to look at the influence of national and organisational contexts on the understanding of a HRBA. This literature review aims to locate this personal enquiry in theories and academic research. It establishes the area of research by examining theories, discussing what is known about a HRBA, and identifying gaps in the literature. This chapter provides the grounds to support the relevance of the theoretical lens used and highlights the significance and original contribution of this research.

The focus of review is on a human rights-based approach (HRBA). Theories on discourse and agency offer definitions of the two concepts and a theoretical lens through with to examine a HRBA. This research also draws attention to the contexts in which a HRBA is operated. The literature on NGOs and HRBA practices in developing countries provides an understanding of influential contextual factors in HRBA implementation.

This chapter reviews the literature in four sections. The first section gives an overview of development discourses. It discusses how the concept of ‘discourse’ is relevant to the examination of a HRBA and where a HRBA is situated in development discourses. The second section shows how a HRBA is presented in academic research. The majority of HRBA literature discusses the background to its emergence, its key strengths and weaknesses, and critical views of a HRBA. The third section is devoted to NGOs, with a focus on the link between the features of NGOs and human rights-based practices. Some empirical research on NGOs that adopted a HRBA highlights the accompanying organisational changes. Little is known about how a HRBA is understood by NGOs based in developing countries. The last section covers the agency of NGO workers, including definitions of agency and how NGO workers are portrayed in existing studies in terms of their agency.
2.1 Development discourse

2.1.1. Recognition of discourse in development
The rise of international development is usually traced back to the second half of the twentieth century with the end of the colonial era and the Second World War (Cooke, 2003; Kothari, 2005; McMichael, 1996). Since then, there have been changes in development theories and practices, which were mainly driven by powerful international institutions (Pieterse, 2001). Changing ideas, which define what development is and how it should be, can be referred to as ‘development discourses’. The concept of ‘discourse’ is theorised by Foucault (1972) as a structured network of power and knowledge that produces the reality (Rossi, 2004). Development discourses are influential. As Grillo and Stirrat observe, ‘(development) discourse identifies appropriate and legitimate ways of practicing development as well as speaking and thinking about it’ (1997, p.12).

In development studies, the lens of ‘discourse' has led to critical reviews of development. Research from a discourse perspective illuminates the ways developing countries and their people are represented and constructed. For example, Escobar (1995) criticises development discourses for perpetuating ethnocentric bias by creating imaginary concepts such as ‘the Third World’ and ‘the South’ (p.9). Ferguson (1990) describes development discourses as ‘expressed and concealed intentions’ (p.17) of developed countries. The concealed intentions are relevant to their imperialistic or industrial interests in developing countries. In short, the criticism of development discourses is centred on their serving to justify development intervention of powerful countries.

2.1.2. The rivalry between dominant and alternative discourses in development
There have been many development discourses since Truman’s speech in 1949 which reconstructed the world as ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped' (Rist, 2008). After the Second World War, economic growth and modernisation first dominated development discourses, and post development most recently emerged with a rejection of neoliberalism and developmentalism (Kothari, 2005; McMichael, 1996; Rapley, 2007). A noticeable trend in the last 50 years is that the focus of discourses moved from macro-
level economics\(^6\) and generalisation to local-level processes and differentiation (Pieterse, 2001). The emergence of new discourses does not necessarily mean extinction of old discourses, as there is both continuity and discontinuity of those old ones in new ones. For this research, this section does not present the timeline of development discourses. Rather, it explores key arguments, supporting theories and development policies of dominant discourses and alternative discourses. Dominant discourses tend to see development as progress and focus on economic growth and technical intervention, while alternative discourses draw attention to the social dimension of development and the processes.

Economic growth, often measured by gross national product (GNP), and market-oriented development dominated discourse with the support of theories about 'big push', 'trickle down' and 'human capital' in the 1950s and 1960s (Mavrotas & Shorrocks, 2007). The failure of the market led to the 'statism' which calls for bigger roles of the state, as seen in the policies such as Import Substitution Industrialisation and Export Industrialisation (Rapley, 2007). The market-led development revived as neoliberalism in the 1980s in the form of structural adjustment and privatisation (Kothari, 2005; Rapley, 2007) based on neoclassical theory and the idea of rational economic man (Rapley, 2007; Syiem, 2009). Although having been refined, as seen in the changed mottos such as 'redistribution in growth' and 'pro-poor growth' (Mavrotas & Shorrocks, 2007), economic growth is still powerful in development discourses. The economy-based development is often associated with managerialism, professionalism and de-politicisation (Bebbington et al., 2004; Mintzberg & Srinivas, 2009). The funding and reporting system in the aid industry has strengthened such ideologies, encouraging the use of technical language and intervention tools\(^7\) (Parpart et al., 2002; Tvedt, 1998). This results in the ‘homogenisation’ of development agencies with standardised knowledge and techniques (Ebrahim, 2003, p.152).

\(^6\) World systems theory and dependency theory are examples, presenting different views.

\(^7\) Examples of management tools are Project Cycle Management (PCM) and Logical framework (Log Frame), which emphasise logical plan and aid effectiveness. They have been revised to be adaptive to changes as a response to criticism of their blueprint approach (Cusworth & Franks, 1993; DFID, 2009)
The dominant belief in economic growth and technical intervention was challenged by widening inequality and under-achieving aid.

Alternative development discourses also emerged. For example, The World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995 included the social dimension of development (Eyben, 2003; Fisher, 2003). Sustainable Human Development (SHD) and People-Centred Development (PCD) appeared in the UN in the mid-1990s (Nicholls, 1995). Alternative values such as participation and local ownership came to feature prominently in the development community. The participatory approach, initially named as participatory rural appraisal (PRA)\(^8\), which has become participatory learning and action (PLA), emphasises giving voice and ownership to local communities, and criticises the linear logic attached to standardised techniques and their disempowering impacts on local capabilities (Chambers, 1994, 1997). In a similar way, Community Development (CD)\(^9\) as an approach, though diversely named as an ‘asset-based approach’ and a ‘sustainable livelihood approach’ (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Pawar, 2010), stresses local initiative, self-reliance and participation (Ife, 2002, 2010). More radically, endogenous development, such as ‘people’s self-development’ (Rahman, 1993) and ‘autonomous development’ (Carmen, 1996), is suggested, rejecting dependence on exogenous knowledge and resources. Participation, empowerment and endogenous development have become highly valued.

A HRBA can be located within the frame of the alternative discourses. A HRBA replaces what has been understood as technical interventions in the dominant discourses with a politicised framework that aims to redress structural power asymmetry (Slim, 2002). Sharing key values with the alternative discourses discussed above, a HRBA is expected to restore authentic values of participation and empowerment, which have been misused by the neoliberal framework (Ife, 2002). For example, a participatory and empowerment

\(^8\) PRA has origins in activist participatory approach, agro ecosystem analysis, applied anthropology and rapid rural appraisal (RRA) (Chambers, 1994).

\(^9\) Conventionally, community development (CD) means development activities within a certain place for a group of people regarded as ‘underdeveloped’ by a criterion of Western modernisation (Pavlakos & Feyter, 2008). This thesis discusses CD as an approach, which has evolved with changing focuses, but centred on common goals shared by community members, public participation and mobilisation of community resources (Ife, 2002).
approach has been used for mobilising local resources to cut costs and for neutralising political intentions in the context of neoliberal policies (Cornwall & Brock, 2005; Hoggett et al 2008). Also, a HRBA has additional emphases on a human rights framework and the accountability of the state. These differences can yield tensions: a participatory approach and CD highlight local norms and knowledge, while a HRBA refers to universal human rights (Nyamu-Musembi & Musyoki, 2004); CD retains innate tensions between individuals and sub-groups in a community (IAP2, 2009) and a HRBA can fuel the tensions through making them visible and siding with the most marginalised. This suggests a HRBA is located in alternative discourses but also distinguished from others with its inherent differences. The next section details the background to the emergence of a HRBA.

2.2. A Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)

2.2.1. Emergence and spread of a HRBA

Human rights and development have long been regarded as separate areas (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004; Uvin, 2004), mainly because both concepts were narrowly understood. The scope of human rights has mainly referred to civil and political rights, such as right to safety, vote, and freedom of speech and association – the so-called ‘first-generation human rights’ (Donnelly, 1988). Meanwhile, the meaning of development has been confined to economic growth (Pieterse, 2001), which is partly relevant to the ‘second-generation human rights’. Arguably both concepts were broadened by historical, theoretical and institutional changes, as discussed below.

Historical background

Economic and social rights are conventionally regarded as relevant to development. While civil and political rights (CPR) which oblige states to abstain from human rights breaches are seen as negative rights, economic, social and cultural rights (ESCR) call for positive actions to promote a human rights realisation in a progressive way (Uvin, 2004). Although both sets of rights are equally important and indivisible, ESCR has been regarded as something that can be delayed using the excuse of insufficient funds. This comes from an arbitrary interpretation of its article 2, which includes a phrase of ‘to the maximum level of each state’s available resources with a view to achieving progressively’. Positive rights leave room for excuses, as written by Kreimer (1984) who expresses concerns about difficulties in telling the difference between ‘failure to act’ and ‘violation of human rights’. 
In the field of human rights, the ‘second-generation human rights’ of ESCR were neglected because their underpinning values were regarded as associated with Communism (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004: Hamm, 2001). However, the end of the Cold War promoted the rise of these rights. With an increased consensus about the importance of ESCR, development was officially acknowledged as a right in 1986 by the Declaration on the Right to Development despite the objection of legal experts who argued existing rights cover the right to development (Uvin, 2007).

In development, human rights gained importance with an increased emphasis on transparent and responsible governance (Steiner et al., 2008). In the 1990s, an analysis of the failure of the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs)\(^\text{10}\) called attention to good governance (Kothari, 2005; Uvin, 2007). When the market-led reforms via SAPs turned out to be a failure, recipient countries were blamed for their poor governance and corruption. The rise of good governance in development was criticised in many ways: as a simplistic and biased measurement of corruption (Galtung, 2006), as increasing in corruption in adjusting countries due to SAPs' rapid transition to market economy (Kothari & Minogue, 2002), and its use of political tool to impose conditionality (Hamm, 2001; Pettit & Wheeler, 2005). Despite critical views on the historical and political background of ‘good governance’, the idea itself was generally accepted in development as desirable. Rejecting the leaner state model in neoliberalism, a HRBA also emphasises good governance considering the state’s role as a primary duty bearer (Greedy & Ensor, 2005). These historical events promoted the nexus between human rights and development.

*Theoretical background*

Sen (1999) contributed towards the theory of a HRBA by expanding the meaning of poverty from economic status to include deprivation of opportunities and power. Although Sen’s work does not centre on human rights, but on capability, he draws attention to the importance of human rights realisation as the means and the ends of development. The interdependency between human rights and development challenged economy-centred

\(^{10}\)SAPs were market-led reforms, which promoted privatisation and deregulation in line with neoliberalism in the 1980s. Developing countries had to follow these neoliberal policies to be eligible for the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans.
development that lacked concern for process. In this sense, despite differences between the open concept of capability and the universal norm of a HRBA, Sen’s ideas are considerably reflected in a HRBA, as acknowledged in the UNDP’s report in 2000 (Frediani, 2010; Uvin, 2007).

Before Sen, Shue (1980) discussed ‘basic rights’ and included non-state actors as duty bearers as well as the state by listing three duty types: ‘duties to avoid depriving, to protect from deprivation and to aid the deprived’ (1980, p.52). However, Shue’s ‘basic rights’ invalidates the indivisibility of human rights by attaching instrumental values to certain types of rights and claims these rights on the basis of morality. Overcoming Shue’s limitations, Sen’s argument reconfirms the equal importance of different rights. His study shows that the realisation of civil and political rights enables protection of economic and social rights, and vice versa.

**Institutional background**

Institutional changes accelerated the rise of a HRBA. The mainstreaming of human rights by the UN in the late 1990s is one of the most significant driving forces (Slim, 2002). Kofi Annan, the former Secretary-General of the UN, placed human rights at the centre of the UN’s mission in his speech in 1997 (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004). In 2000, the UN emphasised the congruence between human development and human rights in the Human Development Report and the Millennium Development Declaration. This discourse change was succeeded by the ‘Common Understanding on HRBA’ in 2003, declaring the UN’s reform by applying the human rights-steered framework to development. With the UN’s sanction, a HRBA spread rapidly in the international development community (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004).

The spread of a HRBA is also attributed to its potential for enhanced legitimacy and effectiveness of aid agencies. In terms of legitimacy, aid agencies have faced doubts about their rationale for intervention. Reframing development programmes with human rights was suggested as a way to be legally and ethically legitimate (Hamm, 2001; Hickey & Mitlin, 2009). In the framework of a HRBA, development intervention could avoid the image of colonialism by framing it as meeting international obligations according to human rights bills (Syiem, 2009). Aid effectiveness is another issue which has been disputed for
several decades (McGillivray et al., 2005). In response to aid fatigue caused by frustration with ineffective aid, a HRBA is presumed to bring more sustainable impacts through addressing underlying causes of poverty (De Greiff & Duthie, 2009). Accordingly, a HRBA is regarded as improving legitimacy and effectiveness with its normative and instrumental values. The added values of a HRBA are further argued in comparison to a needs-based approach (NBA).

2.2.2. Key features of a HRBA
This section outlines characteristics of a HRBA by contrasting it with a NBA. Both approaches are designed to alleviate poverty – rather than for economic growth, the dominant discourse mentioned earlier. A NBA, characterised as meeting basic and urgent needs, has been a mandate of the UN and development agencies since its introduction by the World Bank in 1972\(^{11}\) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in 1976 (Rist, 2008). The following quote from the UN Secretary-General (1998) suggests how a HRBA reorients the work of the UN by contrasting to a NBA:

> A rights-based approach to development describes situations not simply in terms of human needs, or developmental requirements, but in terms of society’s obligations to respond to the inalienable rights of individuals, empowers people to demand justice as a right, not as a charity, and gives communities a moral basis from which to claim international assistance when needed.

As suggested above, distinctions between a HRBA and a NBA can be drawn by the conceptual difference between universalism and targeting, with a HRBA aligned to a universal strategy and a NBA being more targeted. Instead of a universally entitled right, identifying the poor is the key to targeting in a NBA (Mkandawire, 2005). Based on this, the differences between a HRBA and a NBA are revealed in many ways, including how focal problems are identified, goals are set and relationships are built with aid recipients (Boesen & Martin, 2007).

A NBA sees the main problem as lack of resources. In a NBA, providing resources to meet

\(^{11}\) The discourses of the WB changed from engineering and physical infrastructure to a NBA, and then to policy reform through structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) (Bebbington et al., 2004).
the prioritised needs is central to intervention and recipients are regarded as targets of the intervention. A NBA is often justified as a way of making effective use of resources, but the impact of its disempowering processes has been criticised (Manji, 1998; Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003). In a NBA, poverty is framed as an individual issue and the solution to poverty is dependent upon outside assistance based on benevolence (Jonsson, 2003).

In contrast to a NBA, a HRBA focuses on structural issues which prevent human rights realisation and aims to foster power in people (OHCHR, 2006). In tackling structural issues, a HRBA emphasises the accountability of the state, which has been shrunken in the era of neo-liberalism, and the politicisation of development, which has been removed by managialism and instrumentalism (Gready, 2008). Uvin (2007) holds that a HRBA should be about ‘the way the interactions between citizens, states, and corporations are structured, and how they affect the most marginalised and weakest in society’ (2007, p.600). A HRBA defines its goals in relation to protecting, promoting and fulfilling human rights (Jonsson, 2003). The process should be in line with principles such as participation, empowerment, accountability, non-discrimination and linkage to international human rights instruments (OHCHR, 2006, pp.16-17; Boesen & Martin, 2007, p.15). In a HRBA, both the process and the goal accomplishment are considered to be pivotal (Jonsson, 2003) and people are regarded as rights holders, not pity-seekers (Slim, 2002). To summarise, a HRBA shifts development discourse from charity to entitlement, from alleviating symptoms to addressing root causes of poverty, from blaming individuals to considering structural issues, and from immediate outputs to both ultimate outcomes and process.

In reality, however, the line between a NBA and a HRBA is not clearly drawn. A comparative study revealed the difficulty of comparing HRBA programmes to NBA programmes, because most HRBA programmes were somewhere between a HRBA and a NBA (Crawford, 2007). This suggests that many organisations incorporate HRBA elements to varying degrees.

2.2.3. Critiques of a HRBA

**Western centrism of human rights**

Conceptually, talk of human rights raises a debate about the universalism of human rights and cultural relativism (Donnelly, 1984), individual and collective rights (Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003; Chabal, 2012) and rights and duties (Griffin, 2008). These debates are
relevant to differences between the West and the non-West. Westerners are familiar with human rights with its tradition of valuing equality, individuals and rights, while non-Westerners focus on socio-cultural norms, community and responsibility (Hugman, 2010). Such a difference raises a question of what constitute human rights in non-Western countries (Chabal, 2012). Even among those who hold hope for a HRBA, concerns are expressed regarding the legacy of this Western philosophy\(^\text{12}\) (Nyamu-Musembi & Musyoki, 2004); For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was adopted by the UN in 1948 and laid the foundation for human rights treaties and instruments, shows some problems of ethnocentrism: article 16 defines ‘family’ as ‘the fundamental unit of society’, which is households or clans in some regions; and article 18 states a ‘right to choose and change religion’, which is not allowed in some religions. In this sense, human rights has been criticised as a Western way of thinking.

Strong critiques of human rights are made by non-Western countries. The African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights was adopted by 49 African countries in 1986, emphasising their traditional values and collective rights (Steiner et al., 2008). The title of the charter suggests the importance of peoples’ rights, which were not recognised before. Resistance from the South was strong, particularly in relation to religion. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was called a ‘Western imperialist agenda’ (Farhoumand-Sims, 2009, p.144). Rostami-Povey (2003) criticises Western human rights activists: ‘Some of us may take off burqa (a female outfit to cover the whole body not to reveal it in public) once we are ready and our society is ready. To be pressured by the West to take off our burqa is as bad as Taliban imposing it on us. We have the right to choose what to wear’ (2003, pp.272-273). Human rights discourse often defines human rights violation without understanding its religious context. In many Muslim women’s movements, human rights refer to an alternative interpretation of the religious law, not the international human rights regime (Pettit & Wheeler, 2005).

Another example is the ‘Asian values’ in the 1993 Bangkok Declaration. The ‘Asian values’ were pitched by some Asian leaders who argue the human rights regime is blind to particular cultural values (Barr, 1998; Engle, 1999). They put emphasis on the different

\(^{12}\) The concept of human rights is based on natural law, which is mainly influenced by Stoic philosophers and J. Locke (Barr 1998 p.38).
path of development in line with their communitarian culture, in which individual rights are an unfamiliar concept. However, a counter-argument is that Asian culture is not homogeneous and so does not have particular ‘Asian values’ (Barr, 1998). For many, the Asian values argument was also used by authoritarian leaders for justifying their concentration on economic development at the cost of human rights (Sen, 1997). This shows the state practices and culture should be distinguished. However, the Asian value debate is worth mentioning as it criticises the HRBA’s lack of attention to non-Western culture.

The necessity of considering culture is substantially discussed in the literature on human rights discourse. However, this is not to imply that culture is always compatible with human rights. As shown in the example of the Asian values debate, the values of human rights and culture can be prioritised differently and the difference often leads to clashes. At a conceptual level, for instance, Donnelly (2013) observes that some cultures define rights according to one’s social status in the community and performance of duties. Such a concept of rights can reject the idea that human rights are inherent to everyone by virtue of being human, not by their doing. Certain cultural practices, such as female genital mutilation and early marriage, are seen as human rights violations. Culture often plays a role to oppress the powerless, as it reflects the voice of the powerful (Okin, 1998). Therefore culture is often an object to transform in line with the standard of human rights in a HRBA (Uvin, 2004). In development studies, more generally, every culture is seen as sharing basic values protected by human rights (Donnelly, 1984). The literature on culture and human rights suggests the necessity of careful examination of culture with regard to perception of human rights and its implication.

**Issues raised about rights-based practices**

Another criticism is a HRBA’s overtones of elitism (Nyamu-Musembi & Musyoki, 2004). Its reference to professional and legal knowledge are criticised for excluding poor people (Hickey & Mitlin, 2009). Most literature suggests that a HRBA is neither a legal nor a top-down approach (Harrison & Melville, 2011). However, its linkage to the human rights regime is unique to this approach (Uvin, 2007). A HRBA gives importance to understanding and utilising the international and national legal system, which provide grounds for claiming and exercising human rights.
Therefore, the legal system is influential in applying a HRBA. A law has a power to regulate some harmful practices and to shape people’s way of understanding about relevant issues (Charlesworth & Chinkin, 2000). In that sense, the legal pluralism and weak rule of law raises difficulties in implementing a HRBA. Many countries incorporate human rights in their official legal framework. However, these often have less influence on people’s lives than local justice systems and customary laws, which do not necessarily follow human rights norms (Drumbl, 2003; Schneider, 2007). The UNICEF finds the context of a weak rule of law to be challenging in applying a HRBA, as the grounds for human rights claims and the accountability of the state are not well established (Universalia Management Group, 2012). Remote areas generally have limited access to a legal system (Banerjee, 2005).

As mentioned earlier, re-politicising development discourses is considered as one of the strengths of a HRBA. Some literature points out that rights language carries the risk of being misused for political purpose. A HRBA is criticised for supporting political organisations disguised as a civil society (Manji, 1998) and for attaching political conditions to development aid (Chabal, 2012; Donnelly, 1988; Hamm, 2001).

Its limited applicability is another issue to be resolved. It is questioned whether a HRBA can be implemented where claiming rights can endanger development workers and local people (Lindenberg & Dobel, 1999; Slim, 2002). In some countries, the cost of claiming human rights is greater than the benefits (Thompson & Tapscott, 2010).

It is apparent that a HRBA cannot be a ‘one-size-fits-all’ remedy to development discourses. These issues confirm that the value of a HRBA is determined by how it is translated into practice. This conclusion invites research into how the above issues arise and are addressed in a specific context. As noted by many commentators, national contexts such as culture, tradition, and legal and political systems should be further researched. The following section discusses another context, namely NGOs in relation to the delivery of a HRBA.
2.3. **NGOs and a HRBA**

2.3.1. NGOs in international development
Compared to the public sector, NGOs are described as having advantages in terms of access to the grassroots, flexible and creative operations, cost-effectiveness, and knowhow from field experiences (Hudock, 1999). Also, their participatory process and alternative views to development are highly regarded (Clark, 1991). However, NGOs are also criticised as being too close to a dominant development discourse (Bebbington et al., 2008; Fowler, 2000). NGOs sometimes function as sub-contractors of official aid agencies, serving their needs and interests, as Dichter (1999) calls them ‘GONGOs (Government-owned NGOs)’ or ‘QUANGOs (Quasi NGOs)’.

Regarding the different positions and priorities of NGOs, the concept of ‘NGO generations’ suggested by Korten (1990) is frequently cited. Korten categorises NGOs by their focus: direct relief services (the first generation), small-scale community development (the second generation), sustainable system development (the third generation) and people’s movements (the fourth generation) (1990, p. 117). As denoted by the expression ‘generations’, he suggests that some NGOs evolve from the first generation to the fourth generation. Although the shift from service delivery to advocacy is noticeable, particularly in well-known NGOs (Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001), one thing to note is that most NGOs are involved in every category, not moving on to subsequent stages in sequence as Korten describes. In line with Korten, many NGO studies make normative recommendations that NGOs have to move their focus from charity to human rights (Lewis & Wallace, 2000; Slim, 2002). The next section discusses the realities that NGOs face when they take up a HRBA.

2.3.2. Adoption of a HRBA
NGOs’ transforming to a HRBA is explained by external and internal factors which are closely linked. Some literature gives weight to external factors such as powerful donors’ pushing for a HRBA (Harris-Curtis, 2003). In particular, the UN’s official recognition of the importance of human rights in development leads NGOs to choose a more appealing profile which could bring more funding and a better reputation (Tvedt, 1998). As discussed, another driver is the expectation of increasing legitimacy and improving performance which have been questioned by donors, the public and NGOs themselves (Hamm, 2001).
Some literature notes the leading role of NGOs in boosting the human rights agenda in development. As part of the international development community, NGOs have shaped development discourses as well as being shaped by them. Some NGOs were key players in promoting human rights on the development agenda (Baehr, 2009; De Greiff & Duthie, 2009). This was based on field experiences that showed the new pattern of poverty and the necessity for different strategies (Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001; Pettit & Wheeler, 2005).

Despite some common external and internal driving forces as listed above, the response of NGOs to a HRBA is varied. This variation is explained by national and organisational factors. The origins and strategies of NGOs are greatly influenced by the base country’s aid policies and public attitudes, which are decided by history and culture (Tvedt, 1998). This explains why a HRBA is dominant in North-European countries with the strong tradition of universalism and equality. In many other countries, a HRBA is perceived as too political and NGOs fear losing their non-partisan image (Lindenberg & Dobel, 1999). The increased involvement of NGOs with advocacy in line with a HRBA can challenge the authority of the state (Kamat, 2004). This can threaten their partnership with the government and even their very existence.

Organisational traditions and foundational beliefs are influential in adopting a new approach (Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001). This fits with the observation that HRBA adopters are rarely found in faith-based NGOs. Faith-based organisations are suggested as holding religious beliefs as their core values, unlike some NGOs which accept human rights as their core values by adopting a HRBA (Harris-Curtis, 2003). A quantitative study found that organisational factors such as the financial dependency on governmental funds, the number of affiliates, working style and leadership are statistically significant in the adoption of a HRBA (Plipat, 2005). A NGO’s funding scheme is also relevant. As stated earlier, expansion of big donors’ interests in a HRBA can push NGOs towards a HRBA. However, NGOs fear losing individual donors as human rights are not very marketable (Harris-Curtis, 2003; Nyamu-Musembi & Musyoki, 2004; Panitch & Leys, 2003). In particular, NGOs which raise funds from child sponsorship experience resistance from these sponsors (Nicholls, 1995). A literature review suggests that an NGO’s decision to adopt a HRBA is influenced by its own national and organisational contexts.
2.3.3. Alignment with a HRBA
A good number of NGOs officially state they work following a HRBA. However, how they practise it is not widely published with the majority of publications located in the grey literature (Kindornay et al., 2012). Some case studies of NGOs known to be enthusiastic about incorporating human rights in development show their changes designed to show their affinity with a HRBA. For example, organisational changes since the adoption include revising mandates, working with human rights NGOs, hiring staff with work experience in the human rights sector and familiarising staff with the new framework (Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001; Nelson & Dorsey, 2003). However, these case studies largely explore changes occurring in the headquarters or the offices in developed countries (Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003).

In a similar way, programme-level outcomes of these NGOs are also reported with an example of their global advocacy campaigns, mostly initiated by their headquarters or the offices in developed countries. With the advantages of having better access to international power groups (Lewis & Wallace, 2000) and of being trusted by citizens (Clark, 1991), international NGOs have obtained some success in changing the policy of IFIs (International Financial Institutions). This was demonstrated in Jubilee 2000, which resulted in writing off the debt of highly indebted countries. Most case studies conducted in developing countries are programme level to describe how the predetermined elements of a HRBA are operated (Bode et al., 2005; Conin, 2009; Nicholls, 1995).

In that sense, Plipat's study (2005) deserves attention. It explores a variety of interpretations and practices of a HRBA in three NGOs (Oxfam, ActionAid and Save the Children), in both their headquarters and one of their field countries. The study highlights the gap between the proclamations made by the headquarters and the practice in a researched country. He reveals his assumption that a HRBA should be diffused from the headquarters to affiliates in developing countries.

Further, the adoption of a HRBA itself gives little indication of how NGOs understand and practise it (Hickey & Mitlin, 2009). Some commentators note diversity in NGOs: 1) Rights language is used rhetorically to repackage old practices (Conrwall & Nyamu-Musembi,
as seen by the World Bank which uses rights language to legitimise its mainstreaming neo-liberalism in development (Uvin, 2007) and by some NGOs which just borrow language from a HRBA to describe their work and claim their contribution towards human rights realisation; 2) NGOs selectively use a HRBA instead of a comprehensive alignment (Frankovits, 2008) – that is, studies observe that NGOs simply include advocacy or add some strategies widely used by human rights NGOs such as naming and shaming (Roth 2004), without actually adopting a comprehensive HRBA; 3) Human rights standards are used by NGOs as instruments for assessment or evaluation, which can be just a tokenistic action (Conrwall & Nyamu-Musembi, 2004).

2.4. Agency of NGO practitioners

2.4.1. Concept of human agency

The first section of this chapter discussed development discourses. This section turns to human agency. The deterministic view of discourse theories is challenged by the notion of agency (Grillo & Stirrat, 1997; Rossi, 2004). Long (1992) explains the plurality of development discourses and the variety of development practices through the concept of agency. He further suggests the ‘actor-oriented approach’ which focuses on capabilities of development players. In contrast to the totalising effect of discourse, the notion of agency sheds light on room for manoeuvring. The concept of agency is useful for the research interest of exploring context-inspired interpretation and implementation of a HRBA.

There is no single definition of agency. The literature commonly focuses on ‘motivation’ and ‘capacities’, as Deacon suggests (2004, p.447):

The notion of agency raises issues of motivation, why people wish to do what they do, and capacity, the personal qualities and the material and cultural resources they can draw upon.

The existence of capacities is widely suggested as a key to agency: Giddens’ idea is representative, putting an emphasis on ‘capability of doing’ (1984, p.9) including ‘ability of doing otherwise’ (1984, p.14). The latter type of capacity is noted as ‘potential freedom’ (Davidson 1980 in Seckinelgin 2006), ‘alternative ways’ (Long, 2001) and ‘ability to
envisage and purposively choose options’ (Alsop et al., 2006, p.11). In addition to these capacities, Sen emphasises motivation, suggesting the importance of ‘the realisation of values’ in the concept of agency (1992, p.56). This is contrasted with Giddens who dismisses motivation, arguing that ‘intention’ should not be considered as agency (1984, p.11). Sen consistently holds that agency should be exercised ‘in line with one’s conception of the good’ (1985, p.206) and be judged ‘in terms of their own values and objectives’ (2000, p.19). In sum, the literature on agency largely argues that ‘motivation’ and ‘capacities’ can explain the reason for action and the feasibility of action respectively. In later findings chapters, these components are used in the analysis of agency.

2.4.2. Portraits of NGO workers in the literature
The agency of NGO workers is little researched, despite its importance in development practice as suggested by Lipsky (1980) that people living in poverty are greatly influenced by front-line practitioners who have discretionary powers and conflicting roles between assisting and controlling them. With a focus on their motivation, one of the key components of agency as earlier discussed, NGO workers are diversely described in the literature. This is perhaps because of the broad range of NGO activities in different countries (Lewis, 1999, Mitlin et al., 2007). In terms of motivation, studies present a different picture. One study conducted in Bangladesh notes that field workers tend to join development NGOs with money being the main motivation (Ahmad, 2007). The latter description supports the trend of viewing NGOs as an industry (Dichter, 1999). Another study of Ghana NGO workers suggests their identity as activists and their commitment to ideological beliefs is a significant motivation for working in the NGO sector (Yarrow, 2008). However, by the value-driven nature of development work, development practitioners are reported as experiencing compassion fatigue and burnout (Hoggett et al., 2008).

With regards to capacities, some studies of the partnership between the North and the South give ideas about the perceived capacities of local NGO workers. Recognised capacities of local workers include knowledge of social and cultural condition, the use of local networks and culturally appropriate informal skills (Hudock, 1999). However, most of the literature suggests that local NGO workers lack both experience and expertise, and they need capacity building (Eade, 1997; Lewis & Wallace, 2000). Some studies conducted in Bangladesh also show that NGO workers did not have adequate training for
development work (Ahmad, 2007; Hasnain & Jasimuddin, 2012). NGO practitioners are also seen as having limited freedom for creativity due to the hierarchical culture of NGOs (Kaplan, 2002).

When it comes to a HRBA, development practitioners are required to be equipped with relevant values, knowledge and skills (Ife, 2010). In terms of motivation, they are described as indifferent to human rights issues (Uvin, 2002) and as passive to social changes (Pearce, 1993). With regard to knowledge and skills, case studies on HRBA implementation mostly recommend capacity building for local NGO practitioners. For example, Plipat’s research (2005) on three HRBA NGOs concludes that there is a gap between the headquarters’ guidelines and the county office’s practices. Plipat locates the reason for the gap in the lack of knowledge and skills of local personnel. This reveals an assumption that local workers are supposed to deliver a HRBA as interpreted and suggested by the head office. Given that a HRBA gives primacy to agency, such a perspective should be questioned. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the process of how local NGO practitioners negotiate and reshape a HRBA from their own values and realities.

2.5. Conclusion
A literature review reveals that a HRBA is largely discussed theoretically. Empirical studies, particularly about NGO practices in developing countries, are limited. The widely-used methodology is a case study, which explores NGOs’ performance in a specific country. However, NGO contexts and national contexts have not to date been importantly examined. Given the criticisms of NGO practices in the name of a HRBA and of the ethnocentrism of human rights, the contexts of NGO and a specific country should be explored to understand their influence on the construction of a HRBA. It is noted that both the contexts of NGO and a developing country are described as barriers to HRBA implementation with a focus on their negative aspects. This research highlights enabling aspects as well as retraining aspects in consideration of dynamics and complexity of these contexts.

This chapter acknowledges the relevance of theories of discourse and agency to this research. Locating a HRBA in development discourse makes sense of its emergence, popularity and normative values. The concept of agency can illuminate the process of
translation of a HRBA into practice with due consideration of the relevant context. This review chapter presented discourse and agency separately. The next chapter articulates how these theories and concepts are reconciled by building a framework for this research.
Chapter 3  Location of this study

This chapter outlines where this research is located within philosophical and theoretical perspectives. It comprises three sections. The first explores epistemology, showing the overall philosophical approach to this research. The next section provides the theoretical approach underpinning this thesis. Discourse and agency theories and system and organisational theories inform the main concepts of interest and assumptions about the phenomena to be researched. The last section examines the conceptual framework that arises from the theoretical context and literature review. It includes diagrams which depict key concepts and the relationship between concepts.

3.1. Epistemology

Epistemology details the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Creswell, 2013) and the way of gaining knowledge embedded in philosophy (Blaikie, 1993, pp.6-7; Crotty, 1998, p.3). This study is philosophically grounded in social constructionism and constructivism. As a way of understanding social reality, ‘social constructionism’ holds that meanings are shaped by cultural and social processes (Crotty 1998, pp.43, 54). However, the same phenomena can be interpreted differently by each individual in a society. Therefore this study is also influenced by ‘constructivism’, which recognises the uniqueness of individual understanding and meaning making (Crotty, 1998, p.58). In short, ‘social constructionism’ posits that reality itself is the product of social process, while ‘constructivism’ focuses upon an individualised process of generating meaning (Young & Collin, 2004). Despite some common traits, differences between these two stances are reflected in the theories utilised in this thesis and the conceptual framework developed.

This study aims to understand how a human rights-based approach (HRBA) is understood and practised by an organisation and its staff in a particular context. Both of the epistemological positions outlined above are therefore relevant. The lens of ‘social constructionism’ assists in understanding how specific concepts and practices are legitimised by a HRBA and contexts of interest. The ‘constructivism’ lens encourages understanding of individual workers’ various interpretations of a HRBA and of their input which enables contextualisation of a HRBA.
Previous studies on development discourses have been dominated by the constructionist view, which depicts the reality of people in developing counties as being constructed by Western-centric intervention (Escobar, 1995; Ferguson, 1990). In this epistemology, individuals are regarded as bearers or reproducers of development discourses. Discourses frame perceptions and behaviours of development practitioners. However, Long (2001) posits that development is constructed by those who interact in it. In line with Long’s ‘actor-oriented approach’, this thesis pays additional attention to individuals’ roles as articulators or re-creators of development discourse. In short, this thesis combines constructivism with social constructionism in order to capture the complex and dynamic process of contextualising a HRBA.

3.2. Theoretical context

This research employs theories of discourse and agency. These theories are aligned with social constructionism and constructivism, as outlined in the previous section. Discourse theory, which stresses structural impacts, is used to explore the influence of a HRBA on development actors. In reverse, the influence of the actors on a HRBA is discussed through agency theory which focuses on individual perspective and choice. This thesis also draws on system theories and organisational theories to understand the nature of discourse changes in an organisation.

3.2.1. Discourse and agency theories

This section outlines the theories of discourse and agency and their relationship utilised in this thesis. The concept ‘discourse’, informed by the early work of Foucault (1972), is understood as a system of constituting and presenting knowledge through power. Although Foucault’s later work suggests the existence of agency in his concepts of ‘the subject’ and ‘resistance’, discourse theories largely ignore agency (McHoul & Grace, 1993). On the other hand, active agency is explicitly suggested by Giddens (1984) when conceptualising the duality of structure. Contrary to Foucault’s (1978) focus on determining discourse which permeates society, Giddens emphasises the ‘knowledgeability of human agents’ for the reproduction of social systems (1984, p.3). To Giddens, agency means the ‘capability to make a difference’ (1984, p.14), involving ‘knowledge and power’ in a
different way from Foucault. Individuals are not abstract subjects— unlike those in Foucault’s work — and they are perceived to exercise their power within a scope decided by their practical knowledge to restructure the society (Jary & Bryant, 1991). Taking the basic ideas of Giddens but being wary of possible determinism when structure is emphasised, some scholars put agency at the centre of their theory (Sewell, 1992, Long, 2001). For example, Sewell (1992) understands agency as shaped by the agent’s social position, which decides accessible resources and available actions.

Both theories on discourse and agency are influential in development studies. Drawing on Foucault, the term ‘development discourse’ has been used to shed light on how problems and solutions have been defined and shaped (Grillo & Stirrat, 1997). Even though discourse-informed studies in development draw upon Foucault’s ideas, there are some differences. To Foucault, power is multi-directional and neutral (Fraser, 1989; Wetherell et al., 2001; Joseph, 2004). Most existing studies on development discourses recognise power as top-down and problematic, with a focus on the power imbalance between the North and the South (Lewis & Wallace, 2000). For example, Said (1985) and Mohanty (1988) say that developing countries and people in them are constructed and represented from a Western viewpoint (Syiem, 2009). Escobar (1984, 1995) also notes that developed countries exercise power under the name of development, but do so in order to dominate and exploit developing countries through the problematisation of Southern culture. His critical reflection of development results in rejection of the development industry and its accompanying discourses (Escobar, 1995). Ferguson (1990) illustrates how Foucauldian discourse is embodied in development projects. In his case study, development NGOs and workers are described as ‘a part of the development machine’ to deliver development discourse (Ferguson, 1990, p.276).

Despite the critical contributions of discourse inspired research, the neglect of human agency and of plural discourses has been criticised (Rossi, 2004; Lie, 2008). Development discourse is largely described as monolithic and dominant, homogenising development organisations by the ‘wearing the same uniform’ effect (Rossi, 2004, p.23). Alternative arguments pay attention to the complex and dynamic process of development involving diverse actors (Grillo & Stirrat, 1997). Following Giddens and Bourdieu, the notion of agency accounts for the plurality of discourses and the variety of practices even within the
same discourse (Long, 2001; Rossi, 2004). Further, Long (1992) suggests an ‘actor-oriented approach’, which is centred on development players’ agency. He means by agency ‘the capacity to process social experience and to devise ways of coping with life’ (Long, 2001, p.16). Agency, theorised by Giddens and Bourdieu, does not involve actors’ intention (Garrett, 2010). Unlike them, Long posits that agency is exercised in the form of decisions and actions in both intentional and unintentional ways (1992, pp.18-19). In development studies, both concepts of discourse and agency basically draw upon social theories, but are also constructed in a slightly different way. Development discourse is associated with negative connotations in many studies, and agency is highly valued, despite its slippery notion, with an emphasis on intention as well as action.

The anthropologist-led debates on discourse and agency offer thought-provoking ideas and rich descriptions. However, these debates do not provide an analytical framework to connect both discourse and agency, although each assumes the existence of the other. Discourse-oriented perspective often ends up with a deterministic view or anti-development in a way that rejects its formative and hegemonic power (Lie, 2008). In contrast, emphasis only on agency can lead to romanticising knowledge creation by agents, ignoring the shaping effects of a discourse (Lie, 2008). This thesis therefore combines both discourse and agency in order to present a more comprehensive understanding of a HRBA.

A HRBA is theorised in this thesis as an internationally-driven development discourse, which exerts influences on development players. However, this thesis overcomes the weakness of discourse theories by taking account of the agency of development practitioners, particularly at the local level. The geographically limited popularity and diverse interpretations of a HRBA imply the notion of agency. In short, this thesis acknowledges that a HRBA produces a certain development thinking and practice, but also one can be contested and reshaped by the agency of NGO workers.

Figure 3.1 below depicts how theories on discourse and agency assist in understanding a HRBA. Discourse theory sits within social constructionism and explains the diffusion of a HRBA, as indicated by the dot pattern. The dotted arrow on the right side of the figure depicts how an internationally produced discourse of HRBA is diffused into a local context.
via an intermediary NGO. As shown in stripes, agency theory, located in constructivism, suggests that a HRBA can be reshaped by local agents. These two directions illuminate the complicated roles of local staff as described as ‘dilemmatic space of development workers’ (Hogget et al., 2008). Local NGO workers are expected to deliver a HRBA as framed by the international community, but they can play active roles in generating and advocating local perspectives. Likewise, any change in HRBA discourse can be understood as dilemmas between diffusion and construction, or as stated by Fairclough (1992, p.96) between ‘conventional adaptation’ and ‘innovative creation’.

![Figure 3.1 Use of theories on discourse and agency](image)

3.2.2. System and organisation theories
The research topic of NGO practice in a HRBA needs to be analysed contextually. Theories on system and organisations inform an understanding of the relation between an NGO and its context. Both theories regard an organisation and its external context connected and inter-dependent. System theories, underpinned by social constructionism, draw attention to the environmental impact on an organisation, while organisational theories, in line with constructivism, focus mainly upon internal changes through management systems (Bausch, 2001; Mills et al., 2005). As depicted in Figure 3.2, changes in an organisation is understood as adaptation to changing situations in system theories as indicated by the dot pattern, and as voluntary strategies to deal with the contexts in organisational theories as shown as stripes (Astley & Van de Ven, 1983). In Figure 3.2, the black arrows point the direction of influence – ‘adaptation’ caused by contextual change and ‘strategic choice’ to bring out changes to context. These differently oriented theories can be applied to explore interaction between an NGO and its broader
context. In this thesis, the two theories assist understanding change drivers for human rights-based practices in an NGO.

A conceptual framework is a set of assumptions and provisional theories that inform the research based on personal experience and existing research (Maxwell, 1996). The key concepts used in this thesis are ‘discourse’, ‘agency’ and ‘contexts’. These concepts are employed to understand how local NGO workers (agency) shape a HRBA (discourse) influenced by their own circumstances (contexts).

The main concepts are outlined in the previous section. However, use of the concepts of ‘discourse’ and ‘contexts’ in this research needs clarification.

The conceptualisation of discourse was revised by the field work. Mainly drawing on a review of the literature, a HRBA was regarded as driven by the North and imposed on the South. However, this assumption, which was initially considered as accurate, was challenged during the field research. As will be detailed in Section 4.8, findings suggest dropping the presumed dichotomy between the North and the South from the conceptual framework in order to be open to subjective perception and lived experience. To explore external influences on discourse beyond the power relations between the North and the South, this research uses the term ‘contexts’ instead of ‘structure’ or ‘system’. ‘Structure’ is
often discussed in relation to agency. However, it is often associated with the structuralist view, which sits in a different epistemology from discourse and agency theories with a focus on components and functions of a society (Jary & Bryant, 1991; Schirato et al., 2012). The concept ‘system’ is applied to various fields, mostly meaning a well-established mechanism which has interconnected and interacting parts. The terms ‘structure or system’ may exclude some influences such as values or culture which are not regarded as structured or systemic. The term ‘contexts’ include non-discourse elements which impact on discourse practices as well as other existing discourses. In this research, organisational and national contexts are of interest and their use in the plural form is intended.

Figure 3.3 below demonstrates key concepts and the relationship between them. Discourse and agency construct each other through their interaction, as depicted in the two directional arrows between them. This thesis pays a particular attention to the influence of agency on discourse unlike previous discourse-oriented studies. Agency is conceptualised as located and shaped in contexts.

![Figure 3.3 Concept map >](image-url)
This concept map is applied to this research as the following figure:

![Figure 3.4 Conceptual framework]

Earlier Section 1.4 mentioned that this research took place in ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB). Figure 3.4 illustrates AAB as located where the circles overlap. As the name of this NGO indicates, the contexts considered for this study are two: the organisational context of ActionAid International to which AAB belongs and the national context of Bangladesh where AAB has worked.

Individual practitioners are exposed to these contexts by being situated in AAB. As depicted by the downward arrow, their agency is partly shaped by discourse of a HRBA, which guides their way of thinking and doing. In turn, NGO workers exercise their agency to tailor a HRBA to their own contexts, as shown by the upward arrow. As a result of this interaction, as presented by the bent arrow, ‘a’ general discourse HRBA, which is open to the possibility of various translations, becomes ‘the’ particular HRBA in an NGO reflecting contextual influences. The change process is conceptualised as ‘contextualisation’, meaning tailoring a discourse to suit organisational and national contexts. In conclusion, the proposed research looks at the contextualisation process of a HRBA through the agency of NGO practitioners. Employing concepts of discourse, agency and contexts
together enables this study to explore the link between the framework of a HRBA and its practical implications for practices by articulating its meanings to practitioners in their own contexts and any changes made by them to suit the contexts.

3.4. Conclusion

This chapter provided philosophical and theoretical approaches to this thesis. In line with the discussion about epistemology, theories were selected to explore mutual formative influences of discourse and agency, and of system and organisation. This thesis builds on these theories, and argues that discourse of a HRBA is conceptualised through the agency of NGO workers. How to research this is the subject of the next chapter, the research methodology.
Chapter 4  Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in this research. It provides the rationale for the research design, namely a qualitative case study, and the selection of data collection methods. It also outlines some of the challenges I faced as a researcher undertaking the field work in neither my home country of Korea, nor Australia where my university is based. My position in relation to a HRBA is explicitly stated and the research context is extensively provided. This assists readers with evaluating the trustworthiness of this qualitative study and with understanding the interpretation of data in subsequent chapters.

4.1. Qualitative case study

4.1.1. Selection of a case study
This research adopted a qualitative methodology. As a general approach to research (Silverman, 2005), the methodology is intimately related to the philosophical, theoretical and conceptual lenses outlined in the preceding chapter. Qualitative research is appropriate to 'illuminate the subjective meaning, actions and context of those being researched' (Fossey et al., 2002, p.723) in line with my orientation towards social constructionism and constructivism.

Within a qualitative approach, a case study was selected as a research design. A case study can be seen as a methodology (Creswell, 2013), as a research design or a strategy to research (Blaikie, 2010; Bryman, 2008), and as a method (Stake, 1995). Recognising that there are various approaches to a case study, this thesis regards it as a research design using a range of methods to collect data. A qualitative case study is relevant to this research which focuses on contextualised practices of a HRBA in an NGO. As Yin (2009) suggests, a case study is useful to make sense of current events which are outside the control of a researcher but which are not clearly isolated from the contextual conditions. With little existing literature on the development of the particular understanding and practicing of a HRBA, this research is an exploratory case study.

This research employs a single-case design. The case is a HRBA of a particular NGO. For
the research purpose, ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB) was selected to obtain empirical data. By selecting AAB, the case is bounded spatially by ActionAid International (AAI) in Bangladesh, and temporally by the time that has elapsed since 1998 in which AAI adopted a HRBA until the first half of 2012 when data collection was completed.

4.1.2. Selection of the case study site
The selection of AAB as a site for a case study is justified by its being an affiliate of AAI working in Bangladesh.

AAI is an appropriate site among NGOs adopting and implementing a HRBA for the following reasons. First, the literature review suggests a need for empirical studies which exemplify HRBA-guided practices in developing countries. AAI’s strong orientation to people movements at the local level is noticeable in comparison to other HRBA NGOs (Plipat, 2005); and its HRBA is centred on locally implemented programmes (Gready, 2013). This indicates that AAI can provide richer data on application of a HRBA in developing countries, in comparison to others which characterise their HRBA work as campaigns and advocacy in developed countries. Second, AAI’s decentralised organisational structure, called a ‘federal model’ (AAI n.d.), allows more opportunities for local staff and local communities to participate in decision-making, as supported by the fact that rights-informed strategies were initiated by local staff, not by headquarters (Scott-Villiers, 2002). Valuing local agency and redefining human rights in the light of contexts is discernible in the principles of a HRBA (Gready & Ensor, 2005; Ife, 2002). However, local agency and local context are often ignored or even blamed for compromised practices or outcomes (Crawford, 2007; Plipat, 2005). AAI’s structure reflects its respect for local agency and context, as suggested by having its head office located in Africa (AAI n.d.). AAI’s orientation towards local agency is also supported by my visit to AAB in 200613. AAB was the only international organisation operating in Bangladesh at that time that did not have an expatriate director. Based on these characteristics, AAI may serve to explore field practices guided by a HRBA and the influences of local practitioners, who claim and broker contextual considerations. In short, AAI was chosen for its potential to provide answers to research questions which were derived from the limitations of previous studies.

13 This visit to bilateral aid agencies and NGOs in Bangladesh was funded by Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) for Korean NGO workers.
Among AAI’s 45 field countries, Bangladesh was selected for its richness of contextual influences. NGO proliferation and their roles in development is also noticeable (Fruttero & Gauri, 2005; Islam & Morgan, 2011). In terms of their approaches to development, the orientation towards a HRBA is found in a handful of NGOs including AAB, while microfinance is operated by the majority of NGOs, particularly those originated in Bangladesh (Gauri & Galef, 2005). Microfinance is differently framed from a HRBA with a focus on market-led development. HRBA-inspired activities face greater challenges in communities where microfinance NGOs provide tangible benefits such as financial services (Banerjee, 2005). This implies that the existence of competing development discourses and other NGOs can limit the application of a HRBA. In this study, a HRBA can be examined in relation to challenges posed by the different discourses adopted by NGOs.

Bangladesh also provides a context where a HRBA can be contested by cultural references and local actors’ reactions. The Bangladesh government is responsible for human rights as stipulated in its Constitution and in International Conventions ratified by the government. However, these human rights have not been consistently upheld due to the weaknesses of enforcement mechanisms and the conflict between international human rights and customary laws and religion – particularly in the areas of early marriage, dowries and domestic violence – despite their prohibition by laws enacted in 1929, 1983 and 2000 respectively. Also, NGOs working for human rights issues face resistance. There is a negative sentiment against such NGOs from Islamic fundamentalism and rural elites (Hasnain & Jasimuddin, 2012; Ulvila & Hossain, 2002). In particular, foreign NGOs are viewed as importers of colonial order and Christian culture (Tvedt, 1998). Human rights advocacy has brought threats to HRBA NGOs from local people and the Bangladesh government in the form of personal attack, bombing and imprisonment (Banerjee, 2005; Crawford, 2007; Hasnain & Jasimuddin, 2012). Such an environment is likely to influence NGO workers’ agency in rights-based practices. Thus the selection of Bangladesh can be justified as fitting the research purpose of exploring contextual influences on a HRBA and on the agency of local practitioners.

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14 The number of registered NGOs is 2,713 (the NGO Affairs Bureau, as of 16 June 2014) and projects is 17,500 (Priyo, as of 4 April 2011).
4.1.3. Selection of methods
The two major sources of data are ActionAid documents and interviews. Documents offer easy accessibility and low reactivity, and interviews provide the opportunity to clarify complexity (Richards, 2009).

Given the research purpose, documents and interviews are complementary in capturing different aspects of a HRBA. Documents provide information about the definition and operation of a HRBA as understood and intended by the organisation. Documents are seen not as neutral, but as constructed according to the intention. Documents published by an organisation usually function to show its distinctiveness from others, and further to promote particular views and activities (Morphew & Hartley, 2006; Prior, 2003). In other words, documents are appropriate for showing how a HRBA is interpreted and presented by the case organisation. On the other hand, interviews primarily provide information on individuals’ perspectives and interpretation of personal experience. Interviews can illuminate how meanings are negotiated within an interviewee’s own social contexts (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). In this research, capturing the voices and views of NGO staff is vital for understanding the contextual influences on their perception and practices, which are unlikely to be recorded in documents. Put simply, documents present normative or aspiring aspects of a HRBA as a framing discourse appointed by the NGO, while interviews capture an individual’s reconstructed account of a HRBA influenced by the contexts.

The research strategy also justifies employment of multiple data sources. In this research, data was collected in two stages. Documents were examined first to glean the organisation’s understanding of a HRBA and the context in which a HRBA is practised. Then interviews were conducted with a basic knowledge of the organisation and its stated approach to a HRBA. Interviews identified undocumented but significant issues. The two data sources are used in a complementary way. I used ‘complementarity’ instead of triangulation to show my intention that collected data helps to create a big picture, not to validate one truth. Rejecting the logic of cross-validation, contradictory data between documents and interviews and dissenting voices in interviews are viewed as presenting diverse viewpoints and complexity in reality.
4.2. Immersion in the setting of the case study

Immersion in the field work was like diving into uncharted waters. Given the difficult local conditions and the limited time and resources, a well-planned case study was required. Before detailing the process of data collection, this section discusses preparation for the fieldwork and experiential learning about the research context.

4.2.1. Preparation for the field work
Agreement to this research was gained at an early stage, as the approval of the gatekeeper was crucial to a case study approach. First contact with the Country Director of AAB based in Dhaka was made in April, 2011. The research plan was received positively by the Director, who said that the topic was timely and important for AAB. Practical advice regarding sampling and language issues was then received from the Director of Programme Quality and Impact (PQI) via email. Following proposal confirmation and ethical clearance from The University of Queensland, field visits were planned to start as early as possible so as to avoid the monsoon season starting in June and big religious events such as Ramadan and Eid ul Fitr which occur in July and August. The research visa, which allows at most a three-month stay, was then sought. It took approximately one month to get the visa as the permission of the concerned ministry was required. The field research was undertaken in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, for approximately three months starting from March 2012.

4.2.2. The research context
The research context refers to place and time (Glatthorn & Joyner 2005). AAB, the setting of this case study, started its work in Bangladesh in 1983 with an orphanage programme in Bhola (ActionAid, n.d.). Now it works throughout the country under the vision of ‘a world without poverty and injustice in which every person enjoys their right to a life with dignity’ (ActionAid, n.d.). AAB once implemented direct programmes including saving and credit projects (AAB, 1994), however, started working in partnership with other NGOs in the late 1990s (AAB, 1998). AAB now carries out its long-term programmes – usually last for 10 years – named ‘Local Rights Programmes’ (LRPs) with partner NGOs working in local communities. Partner NGOs implement LRPs funded and guided by AAB. As of 2012, AAB had 27 LRPs in 23 of the 64 districts of Bangladesh, involving 36 different partner
NGOs. Other than these 10-year LRPs, AAB also works with partners for short-term projects and national network.

During the field work, I went to the AAB office located in Dhaka every workday, except when on the field visits, and spent about eight hours a day there. The first month was spent learning about the organisation and building trust and rapport with AAB workers. This was important at the entry phase for field work (Mikkelsen, 2005). The main task in the first month was collecting documents, and preparing for interviews by piloting an interview, translating the information sheet into Bengali and recruiting an interpreter. Interviews were then conducted and documents were collected throughout the remaining two months.

It was interesting to observe the process of discourse changes within AAB. AAI and AAB were drafting the new version of the HRBA handbook and long-term strategy papers to guide their future practices. This led to lively discussion about the changes and their implications. The organisational restructuring was followed by the new country strategy paper\textsuperscript{15}. For example, AAB was transitioning from an association to an affiliate of the ActionAid federation (see the footnote on p. 6) by establishing the national executive board and the general assembly (AAB, 2012). With an increased focus on the HRBA, a HRBA Programming Unit was to be newly established\textsuperscript{16}. Such big changes in the organisational structure invoked various staff reactions. There were frequent discussions about personnel management and its relevance to new priorities and strategies. This gave me with the opportunity to sense which changes were considered significant and which caused confusion and conflict. These observations were used when I probed AAB’s discourse changes in interviews, by exploring perceived reasons behind the changes and their accompanying organisational changes.

4.3. Data collection

As discussed in Section 4.1.3, data sources were documents produced by AAI and AAB, and interviews with staff members of AAB and its partner NGOs. The majority of this data

\textsuperscript{15} AAB has produced country strategy papers in line with AAI’s strategy papers.

\textsuperscript{16} The Unit Manager was recruited from internal applicants in June 2012.
was collected during the field visit to Bangladesh. The exceptions were some AAI documents which were accessed in advance of the field work through its homepage (http://www.actionaid.org/). Although not included as formal data, observations of office activities and conversations with staff members also gave me to a better understanding of the organisational culture and programmes of AAB and its partners. This understanding was used when I refined interview guides. An example is my exploration of local partners’ participation in HRBA-related changes during the interviews. This was based on my observation of the passivity of partner NGO workers and their difficulty in comprehending workshop materials written in English. Field notes were kept to record such understandings of the context and to incorporate them into data collection and analysis. Also, a diary was kept about personal thoughts and feelings encountered during the field research, as these were likely to influence the research process. While the field notes and the diary were revisited to trace the field work process, they were not analysed thematically as data. The following sections describe the selection of documents and interview participants.

4.3.1. Documents
Collected documents are confined to ones published or finalised between 1998 and 2012. This time period was selected to cover any changes since AAI’s adoption of a HRBA in 1998. Both AAI and AAB produce official documents in English or in English and Bengali. However, some workshop materials and internal monitoring reports written by partner NGOs are solely in Bengali. Only documents in English were included in the data set. It was decided to exclude Bengali-written documents as they contained little additional information in the opinion of AAB staff and would have been time consuming and costly to translate. However, it is acknowledged that there may be a loss of information, particularly in the area of transferring a HRBA from local partner NGOs to local communities. How AAI and AAB documents were selected is discussed below.

Documents of ActionAid International (AAI)
AAI’s documents were mostly gathered from its public webpage, the remainder being provided by AAB staff. From online publications, appropriate documents were sought by key words such as ‘rights-based approach’ and ‘human rights based approach’. Additionally, documents about organisational structure and changes were searched with
terms of ‘system’ and ‘strategy’. Nine documents were identified from AAI’s website in this way.

During the field visit, publications were obtained from AAB staff and AAB’s resource centre, which is accessible to the public. I also requested some documents which were mentioned in interviews or informal conversations. A selection was then made based on the richness of information about guiding principles in implementing a HRBA, such as child sponsorship and monitoring. Six documents were added by these criteria. The final 15 documents are listed in Table 4.1.

<Table 4.1 AAI documents list >

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Reflect mother manual</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>AAB Resource Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Fighting poverty together : ActionAid’s strategy 1999-2005</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>AAI Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 A RBA to emergencies</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>AAI Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Taking stock 2: Rights based approach</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>AAI Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Rights to end poverty: ActionAid International strategy 2005-2010</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>AAI Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Rights-based development approaches: combining politics, creativity and organisation</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>AAI Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Global monitoring framework – Rights to end poverty</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>AAB staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 HRBA to poverty eradication and development</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>AAI Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 HRBA resource book 1 – Action on rights</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>AAI Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Child sponsorship policy</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>AAB staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 ALPS: Accountability, learning and planning system - update</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>AAI Website</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 People’s action to end poverty: ActionAid’s strategy 2012-2017</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>AAI Website</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17 AAI makes its five-year plan based on periodic reviews and names it 'strategy'.
Documents of ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB)

The documents collected from AAB include publications and internal documents. Documents were selected to meet the research interests around distinctive features of AAB, AAI’s influences on AAB’s work and vice versa, and the operationalisation and institutionalisation of a HRBA in AAB. Three country strategy papers (# 2, 4, 20 in Table 4.2) were key to understanding the link with international strategies (#2, 5, 12 in Table 4.1) and in identifying changes. Programme specific documents (books, newsletter, case stories, funding proposals, baseline surveys and project evaluation reports) were chosen to cover representative practices of AAB and to understand how a HRBA is reflected in AAB’s programme management from planning to impact evaluation. Human resource policy and workshop resources were included to present how the HRBA was shared through staffing and training. Twenty key documents from AAB were selected without consultation with AAB staff as shown in Table 4.2:

<Table 4.2 AAB documents list>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. A review of CSP 2 update of AAB</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>AAB IASL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Socio-economic and indebtedness-related impact of micro-credit in Bangladesh</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>AAB Resource Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline survey of USS Chilahati</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>AAB IASL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning document series 1-10</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>AAB IASL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2010</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2011</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External review of AAB’s country strategy paper-III</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>AAB IASL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding climate change from below, addressing barriers from above</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>AAB Resource Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impact assessment DA-18 in Chittagong</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>AAB IASL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering the poor and marginalized through self-help group approach</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>AAB FSL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community newsletter, progress report</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>AAB CS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resources and organization development policy and procedures manual</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>AAB HR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist leadership forum</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>AAB Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights based approach (HRBA) V2.0 at a glance</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>AAB Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New monitoring and evaluation format</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>AAB Workshop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People challenging poverty and exclusion – 4th country strategy paper 2012-2017 (yet-to-be finalised)</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>AAB IASL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Abbreviation for team names in Table 2: IASL (Impact Assessment, Shared Learning), JM (Justice for Marginalised), FSL (Food Security and Livelihoods), CS (child sponsorship), HR (Human Resource Development))

4.3.2. Interviews
Twenty eight interview participants were selected as a purposive sample, taking into
account the characteristics of practitioners identified in the literature as significant in answering the research questions. The literature suggests considering both the type of work and the degree of authority to understand experience in development discourse and its changes. For example, programme workers are more aware of and influenced by discourse-level changes than administrative workers (Scott-Villiers, 2002). Head office workers have more discretionary power than field practitioners (Hoggett et al., 2008). This implies differences in terms of authority between AAB staff and partner NGO staff. Their relationship is similar to that between head office worker and field office worker. Within an organisation, a different level of authority is generally found between senior staff and junior staff. The sampling criteria were therefore organisation type (AAB and partner NGOs), position (senior and junior), and major role (programme implementation, programme support and administrative). These sampling criteria were expected to result in a broad range of perspectives and experiences.

Also, gender balance and the length of service were considered as secondary criteria. Gender was taken into account to allow a comparison between female staff and male staff. Different experiences by gender can result in different opinions (Mikkelsen, 2005) given AAI’s focus on a gender equity policy and the harsh environment for women in Bangladesh. The length of service was assumed to influence the extent of experience in organisational changes and participants’ loyalty to the organisation.

The sample size was decided by integrating these criteria as shown in Table 4.3, and the additional consideration of gender and length of service was applied to selection of interview participants within each cell.

<Table 4.3 The intended sample size by nested main criteria>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>AAB</th>
<th></th>
<th>Partner NGOs</th>
<th></th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme implementation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme support</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Details about recruitment of interview participants to fill this quota are discussed in the following sections.

*Interview participants from AAB*

AAB staff were sampled from an employee list with information about their team, position and the year they joined. The list provided all the information needed for sampling and gender was generally discernible by names. As the interview involved a question about changes in AAB, work experience at AAB was required to be more than three years. By this criteria, 110 of 188 staff were eligible for the study, as Table 4.4 shows. By excluding drivers, guards and cooks, 92 staff meet the criteria. Position types were divided into senior and junior, in consultation with AAB staff. Those who held a position under the level of manager were categorised as ‘junior’ and the others as ‘senior’, as summarised in Table 4.4.

<Table 4.4 The number of eligible AAB staff by position>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Eligible(≥3 years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head (including Country Director)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior manager</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy manager</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior officer / Officer / Coordinator/ Assistant</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excluded</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (cook, driver, guard)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concerning major roles, each team was divided into three categories (programme implementation, programme support and administration) as shown in Table 4.5 with agreement of AAB staff.

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18 ‘Md. and mohammad’ in front of a name is male and a name which end with ‘a’ is generally female.
### Table 4.5 The number of eligible AAB staff by roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Division / Team</th>
<th>Eligible (≥3 years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Programme implementation</td>
<td>Livelihood security and risk reduction, Women’s right and gender equality, Rights and social justice, Social development and economic justice</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme support</td>
<td>Impact assessment &amp; shared learning, Reflect and adult education, Partnership and documentation, Child sponsorship,</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration</td>
<td>Finance, Human resource development, Administration, Audit, IT</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>92</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I aimed to recruit two participants for each category nested by major roles and positions (See Table 4.3). The quota table was filled first from those who had worked for longer periods or held a high position as a female. Some categories were easily reached as some divisions had a small number of eligible staff. When there were many who fell in the category, the sample was decided by ensuring a balance of gender and length of service. Three categories of seniority were created in relation to AAB’s launch of a new strategy: before 1999 (the year in which the second country strategy started), between 2000 and 2005 (the year in which the third country strategy started), and after 2006.

After the interview process had started, three participants (two senior staff members from programme implementation and one junior staff member from programme support) were added to the sample to give a greater range of information based on my observation in workshops and personal discussions. Two staff members, one senior staff and one junior staff, were noted for their critical ideas on development practices, and another participant was added for the potential influence of having had an overseas education experience. Table 4.6 and Table 4.7 summarise the final sample of 15 which maximised diversity.

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19 Team names are as of June 2012. They changed following the restructure of AAB in the second half of 2012.
Interview participants from partner NGOs

AAB works in partnership with national and local NGOs. AAB’s field programmes are implemented by these NGO partners. Consequently, it was considered imperative to include the voices of the staff of partner NGOs to understand the implementation of AAB’s HRBA.

I originally planned field visits to three LRP partner NGOs and interviews with 12 participants with a range of roles and positions. However, after learning that not all partner NGOs have the same job hierarchy as AAB, the sampling plan changed to interview three to four people from different roles in each NGO regardless of position.20 For the programmes funded by AAB, every partner NGO has staff for programme coordination, monitoring and evaluation, child sponsorship and finance. These roles can be categorised into three role types in the same way as AAB: programme implementation (programme coordination), programme support (monitoring and evaluation, child sponsorship) and administration (finance, accounting).

20 For example, ‘officer’ was categorised as ‘junior’ in AAB (See Table 4.4). However, partner NGOs have only 1 M&E officer who is in charge of all M&E work, but is not necessarily to be a low rank staff. Therefore, partner NGOs do not have equivalent position to AAB.
Partner NGOs were selected on the basis of the issues of interest to this research. AAB was working on 12 different issues. In line with the research purpose of identifying organisation specific or country specific influences on HRBA practices, three issues were chosen: women’s rights, disability and sustainable livelihoods. Firstly, women’s right is a primary cross-cutting agenda of both AAI and AAB. Also, women’s issues are likely to illustrate a particular context of Bangladesh society. Secondly, disability was selected as a distinctive programme of AAB. While AAB has worked with people with disability, no emphasis on disability is found in AAI and even in other development NGOs. Thirdly, livelihood security was selected, as it was the top programme in terms of AAB’s priority and budget according to the Annual Report 2010. As discussed in Chapter Two, a sustainable livelihood approach emerged before a HRBA in development history, but both approaches have common emphasis on empowerment and participation. The inclusion of livelihood programmes was theoretically expected to suggest potential differences between a HRBA and other approaches.

After selecting these three programmes of gender, disability and livelihood, partner NGOs were selected in consultation with the head of each department of AAB. Only NGOs with more than five-years work experience with AAB were considered. After deciding partner NGOs, field visits were arranged by the AAB staff member in charge of communication and coordination with a partner NGO for the partnership programmes (called the ‘focal person’).

Scheduled visits were cancelled twice because of unforeseen political strikes (called Hortal in Bengali), which prevented the movement of any vehicle and raised the risks for travelling. Many AAB staff could not come to the office during the strikes. Repeated political unrest increased AAB workers’ workload, and field trips to remote areas were hampered. Therefore, initially planned field visits were changed to interviewing staff of partner NGOs working near to Dhaka. Instead, I took the opportunity to interview some NGO staff attending a training workshop in Dhaka who worked in remote areas.

As I began to understand how AAB and partner NGOs work together short-term partner NGOs were added to see if different types of partnership would suggest any difference in
understanding and implementing the HRBA. Table 4.8 shows the distribution of NGOs by partnership types and geographic locations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dhaka and adjacent districts</th>
<th>Remote districts</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long-term partner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short-term partner</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
AAB has worked in the areas marked red for more than 10 years. The yellow boundary indicates areas from which partner NGO workers were sampled. As shown in Figure 4.1, two partner NGOs are from remote areas (Lalmonirhat, Patuakhali) and four from Dhaka.
and adjacent districts (Gazipur, Faridpur). Once NGOs were selected, the choice of participants was limited as most partner NGOs have small numbers of staff involved in the joint programme with AAB. Table 4.9 shows the number of selected partner NGO workers by the priority criteria.

| Table 4.9 Sampled partner NGO staff by priority criteria of role and programmes |
|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------|
|                                 | Women’s rights | Disability     | Livelihoods    | TOTAL |
| Programme implementation        | 1              | 2              | 1              | 4     |
| Programme Support               | 2              | 0              | 4              | 6     |
| Finance & Administration        | 1              | 1              | 1              | 3     |
| TOTAL                           | 4              | 3              | 6              | 13    |

The secondary criteria of gender and length of service with AAB projects could not be applied in selecting participants from partner NGOs. Table 4.10 sums up the distribution of these 13 participants by the same criteria considered for AAB staff. None had worked for AAB projects for more than 10 years as partnership programmes are designed to end after a 10-year intervention. Fewer numbers of female workers probably reflects the conservative culture outside Dhaka as represented by the lower educational accomplishment of women, early marriage, and the fact that social activities by women outside the home are discouraged.

| Table 4.10 Sampled partner NGO staff by secondary criteria of gender and joining year in AAB’s programme/project |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|--------|
| Female                                         | Male           | TOTAL          |
| Before 1999                                    | 0              | 0              | 0      |
| 2000-2005                                      | 0              | 6              | 6      |
| After 2006                                     | 3              | 4              | 7      |
| TOTAL                                          | 3              | 10             | 13     |

**Interview process**

A semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 1) was developed to answer the research questions. This guide was flexible in sequencing and wording. So that subsequent
comparisons could be made, the same key topics were covered in most interviews. However, the order in which topics were covered varied according to the flow of the interview. In order to elicit a background understanding of interviewees and to open an interview with a familiar subject, opening questions were about motivation to work in development or educational background. This naturally led to other topics such as work experiences and perceived features of AAB. How the HRBA was understood and applied to the work was then explored. Usually the last topic was any change the participant experienced in the HRBA or in AAB with an exploration of the perceived reasons behind the change and the nature of change processes. Before finalising interviews, participants were given an opportunity to clarify their views.

A pilot interview was conducted with one AAB staff member who met the selection criteria as this person had worked for AAB for more than five years. This interviewee was chosen with the expectation of obtaining rich data and informative feedback. This person was observed as vocal in in-house workshops and had considerable interview experiences. The pilot interview suggested that I had a tendency to provide my own interpretation in summarising comments instead of turning them into further questions, and to ask more than one question at a time. This reflection was useful in improving subsequent interviews. The interview guide was not revised much after this pilot interview. This pilot interview was included in the data set.

After the pilot interview, I invited 14 AAB staff to participate in interviews. Most welcomed the opportunity. However, some administration staff thought that they were not the right interviewees as their work was not related to the HRBA or that their line manager would know better than them. After explaining that the research was not about knowledge of the HRBA but about personal experience as an AAB worker, agreement to participate was gained from all. The participation information sheet (Appendix 2) was emailed to each participant before the interview to ensure their informed decision making about participation. Venue and time were decided to suit participants. Before starting the interview, the participation consent form (Appendix 3) was signed. With consent, every interview was audio-recorded.

Partner NGO workers were contacted by the AAB focal person. Information sheets and
consent forms in English and Bengali were sent to the partner NGO before my visit. I had limited personal information about partner NGO staff before the field visits.

Interview times ranged from 20 to 133 minutes with an average of 71 minutes. Most interviews were conducted in an empty office or in a workshop place if participants did not have their own private office. Most interviews went well without interruption; however, some problems were experienced. For example, the first two interviews were done in a noisy environment as both fan and air conditioner were on. For better quality recording, the fan was turned off during other interviews at my request. Other examples of interruptions are discussed later in Section 4.6 as ethical considerations. Whenever interruptions occurred, the recording device was turned off and the interview was resumed with a reminder to a participant about what had been discussed.

After reviewing and transcribing the interview, five follow-up interviews were conducted to clarify responses and to cover unexplored topics. Each follow-up interview took an average of 30 minutes (range 20-45 minutes).

**Translating and interpreting**
As English is not the first language for either the researcher or research participants, my communication strategies included the use of clear and basic English and the use of an interpreter when necessary. None of the AAB staff needed an interpreter, as their working language is English. Three participants from AAB expressed concerns about their capacity to communicate in English. However, their command of English was good enough to understand my question and to express their opinions, despite their need to search for appropriate words. Unlike AAB staff, most partner NGO staff could not communicate in English. The information sheet and consent form were translated into Bengali for them. Semi-structured interviews with partner NGO staff were conducted through an interpreter, except for two participants who were able to communicate in English.

Translation of the information sheet and consent form was done by a university student under the supervision of a bilingual lecturer at North South University in Bangladesh. Translated forms were slightly revised by the recruited interpreter.
An interpreter was sought with an understanding of development work and experience in interpreting, but with no prior links to AAB to prevent him or her influencing interviewees. Initially I sought to use a university student as interpreter. However, this was not possible as the field visits were planned during the university semester. AAB introduced one possible interpreter used previously for AAB’s conferences.

As outlined in the interpreter consent form (Appendix 4), the interpreter agreed to provide an accurate interpretation, while also taking responsibility for confidentiality, early notice of any conflict of interest, and presenting a professional demeanour. At first, the interpreter was expected to provide consecutive interpreting – that is, beginning when the speaker finished one or two sentences – to ensure accuracy. As this hindered the interview flow, interpretation was given after several sentences or an explanation of an idea.

Without specialised training in note-taking and memory techniques, the interpreter sometimes omitted something or too briefly summarised what participants stated. This problem was detected after the first two interviews. I realised that some words mentioned by participants were not included in the interpreter’s interpretation, as I could understand basic Bengali and participants often used English development jargon. For example, the Bengali words of ‘Union Parishad’ (meaning ‘local government’) heard from a participant’s response were not interpreted, meaning that an example of community empowerment by the HRBA could have been lost. The interpreter was reminded of the importance of a complete and accurate interpretation without changing the meaning or omitting anything that is stated. The incorrect parts of the transcript were revised by the interpreter with the copied recording file, which was discarded once the review was finished for the preservation of confidentiality.

After six interviews with partner NGO staff, this initial interpreter was not available. No interpreter meeting the requirements could be found. AAB suggested that any AAB staff who would accompany my field trip could help with interpreting. The possibility of inequitable power relations between the funding organisation and recipient organisations made me reluctant to take up the offer and an alternative plan was pursued. The idea was to get help from another staff member who worked in the partner NGO but was not participating in any of the interviews. In one NGO, some staff volunteered for the role as
an interpreter, however, their English fell below expectations.

As the alternative did not work, five interviews with partner NGO staff were conducted with two AAB staff members acting as interpreters. Fortunately, the AAB worker’s abundant knowledge of the relevant programme improved accuracy of interpreting and the relationship between AAB staff and partner NGO staff was observed as informal without raising any serious power issue. However, AAB staff interpreters were sometimes tempted to add further explanations or their own opinions. They were asked to keep to the role as an interpreter during the interview.

Transcribing and member checking

Complete audio recordings of interviews were imported from the voice recorder to a laptop and then transcribed as quickly as possible after the interview. In a verbatim translation, the following symbols were used to add clarity.

<Table 4.11 Transcript symbols>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Italicised words</th>
<th>Indication of sounds or behaviours during the interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(?)</td>
<td>Words that were not clearly heard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(LP)</td>
<td>Long Pause</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>←</td>
<td>Interruption in the middle of talking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Every transcript was sent back to the participant within a week of the interview. It is unrealistic to expect that participants can remember their statements exactly, however, they can tell if something is unlikely to have been mentioned or does not fit the context (Gibbs, 2007). A member check, also known as informant feedback, was used to improve accuracy and credibility. I highlighted what was perhaps misheard or what needed clarification in order to focus participants’ attention and to save their time in case they were too busy to read the lengthy transcript. Feedback from 11 of the 28 participants was provided by email or in person. Participants added a supplementary explanation and corrected wrongly-transcribed words and their mistakes in English grammar. Slight changes when converting recorded speech into written text are inevitable (Gibbs, 2007). In the reviewing process, I corrected some minor grammatical errors, such as subject and verb agreement or tense agreement, which were not significant in understanding the
content but might hinder readability.

4.4. Data management

Qualitative research, particularly a case study using multiple data sources, produces overwhelming amounts of data (Yin, 2003, 2009). Since this research involves many documents and hours of recordings, managing data in a well-organised way was essential for accurate analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). This section covers data storing and accessing data for analysis.

During the field work, all digital data were stored in my personal laptop with access controlled by a password. Additionally, back-up copies were saved in a memory stick. The original plan was to save back-up files to The University of Queensland (UQ) webserver, but internet speed in Bangladesh did not allow that. Hard copies of documents and consent forms which contained personal information and signatures were locked in a suitcase.

In Australia, documents were kept in a locked filing cabinet and audio files were moved to a UQ network, which controls access by user ID and password. All transcripts and some soft-copied documents were imported to NVivo software, which enables access to stored data by searching and retrieving indexed text (Gibbs, 2007). Recording and tracking of my ideas was also assisted by NVivo functions such as ‘annotation’ for comments on a specific passage and ‘journal’ for notes about interesting statements and emerging ideas on research questions or theories. In this way, NVivo software was used for data management.

4.5. Data analysis

4.5.1. Thematic analysis

In this research, documents and interviews were analysed thematically. Discourse analysis is not appropriate for this research, although the study is developed drawing upon discourse theories. In development studies, the term discourse has been used as an ideology, not as an analysis method (Pieterse, 2000). As an ideology, Foucauldian
discourse pays broader attention to the formation of specific ideas through systems (Foucault, 1972, pp.27-28), being distinct from linguistically oriented discourse analysis which has a narrower focus on language itself (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Wetherell et al., 2001). In fact, Foucault’s discourse informs no specific method (Graham, 2005). Further, discourse analysis is embedded in different epistemology from this research (Silverman, 2005; Tracy, 1995; Wetherell et al., 2001) and is not appropriate for the researcher and research participants whose first language is not English, the language used in this research. Consequently, this research uses a thematic analysis, not a discourse analysis, and regards discourse as a theme to be thematically examined.

Thematic analysis is a systematic process for encoding qualitative information gained from various data sources (Mills et al., 2010). As mentioned in Section 4.1.3, it was anticipated that documents and interviews would provide different but related accounts. Initial themes were developed by each data source. In terms of order, document analysis was done first and then revisited after interview analysis with broadened understanding of the case. Differences and mutual influences between organisations and their staff were examined with particular attention paid to the different nature of accounts by data source. Considering both documents and interviews as social products, contexts in which the data was produced were considered as well as its contents (Woodhouse, 2006). The influence of spatial and temporal contexts on interviews was also noted. For example, AAB’s organisational structuring, a planned closure of the programme implemented by one partner NGO, and partner NGOs' working conditions which limit privacy appeared to influence interviews to varying degrees.

The definitions of the terms used in the following sections are offered here to minimise confusion. In qualitative analysis, ‘code’, ‘index’, and ‘theme’ have been used interchangeably to refer to thematic accounts (Gibbs, 2007). Since the terms ‘code’ and ‘code book’ are widely used in quantitative analysis in association with numeric values (Gibbs, 2007; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), this thesis uses ‘index’ to mean the conventional codes and ‘thematic framework’ instead of code book or analytical chart as suggested by Ritchie and Lewis (2003). ‘Theme’ is used for conceptual products arising from working with ‘index’ and ‘thematic framework’. Theme is understood to have a higher level of abstraction than index, as defined as a description of comprehensive ideas or an indication
of relations between indexes (Richards, 2009). In the next section, the process of indexing, constructing a thematic framework, and developing themes is presented. As this analytical process is not linear (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the concurrent work started from the early stages of the field work and continued in an iterative way until the completion of the thesis.

4.5.2. Developing descriptive accounts by indexing
Indexes were developed through the following steps suggested by Bryman (2008):
- getting familiar with data by reading it through and making a note about noticeable ideas or events;
- marking texts with initial indexes or highlighting some passages; and
- repeating the second stage with other data while structuring indexes by grouping or elimination.

Following this guide, I started intensive reading with data-rich interview transcripts and key documents. Repeated reading produced descriptive indexes which sum up the attributes of each segment, and topic indexes which label commonly found subjects within and then across pieces of data (Richards, 2009). Descriptive indexes were written on the paper margin of the transcripts and documents selected for analysis. These descriptive indexes were transferred to topic indexes, as nodes in NVivo. Topic indexes were separately developed for interviews and documents (Appendix 5) and applied throughout data.

Descriptive indexes remain close to the transcript to corroborate the original expression (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2008). Each case was summarised with relevant statements around research questions and with any insights regarding the conceptual framework. Topic indexes were initially created from the interview guide and conceptual framework in a deductive way and more indexes were generated in an inductive way when a new topic appeared. Each topic index was defined in the description box of a node for consistency in further indexing and for trustworthiness by providing the trace (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2008). Comparison with other data files led to restructuring of indexes by addition, integration and removal. Topic indexes were organised in a hierarchy as tree nodes with parent nodes and child nodes, which later helped relational mapping and analytical thinking (Gibbs, 2007).
4.5.3. Developing analytic themes using thematic framework

Assigned passages by topic indexes were sorted and mapped for themes identification in a template, ‘thematic framework’ (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Data was then clustered into patterns and categories, paying attention to similarities and differences (Richards, 2009). Patterns and categories were searched in two ways: 1) phenomena at the manifest level; and 2) interpretations involving the meanings in the context and underlying concepts at the latent level (Boyatzis, 1998). At the manifest level content categories and typology were developed; and at the latent level explanations for relations were built referring to theories (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

The process of linking indexes and analytical themes is shown in Figure 4.2. This process usually seeks a higher level of abstraction and generalisation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003).

![Figure 4.2 An example of developing indexes and themes](image)

4.6. Data presentation

It is necessary to clarify the term used in the succeeding finding chapters. The broader literature conventionally uses the terms ‘RBA’ and ‘HRBA’ interchangeably. However, the two terms are distinguished in AAB. Many of the staff interviewed suggested that ‘HRBA’
more appropriately captures their work than ‘RBA’. This thesis respects that suggestion and uses the term ‘HRBA’, while noting that the term ‘RBA’ was used by some of those interviewed and in some documents from AAI and AAB. This perhaps stems from the interchangeable use of such terms in ActionAid where ‘RBA’ was used until 2008 when it was replaced by ‘HRBA’ without any apparent change in meaning.

Another distinction is made between the definite article ‘the’ and the indefinite article ‘a’ when referring to HRBA. In this thesis, ‘a HRBA’ means a development discourse in a broader sense and ‘the HRBA’ means a specific HRBA understood and practised by AAB. However, this distinction is not applied in presenting raw materials, as the distinction is the result of analysis in this thesis.

Brackets and ellipses are used when presenting data materials. Round brackets (()) are used to specify words which appeared earlier in the interview but were replaced by pronouns in the extracts. Some round brackets are as shown in documents to provide additional explanation. Square brackets ([ ]) enclose words which are added by the researcher to fill in missing words or to clarify the meaning. Square brackets are used only when the missing word is noticeable from the context and when a participant uses a shortened form of a word which is widely used in AAB but may not be clear to readers. Ellipses (...) show where sentences or words were deliberately omitted from a quote because they are irrelevant to its key message, which is understandable without them.

4.7. Ethical considerations

This research complies with the ethics requirements outlined in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research as reviewed by the Ethics Committee of The University of Queensland (UQ). This section outlines key ethical issues for this study. It outlines issues that arose in the fieldwork, and how they were dealt with. It also includes some principles that were applied in presenting and sharing the findings. The following sections display the efforts made throughout the research for integrity as a researcher and as a person who believes that process matters as much as results.
4.7.1. Gaining access and informed consent
Overall access to most data sources was gained with the approval of the Director of AAB based on the research plan that I provided prior to field work. Additional consent was sought to access other documents and to interview participants. Most documents were acquired from the staff in charge of a specific programme or task, sometimes with the approval of the line manager. For interviews, initial contact was made by sending an email inviting participation. Each potential participant was given detailed information about the research. The information sheet (Appendix 2) covered the research purpose, its methods, what participation involved, any potential benefits and risks, the right to withdraw, implication of withdrawing, the voluntary nature of participation, the use of data, monitoring procedures by the advisory team and UQ, confidentiality issues, strategies to maintain anonymity, and contact details for more information. To ensure informed consent, the information sheet was sent in advance. When any participant could not read it through before the interview, enough time was given at the start of the interview before gaining consent. Every participant signed the consent form after I recapped verbally the key issues before commencing an interview.

All participants had sufficient education\(^{21}\) to understand what this research involved and they were independently able to make a voluntary decision to participate. There were no issues concerning informed consent. Regarding control over the provision of information, participants were informed that they could refuse to answer any question or withdraw at any stage. No participant refused or withdrew.

4.7.2. Protection of confidentiality and privacy
To protect confidentiality and privacy during the interview, a private and quiet venue was selected. However, the concept of privacy held by the research participants varied. Interviews were sometimes interrupted by phone calls or other staff who needed to talk to a participant or who just dropped by. Some participants let others come and overhear the interview. To preserve confidentiality, non-participants were asked to leave the interview venue. Since interviews were scheduled during office hours, work-related disturbance ________________

\(^{21}\) All participants had education which is equivalent to 12 years of primary and secondary school. More than half of AAB staff had a master’s degree and the majority of partner NGO staff had a bachelor’s degree.
could not be prevented entirely, but some interruptions were caused by a different understanding of confidentiality. With extreme caution, field notes and the diary were written in Korean, my native language, so it could not be read by others and interview materials were kept in a locked drawer.

Interviewing partner NGOs raised more confidentiality issues. One local NGO had no appropriate room available for interviews. The interview venue was frequented by other staff members. Another issue was that four out of 13 participants from partner NGOs had no personal email account. For further contact, they gave the organisation’s email account. In such cases, transcripts had to be emailed to the shared account, indicating who was supposed to get the email.

Access to transcripts was restricted to me and my advisory team. To ensure confidentiality, any identifiers such as a participant’s name and locality were removed and replaced by pseudonyms in the transcripts. Named individuals and organisations mentioned in interviews were also replaced with pseudonyms when presenting research findings. However, the disclosure of types of NGO (AAB/partner NGO), position (senior/junior) and main task (administration/programme implementation/programme support) was inevitable as these selection criteria were applied to identify any differences in sub groups. Although a category itself may not identify a participant if more than one fell within the same category, findings were carefully reported so as not to include other descriptions which could identify an individual.

However, it is acknowledged that staff members can potentially identify interview participants from the details of the interview. In Bengali culture and AAB’s organisational culture, it is highly likely that staff members know personal matters of others. Hence, personal information such as educational background, employment history, or hometown were carefully dealt with in the reporting process.

4.7.3. Risks and benefits of participation
Although the research topic itself is not overly sensitive, there is a risk in uncovering some unpleasant experiences or leading participants to disclose information which is negative to the organisation or the government. This risk was assessed as minimal by me and the UQ
Ethical Review Committee for the following reasons. Firstly, it is unlikely that AAI and AAB would discourage its staff from speaking up in an interview or that they would be disadvantaged because of what they said in an interview. AAI is one of 25 signatories to the ‘International NGO Accountability Charter’, which regulates unethical behaviours. Further, one of the reasons for choosing AAI for this research is that this NGO has a culture of promoting diverse voices in sharing and learning. Secondly, while threats from the government or local people can be serious (as outlined in the rationale for the case in Section 4.1.2), the probability of such threats is very low. As AAB has periodically reported its activities to the government and the public, it is unlikely that talking about their activities endangers participants. Staff members are also protected by the profile and influence of international NGOs and the development community.

To prevent any possible harm, when any sign of discomfort or hesitance was detected during an interview, the participant was asked if they wanted to keep going or if they wanted to delete what had been said. None withdrew from interview or asked for data to be erased. As mentioned above, in reporting research results, every effort was made to conceal the identity of individual participants.

This research involved no personal benefit to participants. Small gifts were given at the end of the interview to show thanks for their valuable time and input. Gift is an issue to seek a local advice (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003). Prior to field work, I was told by my Bengali friend that cash would be best. However, AAB staff advised that cash would be culturally inappropriate. A box of chocolates was therefore selected as a gift to thank participants.

4.7.4. Sharing of research findings
This research could not have happened without the support of AAB and its partner NGOs who therefore have the right to be advised of the research findings. The preliminary findings were shared with AAB staff thorough a presentation at the end of the field work period. Feedback from this presentation confirmed the relevance of this research to AAB and provided insights into the causes of the present confusion over the HRBA and its practical implications. The presentation is summarised in Appendix 6 and new insights from feedback were included in the finding chapters. When this thesis is completed, a full
4.8. Threats to trustworthiness and rigour

In quantitative research, validity and reliability are critical to judge the thoroughness of research. However, the concepts of validity and reliability are not used much by qualitative researchers, as both are rooted in positivist epistemology. Some find their relevance to qualitative research in a broader sense (Golafshani, 2003; Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), while other authors prefer replacing them by different terms such as ‘credibility’ or ‘transferability’ for validity and ‘confirmability’ or ‘dependability’ for reliability (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). In this thesis, rigour is understood as related to the ‘trustworthiness’ of data. This section discusses the trustworthiness in terms of credibility and dependability. It also presents how possible threats to them were addressed.

4.8.1. Credibility
Credibility, an alternative concept to validity, can be understood as the extent to which the research captures the phenomenon it claims to explore and provides the grounds for interpretation (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). To establish credibility, member checking was used (see Section 4.3.), and thick description and disconfirming evidence were provided in reporting findings. Transcripts were checked by all participants who wished to do this (11 of 28 participants) to ensure accurate presentation of their experience and perception. Feedback on my presentation in AAB’s workshop also supported the credibility of my interpretation. In the following finding chapters, thick description of the context and participants assists in understanding my interpretation of the research material. Dissenting or contradictory voices are also presented as this research is interested in the complex reality interwoven by discourse, agency and contexts, rather than in the confirmation of known theories.

4.8.2. Dependability
Dependability refers to replicable and systemic procedures, a concept similar to reliability in quantitative research (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The difference lies in the idea of dependability in qualitative research being applied to the way of producing results, not to obtaining the same results by repeated measures (Andrade, 2009), as the context and participants change even if the same procedures are repeated. Consistency in sampling,
interviewing, indexing and interpreting is imperative for dependability. Sampling criteria and the interview guide helped ensure the research was unbiased and systematic. Cross checking of indexing texts and labelling themes with advisors also improved consistency. Despite every effort to follow systemic processes, data is constructed when I select specific information, transform it into summaries or categories, and build particular meanings and stories (Mikkelsen, 2005). In the following section, my subjectivity and the reaction of participants which may threaten trustworthiness is discussed.

4.9. Reflection on the research journey

Reflecting on my subjectivity and interview participants’ reactivity is important for the quality of the research. There are two types of reflexivity: one is endogenous reflexivity about how the researcher’s experience and preconceptions influence the research practices; the other is referential reflexivity, which refers to mutual influence between the researcher and the environment (May & Perry, 2011). This section firstly states where the researcher stands in this research and how this stance may influence the process of data collection and analysis. Secondly, in relation to referential reflexivity, it identifies how the existence of the researcher can influence the setting and the researcher’s interpretations can be fed by contextual influences.

4.9.1. Endogenous reflexivity

My preconceptions were mostly based on my previous work experience of about five years at international development NGOs in Korea and in some developing countries including Bangladesh. These experiences gave me an understanding of working systems –relations between donors and an NGO, and the headquarters and county offices within an NGO–, of key issues in NGOs –funding, accountability, programme management– and of development terminology –such as log frame (logical framework), PRA (participatory rural appraisal) and MDGs (Millennium development goals). This helped me communicate with participants because I have an understanding of how international development NGOs work and of the challenges they face in practicing a HRBA.

Work experience also influenced my first impressions of AAB. My experience in Korea and Bangladesh was of NGO Organisational cultures that were quite hierarchical and
efficiency-focused. In contrast, AAB was found to be relaxed with family-like relationships and vibrant with unreserved discussions. Even though I was well-disposed towards AAB and its friendly staff, I tried to maintain a neutral stance as a researcher. An example of holding a neutral stance is that interviews included questions probing any negative aspect of the organisation in terms of staff authority in the change process. I also had to remind myself of the purpose of this research, particularly when my interest was sparked by issues irrelevant to the research.

My previous experience during a three-month fellowship with an international NGO in Bangladesh also helped me to quickly settle into this field work. Since the time for this field research was limited, it was important to be prepared for the different life style with practical lessons learnt from previous experience.

In terms of the research topic, I have held a positive view of a HRBA. From my perspective, the principles of a HRBA sound revolutionary, as it requires a transformative change in the mindset of the development workers and in relationships with aid recipients. On the other hand, I also critically questioned its limited applicability due to its Northern root and its reference to international laws which lack enforcement mechanisms. As discussed in Section 1.5, the context of Bangladesh was expected to provide some contested ideas on the universal applicability of a HRBA, given its reputation as an unfriendly and challenging environment for human rights activities. Possible negative aspects of a HRBA were explored as well as positive aspects. For example, I asked whether interview participants see a HRBA as imposed from the North or not, and whether they experience any conflicts with the government and other duty bearers.

Detailed accounts are made in succeeding finding chapters. But briefly, the assumed dichotomy between the North and the South does not seem to fit well with the research findings. Bangladesh is a rapidly changing society in the globalisation era. NGO workers are frequent exposed to international terms and ideas. Unlike the findings of existing literature, the relationship between AAB and duty bearers was not confrontational. AAB adopted win-win strategies for making duty bearers accountable by providing alternatives. This will be discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.
4.9.2. Referential reflexivity
This section describes how the researcher and the researched might be mutually influenced. I carried out observations and interviews with staff as an outsider of the context in which the research was done. At the same time, my three-month engagement provided staff members with opportunities to research me. Since the organisation has had international researchers and interns, my presence was not viewed as intrusive. The independent character of this research and the researcher as a PhD student was stressed to interview participants to prevent them feeling pressured about participation and responses. Most participants and other staff members were pleased that I had chosen AAB as a case site for my research, showing their high pride in their approach to the work. Moreover, my efforts to learn the Bengali language and to follow their way of living by wearing traditional clothes and eating with one hand impressed AAB staff and partner NGO workers. In Bangladesh, as in all countries, respecting cultural norms and values is important for building a good rapport with research participants. Good relationship with staff members eased the research. Most staff members were willing to help with my research and to take part in the interviews.

In development studies, reproduction of ‘otherness’ by non-native researchers, mostly from Western societies, has been criticised (Escobar, 1995). In qualitative research, the potential for exploitative or disempowering processes has been raised (Bridges, 2002). However, the key argument found in these critiques is that value judgements should not be drawn without sensitive understanding of historical or culture-specific contexts (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003). Openness and honesty in understanding and presenting research experience is far more important than having an insider status (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Further, there are some advantages in being an outsider (Mikkelsen, 2005). I could probe Bangladesh-specific practices without taking them as absolutely right or natural, and could provide insights from a new lens. Likewise, interview participants tended to provide detailed explanations and their own interpretation about their politics, legal system and culture, as they assumed my ignorance as a foreigner.

Language is one of the most challenging issues facing an outside researcher. In this study, English was the language for data collection. In a Bengali speaking environment, my understanding of Bengali, even very limited, was an advantage. It helped me follow the
interpreting process, AAB’s workshops and casual talks. However, the difference in Bengali such as frequent use of collective subject (e.g. we instead of I), two types of pronoun to note the degree of politeness (e.g. *tumi* and *apni* for you), and different tenses (e.g. eight tenses in Bengali) posed difficulties in transcribing and interpreting in English. Notes were kept in Korean, partly to keep them confidential as I did not have a private space in the office, but also because that is my mother tongue and the language I think in. It meant that every discussion involved several language steps.

My Asian background seemed to work in a positive way. Participants provided an explanation for national traditions such as money lending or family ties, assuming that my country had similar traditions. Being a non-Westerner also helped me explore the perception of the HRBA, as some critical viewpoints were around its Western-centrism and misuse as a colonial tool. A participant told me after the interview that he would have felt uncomfortable in providing his critical view on the North if I were from the North.

During my stay, much thought was given to the impact of the gender of the researcher. In field studies, being a female researcher has been regarded as an advantage (Mikkelsen, 2005). As a woman, I could easily build an intimate relationship with female workers. Their hardships and struggles in their private lives surprised me, as they looked so confident and competent in challenging injustice in their public lives. Frequent socialising with female workers made me look into the meanings of a HRBA not only as it related to their work, but also as it related to their personal lives. My gender did not impede carrying out the research. However, I realised that I was socially vulnerable. For example, as a female without any male guardian, I was not able to rent a house and some hostesses of Bengali families were reluctant to have a foreign female guest in their houses. Outside the case study setting, I had to be careful about security and unwanted attention.

There was no concern regarding conventional power issues between a researcher and participants. Being a young female student placed me at a lower rank in the social hierarchy in terms of age, gender and social class. This meant participants felt relaxed during the interview.

This reflective section is believed to be important for examining any possible influence on
the process of conducting this research and analysing data. Some reflections are further
developed in the findings chapters.

4.10. Conclusion

This chapter outlined the appropriateness of the case study and data collection methods adopted in this research. The detailed process of collecting, managing and analysing data presented the complexity of a qualitative case study. The complexity also posed ethical issues and threats to trustworthiness, which I tried to address as described.

It should be emphasised that this research was a journey that required constant reflectivity to enable me to deal with the complexity of the research processes. I had to continuously negotiate the space between insider and outsider. Being an insider committed to development work, particularly to a HRBA, challenged me to protect the neutrality of the research. Further reading helped me develop a balanced but critical view of a HRBA and NGO work, which allowed me to explore both positive and negative aspects throughout the field work. On the other hand, being an outsider with a different nationality and cultural background presented language issues. Working in three languages – English, Bengali and Korean – and making sense of cultural specific practices required caution.

This chapter has provided explanations for the decisions made for data collection, data management and analysis. The following three chapters present the findings of the research resulting from these decisions.
Chapter 5  Contextualisation of a HRBA in ActionAid Bangladesh

Every county has a different context. And the context should be taken into account. We don’t want to implement something that is contextual to the North, not contextual to the South. (Participant 8, AAB staff)

5.1. Introduction

The findings chapters including this one explore how AAB has developed its human rights-based approach (HRBA) to suit its own contexts and how AAB staff have influenced that development. This contributes to answering the first research question and its associated sub-questions (see Section 1.3). AAB’s understanding and practicing of the HRBA is discussed in the succeeding chapters. This chapter defines the relevant key concepts including context, contextualisation and agency, and looks at how they are perceived by AAB and its staff.

This extensive chapter consists of three sections. The first section explores the influential contexts in shaping AAB’s HRBA. This offers background information on the case of this study and justifies the necessity of considering contexts. AAB’s views on the contextualisation are discussed in the second section. The last section outlines how NGO workers’ agency can be understood in relation to contextualisation of a HRBA.

5.2. Influential contexts in shaping the HRBA

This section describes the contexts in which AAB operates. It provides foundational knowledge to address the second sub-question associated with the first research question, ‘To what extent can the characteristics of the HRBA be explained by its organisational and national context?’. As articulated in Section 3.3, the relevant AAB contexts are the organisational context of ActionAid International (AAI) and the national context of Bangladesh.
Figure 5.1 depicts, AAI and Bangladesh as contexts which interact with AAB. Since AAB is part of the international federation of AAI, AAI’s philosophy, structure and culture are suggested as influential in shaping the HRBA in AAB. With regard to the national context, the legal, political, and cultural contexts of Bangladesh and the NGO environment within Bangladesh appear to be significant for understanding AAB’s HRBA. The following sections detail these two contexts.

5.2.1. The organisational contexts of ActionAid International (AAI)

The organisational factors suggested by the findings as significant in shaping the HRBA are radical philosophy, federal structure and open culture. These are inter-connected, sharing features which are related to a HRBA. AAI’s philosophical tradition allowed it to adopt a HRBA relatively early with enthusiasm. In turn, a HRBA transformed AAI’s structure and culture in line with human rights principles. This section suggests AAI’s radical ideals are embedded values; and AAI’s structure and culture are an enabling environment for AAB to build its own HRBA in a way that is appropriate to the context in which it operates.

Radical philosophy

In the literature, AAI is described as ‘bold’ in tackling power imbalance (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004, p.42) and characterised by its ‘local-up advocacy’ (Plipat, 2005, p. 290). ‘Radical’ is one of the words frequently used to describe AAI in documents and in interviews. AAI identifies itself as a ‘radical, highly critical and risk taking’ organisation (AAI,
Being radical’ has been encouraged throughout the organisation’s life (AAI, 1999; 2005; 2011; 2012). One meaning of the term ‘radical’ is ‘getting to the roots of something to discover the essence’ (Brookfield & Holst, 2010 cited in Westoby & Shevellar, 2012). AAI strives to address the ‘root cause’ of poverty and injustice, which are closely related to power issues (AAI, 2012b, p.201). AAI’s radical philosophy which calls for challenging the power relations is embodied in three: its opposition to neoliberalism; its political stance; and its action-centred work.

AAI suggests neoliberalism as a main structural reason for inequality and injustice:

We hold a deep critique of the dominant global economic framework that favours a minimal role of the state, cuts back public spending and supports continued distortions of the market in favour of richer countries and powerful corporations. We see this system as a form of fundamentalism and we have seen how it contributes to the violation of rights. (AAI, 2012b, p.25)

AAI’s critique of neoliberalism results from its analysis of poverty. Its attention to the underlying causes of inequality leads AAI to reject market-led development, which neoliberalism proffers as a solution to poverty. Another example of AAI’s disapproval of neoliberalism is its decision not to take any funds from donors who adversely impact on the poor by spreading neoliberalism:

ActionAid will not accept donations from donors implementing policies or carrying out activities that are persistently harmful to poor and marginalized people…Agreeing not to accept money directly from the World Bank is an important political statement; we wish to align ourselves against injustice and to challenge power holders to hold themselves to account for their actions. (AAI, 2005, p.4)

AAI’s refusal of donations from the World Bank is a very strong stand, which is quite rare among development NGOs that are heavily dependent on funds from donor agencies. This dependency leads NGOs to play a role in delivering the message of neoliberalism (Wallace 2009) and to undermine the state’s role as provider of social services (Gready & Ensor, 2005; Kamat, 2004). Such a tendency is noted by a participant:
Strengthening formal education is our stance. But privatisation and non-formalisation are what other NGOs are trying to do. (Participation 2, AAB staff)

The above statement suggests that a great number of NGOs are replacing the government’s role of education provider in Bangladesh, as also observed in other studies (Gready & Ensor, 2005; Lewis, 2004). However, AAB sees its role as holding the state accountable and responsive to people, not in replacing the state. AAB’s view on the roles of NGOs is consistent with the notion of a HRBA, which aims to empower the state to be accountable as a main duty bearer (Boesen & Martin, 2007). Likewise, AAI’s critical viewpoint on neoliberalism is understood as closely related to the HRBA as suggested below:

You need to have it (the essence of a HRBA) in your mind, in your thinking, in your philosophy. For example, we talk against neoliberal economics. There are people who are working in organisations which are very subordinate to neoliberal economics. Then, it (a HRBA) will not work. (Participant 6, AAB staff)

Such a shared understanding of the incompatibility between neoliberalism and a HRBA leads AAI to challenge the power relations in which the neoliberal discourse is produced and sustained. AAI argues that challenging the powerful is inevitably political, distinguishing ‘little p’ for everyday politics from ‘capital P’ for partisan politics:

ActionAid’s HRBA is political. It is political with a small “p”, not party-political. Driven by our values and our mission we are taken to the heart of complex political issues to do with the exercise of power. In this we are not a neutral actor. (AAI, 2012b, p.25)

Such an explicit expression which positions AAI as a political actor can be seen as distinct from other development NGOs, most of which are afraid of being labelled as political or partisan. Their reluctance to take a political position is explained by their origin in charity or religious organisations (Lewis, 1999) and by their relationship with the state as public service contractor (Korten, 1990). Another reason why development NGOs claim political neutrality is perhaps a confusion between neutrality and impartiality. Impartiality is one of the core humanitarian principles. It means the prevention of discrimination on the basis of nationality, race, religion or political point of view (Sphere Project, 2004). Based on the
difference between neutrality and impartiality, AAI claims to remain impartial; however, it does not describe itself as neutral.

AAI’s political standpoint, stated above, is confirmed by its emphasis on actions to support social movements. With regard to its action-oriented practices, AAI has a unique process entitled ‘Reflection-Action’, drawing on the REFLECT approach (AAI, 2012b). In the 1990s, AAI developed an approach for eradicating illiteracy, called REFLECT as an abbreviation for ‘Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Techniques’. As the name denotes, this programme builds on the work of Paulo Freire, the renowned Brazilian educator, employing participatory methods:

REFLECT is a new approach to adult literacy which fuses the theory of Paulo Freire and the practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal, which is a philosophy and set of practical methods for consulting with non-literate communities about local development. (AAI, 1996, p.9)

This programme was established later as a participatory approach for community empowerment and social change beyond its original aim of adult literacy. As Freire’s theory characterises education as liberating people from oppression (AAI, 2012b), the reference to Freire can imply that AAI is devoted to action for people’s mobilisation. Furthermore, AAI’s recent renaming of the REFLECT as ‘Reflection-Action’ gives an additional focus on action:

REFLECT is conscientisation, which is a combination of awareness and action. So now we call it Reflection and Action. It is not only about awareness. It is also about action after becoming aware…Reflection and Action is a political process. It is about power relations and the imbalance of power in our society. (Participant 18, AAB staff)

AAI’s tradition of valuing social change is consistent with a HRBA, and its adoption of a HRBA encourages further involvement in social movements. The following extract demonstrates where AAI locates itself:

AAI is part of something larger than itself as an organisation. Its roots are as a development organisation that now advances human rights and connects to social movement. Its identity should now embrace its extended environment. (p12)…It (AAI) moves across the boundaries of
being a development organisation, with a rights-based emphasis, gaining additional energy from the efforts of social movements to build power where so far it has been stifled. (AAI, 2004, p.32)

AAI’s expanded identity with the introduction of a HRBA can cause some confusion. Mainstreaming human rights in all areas of work makes some staff members wonder if AAI is a development NGO or not (Gready, 2013). Likewise, two interview participants of AAB revealed confusion over AAI’s organisational identity beyond its stance as a development NGO. One participant referred to AAB as a human rights NGO:

Government, some departments, think AA is a social organisation that is always beside the people and talks about issues which oppose the government. That is the image. AA is somewhat rigid. Rigid in a sense for people’s rights…In that sense, we can see AA as a human rights organisation. (Participant 2, AAB staff)

The above statement demonstrates a view that a HRBA transforms AAB into a human-rights organisation. The following participant questions if development NGOs can practice a HRBA:

If you want to mobilise people to claim their rights, you should form a political party or agency which wants to fight against the government. This is not a role of NGOs. This is number one that NGOs cannot do this. Number two is that, even when you want to do this as an NGO, the government won’t let you do it…If your work disturbs or challenges the government, they will shut your organisation and withdraw your license. Our scope as an NGO is very limited. (Participant 4, AAB staff)

For this participant, mobilisation and resistance is regarded as appropriate for political parties, not for development NGOs which are bound by their nature and government regulation. However, in its latest handbook, AAI makes its identity clear as a development NGO in the following way:

ActionAid may pave the way for and support the formation of a social movement in every way possible (funding, strategising, capacity development, unifying rights groups across places etc.) but should not be a founder of a social movement. (AAI, 2012b, p.59)
This clarifies that AAI plays a role in social movements as an enabler and catalyst, not as an initiator. In other words, even when a HRBA makes AAI radical and political, the boundary is drawn between development NGOs and civil society. This distinction is consistent with the literature. Although NGOs are generally regarded as a part of civil society (Bebbington et al., 2008; Jordan & Tuijl, 2006), development NGOs are considered less political and more service oriented (Glasius et al., 2004) – unlike civil society which plays a role in collective actions as a counter-power, as suggested by Gramsci and Habermas (Kontinen, 2007). In the case of AAI, its identity was expanded with an additional focus on human rights. However, it remains a development NGO.

In short, AAI’s radical philosophy is associated with its strong objection to neoliberalism, its rejection of apolitical approaches to development, and a proactive commitment to social change by strengthening social movements. Interviews suggest that this vision of AAI is widely shared in AAB. The influence of AAI’s radical ideology on AAB workers and AAB’s HRBA is discussed in Section 5.4 and Chapter 7.

**Federal Structure**

Turning to the organisational environment which enables AAB to shape the HRBA in its own way, this section discusses the federal structure of AAI. AAI as a federation provides its affiliates with both guiding principles and autonomy. Based on the classification of international NGOs by Lindenberg and Bryant (2001), a federation model is characterised by common systems with moderately centralised headquarters. A federation is situated between loosely coordinated ‘confederations’ such as Oxfam and Save the Children and strongly centralised ‘unitary corporate’ like World Vision. In accordance with this explanation, AAI’s headquarters produce guidelines and policies for coherent practices under the same brand name. But within those guidelines its affiliates, including AAB, enjoy a certain degree of autonomy in making decisions.

Further, AAI describes itself as a ‘unique democratic federation’. A federation model itself is not unique and is found in many NGOs. However, AAI claims its uniqueness lies in the way power is shared with its member countries:

*ActionAid International is a unique democratic federation collectively governed by all its members, supported by an International Secretariat in Johannesburg… As part of our own*
transformation we moved our International Secretariat to South Africa – shifting more power to low-income countries and deepening our relevance. (AAI, 2011b, p.8)

Having its headquarters in the South may demonstrate AAI’s will to move governance power to developing countries. However, this location does not necessarily mean that each affiliate has an equal voice. The following participant raised an issue about AAI’s neglect of Asia:

Even inside the organisation and even in development organisations, there are still power politics…We were having a discussion that the HRBA resource book is actually written from the Northern point of view. Africa has got more attention in this resource book. Asia did not get that much attention…The concentration of funding and charity is now more focused in Africa. Why Africa? Personally I think, African countries are very resourceful…So, maybe Western countries want to fund those countries from where they can get resources. (Participant 1, AAB staff)

This participant holds that AAI’s lack of attention to non-African regions is driven by political interests, particularly of the North. The division into two power groups, as suggested by the expression ‘Northern’ and ‘Western’ countries, implies a power imbalance within AAI. Such a perception is in contrast to AAI’s claim that its federal structure is unique because of its power sharing.

In order to build an egalitarian federal structure AAI suggests a ‘dual identity’, being international and national at the same time, as shown in the following passage:

ActionAid is a global federation and every member of governance bodies, management and staff should feel a sense of dual identity: national and international (p42)….This process is not only about registering organisations nationally. It is a political project: which moves us from our old identity as a British, ‘foreign’ transnational NGO (rooted in the North-South transfer of aid) to being a democratic global federation that is consistent with our mission and values (AAI, 2012b, p.57)

To AAI affiliates, having dual identities means having the status of an independent national entity in addition to their membership of the international federation. Such a change is intended to give each affiliate greater independence and voice in AAI and also greater responsibility for self-financing (AAB, 2012f). AAB registered with the Bangladesh
Government as a national NGO in 2012. Interview participants understand this change can advance their rights-related work by overcoming limitations of international NGOs, which are prohibited from intervening in sensitive internal issues:

An international NGO does not have much right to talk about all the national issues, all the sensitive issues related to natural resources…If the government sees that it is not right for international organisations, the government can cancel the registration of the organisation. But if it has a national identity, the government can't do it. (Participant 2, AAB staff)

This suggests that AAI’s recent move to dual identities increases not only affiliates’ autonomy but also their commitment to national rights issues. To summarise, AAI’s federal structure, composed of member countries with dual identities, gives AAB discretionary power and room for involvement in national issues. This suggests that AAI’s organisational structure enables AAB to take national contexts into consideration in shaping its HRBA.

A culture open to innovative ideas
In addition to the federation model, shaping a HRBA is credited to AAI’s organisational culture which is suggested as being open to innovative ideas and experimental learning. The following extract sums up AAI’s culture:

ActionAid has a long history and culture of being self-critical and so we commit to continually testing our theory of change (AAI, 2012b, p.19)

AAI puts an emphasis on experimental learning to improve its practice through critical reflection, as discerned in the expression ‘testing’. Interviews also confirm AAI’s openness to new ideas as proclaimed in its documents. AAB’s encouragement to learn from trial and error is also backed up by a partner NGO staff member who worked for AAB previously. This person reported that:

I myself have worked for AA. Now I am still working with AA as a partner. As a partner organisation, I think the best thing of AA is, if even I say as a former staff, [that] AA gives you space to make mistakes and learn from them. Most organisations do not allow mistakes. (Participant 27, Partner NGO Staff)
The culture of trial-and-error learning is highly regarded by this participant. As suggested above, development NGOs do not generally tolerate failures which may adversely affect many people’s lives and which means a waste of entrusted money. This can impede innovations within NGOs as opposed to the widely-held belief that NGOs are flexible to a change (Ditcher, 1999). The following interview suggests the risks and rewards accompanying new trials:

*Obviously, it (creativity) is very important to me…If you work in a creative organisation, you are given some space to try something new. Even unintentionally it can create disasters. But still you can go and try something…Risk is definitely required to be taken if you really want…If it works, there is a very high chance to incorporate it in country programmes and to profile it in the entire federation. This is a big opportunity that ActionAid is providing.* (Participant 8, AAB staff)

What is suggested here is that the pro-innovation culture is appreciated by staff members as creating opportunities. This open environment, which allows trials of new ideas, means a lot to the participant quoted above, a junior staff member who recently joined AAB, particularly given the hierarchical culture in Bangladesh (Ahmad, 2007; Lewis, 2004),

Such opportunities to propose ideas are not limited to staff. When tracing the process of developing internal guidelines or strategies, the invitation for feedback extends to wider stakeholders including partner NGOs, civil society, government officials, outside consultants and, more importantly, people living in poverty (AAI, 2011c; AAB, 1998, 2005, 2012). This consultative process is strongly recommended by AAI for further improvement as a learning organisation and for legitimacy as a people-centred organisation (AAI, 2004).

In addition, AAI calls for an openness to innovative and critical ideas beyond its programmes. The AAI’s document, ‘Monitoring Framework’, requests staff members to keep reflecting on their attitude as well as on programme implementation:

*All units should continuously ask ourselves: Are we dynamic, bold, responsive and innovative? How are we learning and sharing our knowledge and change? How are we trying out and experimenting new ideas, approach and methods to generate alternatives? (AAI, 2006, p.4)*

As previously discussed, AAI’s open culture appears to nourish innovative ideas and
reflective practices. This promotes input from staff regardless of their position. How this open culture enables AAB to generate, test and propose context-informed ideas is discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

**Summary**

AAI’s radical philosophy, its federal structure and open culture were identified as critical for the examination of AAB’s HRBA. AAI’s understanding of poverty and injustice provides AAB the basis for constructing its HRBA. The organisational structure and culture are supportive of shaping the HRBA in a way appropriate to the Bangladesh context: AAI’s federal model grants AAB autonomy, which is furthered by the recent drive to dual identities; AAI’s open culture encourages AAB’s learning from reflection and experimentation, so that AAB can try to respond to context-specific demands with innovative ideas. In other words, AAI’s organisational contexts enable AAB to engage with the national contexts. The national context of Bangladesh is discussed in the next section to identify factors that may be important for the contextualisation of a HRBA in this case study.

5.2.2. National contexts of Bangladesh

National contexts affect the practical application of a HRBA. As Gready (2013) notes, some AAI affiliates better fit a HRBA. AAI suggests that consideration of the national context is essential. One document states:

*The advancing of RBA should be a reminder that each country has to be understood in its own context. Political and cultural institutions differ. Context is very specific. (AAI, 2004, p.18)*

The national contexts which are identified as influential in the formation of contextualised HRBA are: legal, political and cultural contexts and the NGO environment in Bangladesh. Firstly, legal and political contexts decide which human rights can be validated in Bangladesh. Secondly, cultural contexts, such as religion and patriarchy, are suggested as providing challenges in the implementation of the HRBA. Thirdly, with regards to NGO context, the prevalence of microfinance NGOs influences local people's perception of the HRBA and AAB’s partnership with local NGOs. Detailed discussion about the influence of these contexts on AAB’s HRBA is provided in Chapters Six and Seven. This chapter focuses on providing the background to the context of Bangladesh.
**Legal and political context**

One of the distinct features of a HRBA is the use of international and national laws. This invites attention to the legal and political aspects of human rights (Forst, 2012). The following AAI document also suggests that recognition of certain human rights is politically decided and legally established:

*A right is first developed and disputed in a society, and depending on the power relations, a state can choose to recognise a right and create its respective legal entitlements, or can choose not to recognise it. (AAI, 2008, pp.2-3)*

Generally, the legal and political context of Bangladesh is perceived by research participants as imposing restraints on the realisation of human rights. Bangladesh ratified major UN conventions which embody internationally recognised human rights. However, reservations about the conventions and an unsatisfactory enactment of national laws appear as barriers. Four participants suggest that the pressure from religious groups is the reason for the reluctance of the Bangladesh government to legislate and enforce the national laws. These limitations of Bangladesh laws are detailed in Chapter Six.

In addition to legislation issues, the data suggests that the judicial system of Bangladesh hinders the protection of human rights. The judicial process was described by interview participants as costly and lengthy. This means that the legal system is not very accessible by the marginalised:

*Basically for now if you want to file a law suit, you need to pay the court fee of 40,000TK [Taka, the currency of Bangladesh]. How many disabled people can afford that? (Participant 27, Partner NGO staff)*

*Our legal system is not for poor women. It is very lengthy....When the case is filed to the police station, it takes much time to investigate, and also [the case] moves to the court, so again its takes time. Even in 5 years, she (the victim of sexual violence) cannot get him (the perpetrator) to justice. This is our challenge. (Participant 5, AAB staff)*

Another challenge in relation to the legal context is that people are not aware of rights:
Bangladesh was a colony of the British. Laws and Acts in Bangladesh are based on British system. At that time, British regime never disclosed official matters. There was Official Secrets Act…Recently, Right to Information Act was enacted in 2010. Now the situation is changing because of this Act. But still it is common for government institutions not to disclose all information to the public. That is why I think it is a challenge to ensure people’s rights, as the institutions restrict information. (Participant 12, Partner NGO staff)

This participant suggests the people’s lack of access to information about available rights is in part a legal legacy from a colonial period. As already discussed, the current legal system and lack of political will to improve the system can limit AAB’s work in the framework of a HRBA. However, the above statement also suggests that enactment of new laws can improve the situation. This explains why AAB strives for legislation which contributes to rights realisation.

In short, the legal and political contexts are regarded by participants as critical for the HRBA. International and national laws provide the grounds for rights claims and political will determines law enactment and enforcement. How the legal and political contexts of Bangladesh affect AAB’s HRBA is examined in the following chapter while discussing the different implications of the two terms, a RBA and a HRBA.

Cultural context

Turning to the cultural context of Bangladesh, it should first be noted that culture is neither static nor unique. Some participants note that their culture has changed over time, and that their ‘local culture’ is not necessarily different from all other cultures. Despite the innate complexity of culture, its importance as the criteria for judging an alternative idea, a HRBA in this study, should be taken seriously (Eade, 2002). In relation to recognition of human rights, negative opinions are prevalent. For instance, patriarchal and religious beliefs are suggested as a hindrance to human rights in Bangladesh. The following participant points out that equality for women is denied because of patriarchy:

The biggest challenge is...actually, this is a patriarchal society. Still men cannot accept equal rights of women. If I want to implement the HRBA, we have to have equal dignity and equal respect. The challenge is that it is really tough to talk about women’s rights. (Participant 5, AAB)
This view is consistent with AAB’s strategy paper (AAB, 2005) which presents the universality of human rights as being challenged in Bangladesh by the socio-cultural values. The patriarchal value is supported by Islamic laws:

*In our Muslim law, evidence of legal and lawful marriage should have witness. In the law which was enacted in 1961, it was written that there should be two witnesses in Muslim marriage. But if it is female, there should be 4 female witnesses. It means that 1 male is equal to 2 females.*

(Participant 17, AAB staff)

This example suggests that women are not acknowledged as equal human beings. When equal dignity is denied, equal rights cannot be expected. Also, religious beliefs can lead to a fatalistic view, discouraging claim making:

*They (people) think, ‘this is happening because God is angry with me’…People think, ‘Okay, maybe I’ve done something bad in my past life and I am suffering for that.’* (Participant 6, AAB staff)

*In our Muslim society, disability is regarded as a result of parents’ bad behaviour. People think that is why God punishes them by giving such a child with a disability…This is a cultural barrier in our society.* (Participant 25, Partner NGO staff)

The above two passages show that many Bangladeshis regard everything undesirable as God’s will or even a punishment. Such a view prevents people from thinking of poverty or discrimination against disabilities as human rights violations and from making rights claims.

In contrast to the perception that religion can be a hindrance to conceiving the concept of human rights in Bangladesh, one participant noted a commonality between human rights and religious teaching:

*No religion tells you to put acid on someone’s face. No religion tells you to exploit your neighbour or take away their lives…CEDAW (Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discrimination Against Woman) is telling equal rights for women. Our religion also says that equal rights should be given to people, but the problem is the extreme interpretation of the...*
This participant argues that Islam establishes women's rights in a similar way that a human rights regime does. However, literature acknowledges that Islam has no explicit word for human rights (Donnelly, 2013). Instead, Donnelly suggests that human dignity, the core concept of human rights, is valid as a religious value (1984). But at the same time he points out that dignity is only earned by doing one's duty in line with Islamic beliefs, not from being a human (2013). Bauer and Bell (1999) also argue that human dignity cannot be equated with human rights. However, participant 8 insists that a HRBA and his religion share key values; and that the only problem lies in the interpretation by some religious leaders, not in the religion itself, as shown in the following quote:

*There are some anti-religious concepts in the RBA. Not anti-religious concepts; it is the concept of secularism, which is not very Southern. Human rights are meant to be secular. So there is a contradiction. One is Northern and one is Southern. Our southern society is very much based on culture and religion. We cannot come out of it. They cannot tell us to come out of culture and religion, and to start working on the concept of secularism only. The contradiction creates the problem.* (Participant 8, AAB staff)

Furthermore, this participant raised a critical question about the inattention to religion in a HRBA. As expressed in the two binaries of 'secular and religious' and 'the North and the South', this participant perceives that the religion-centred life style of the South is neglected in the North-led HRBA. This accords with Chabal's observation (2012) that the North has promoted secularism as modern and desirable. Some participants, including the above participant, urge the incorporation of religious aspects into human rights schemes. That religious teaching, particularly in Islam, is well reconciled with human rights is disputed by human rights scholars (Freeman, 2004) and by many within AAB. Some emphasise common values between human rights and their religion, while others focus on addressing any negative influences of religion on human rights. The importance of considering religion for HRBA practices is agreed by research participants; however, a difference is noted in positions regarding religion and human rights. The lack of agreement of what constitutes the local context may cause tensions around religious issues.

The cultural context of Bangladesh can be broader than patriarchy and religion. However,
these two were discussed by participants as most relevant to implementing a HRBA. This section placed a focus on the significance of these contexts in building the concept of human rights in Bangladesh. The following section discusses the influence of the NGO context, wrapping up the Bangladesh contexts.

**NGO context**

It is noted that NGO expansion and competition in Bangladesh affects both the way a HRBA is perceived by local people and the way it is practiced by AAB. One interview participant called Bangladesh ‘a heaven of NGOs’. This reflects Bangladesh’s reputation for having great number of NGOs (Ahmad, 2007; Lewis, 2004). Such an environment heightens competition among NGOs. Such competition, along with reported antipathy towards foreign NGOs (Tvedt, 1998) and the dominance of microfinance NGOs (Banerjee, 2005), suggests an unfavorable environment for AAB.

Firstly, in relation to community antipathy, the AAB analysis suggests that 9/11 provoked opposition to the West and that non-Islamic NGOs were exposed to threats (AAB, 2005). It is possible that AAB, as an international and secular NGO, may have experienced the antipathy of communities. The following participant reported religion-related opposition faced by AAB, although not many participants suggested it:

(Name of an international NGO) is a Christian based NGO and it is huge. When we went to communities, some did not welcome us as they thought that we would also try to convert their religion like the NGO did. (Participant 24, AAB staff)

This implies that local people perceive foreign NGOs as invaders based on their negative experience with NGOs, faith-based NGOs in particular. In this way, AAB and its work are influenced by people’s perception of other NGOs.

Secondly, the dominance of microfinance in Bangladesh-born NGOs is identified as significant for understanding AAB’s HRBA. AAB faces difficulties when it introduces a HRBA to local people and it develops partnership with local organisations. Participants raised microfinance frequently and strongly while discussing their understanding and practice of the HRBA. Details about influences of microfinance on AAB’s HRBA are provided in Chapter Seven.
Summary

To sum up this section, it is imperative to examine the legal, political and cultural contexts of Bangladesh to understand how AAB has shaped its HRBA. These interrelated contexts create challenges for AAB. The legal system needs improvement, but there is no political will for improvement because of the pressure from religious groups. People’s rights awareness is generally poor due to their religious world view and cultural practices. Challenges are also posed by the NGO contexts of Bangladesh. People’s experience with foreign NGOs and microfinance NGOs influence the way AAB and its work are perceived. Chapters Six and Seven examine the influences of these legal, political, cultural and NGO-related contexts of Bangladesh on AAB’s HRBA.

5.3. Why contextualisation?

The previous section discussed organisational and national contexts to be considered in understanding AAB’s HRBA. In this research, AAB’s own interpretation and implementation of a HRBA is suggested as the result of ‘contextualisation’. This section explores how contextualisation is perceived and takes place in AAI and AAB.

5.3.1. The necessity of contextualisation

The concept of ‘contextualisation’ was generated while building the conceptual framework for this thesis. The data also supports the necessity of contextualisation as a way of making sense of this concept. Documents from both AAI and AAB emphasise the adaptation of a HRBA to different contexts (AAB, 2012f; AAI, 2004, 2012b). In particular, the most recent AAI document, a HRBA resource book (2012b), uses the same term ‘contextualisation’ in suggesting context-appropriate practices. One interview participant also used the verb form ‘contextualise’:

*We are now saying ‘glocal’, which means global to local and local to global. So we need to understand prevailing discourses at global level. Then we need to try to explore what particular discourse will suit for our situation. If it is relevant, I should try to contextualise it. (Participant 6, AAB staff)*

The word ‘glocal’ is used to emphasise mutual influences between the global discourse
and the local situation, in line with Robertson (1994) who pays attention to the simultaneous process of globalisation and localisation. Likewise, the following interviewee highlights the importance of considering contexts in implementing a HRBA:

*It (a HRBA) is like a vehicle. Some [vehicles] are right-hand side and others are left-hand side, but the basic principles [of driving] are general for everyone. It [a HRBA, like driving] is how you put the basic principles into context.* (Participant 8, AAB staff)

The above statement suggests a HRBA as a set of general principles, which require different applications to each context. AAI’s understanding of contextualisation is described in the following three excerpts from AAI guidelines and strategy papers:

*Individual parts of the organisation will have flexibility to prioritise actions within the guiding framework described below, based on available resources and the needs and aspirations of poor and excluded people in each area where we work.* (AAI, 2005, p.11)

*Our experience has shown that that while the broad approach outlined above is valid and can be implemented in all our work in almost all situations…Local flexibility, adaptation and translation of the human rights-based approach into specific agenda, methods, tools and techniques to suit the context are essential.* (AAI, 2008, p.9)

*It (This handbook) cannot exhaustively refer to all possible contexts where we are working and so will need creative adaptation and interpretation by you, informed by your context.* (AAI, 2012b, p.8)

All three extracts suggest a flexible application of guidelines. Interestingly, they show that flexibility within AAI has increased over time, alluding to the published dates, the first being 2005, then 2008 and the most recent being 2012: from prioritisation of programmes and employment of appropriate methods to the creation of context-informed practices.

AAI’s respect for contextual diversity is generally confirmed by the interview participants. Participants reported that AAI’s guidelines just set a direction and AAB decided which route to take. For example, one staff member explained:

*This (International Strategy Paper) is a guideline. It does not mention how we will do it. Country
programmes are designed within the context. So there is no conflict. We just take a broad guide and direction. Then we design our programmes on the basis of our context, our guidelines and our challenges. (Participant 5, AAB staff)

Furthermore, AAI’s guidelines are seen as jointly produced through a participatory process. Such a process grants legitimacy to decisions made at the international level. Again, one staff member stated that:

When we prepare our national strategies, we also see what are written and what are agreed in the international strategy. Because international strategy does not mean that it is prepared by international staff only. It also is in a participatory way. So we can participate and we can give inputs on the strategy. (Participant 2, AAB staff)

A consideration of contextual differences is consistently supported by both AAI and AAB and in both documents and interviews. This indicates that the necessity of contextualisation is widely acknowledged within both AAI and AAB.

5.3.2. Issues raised by contextualisation

Despite the agreed importance of contextualisation, two key issues emerged from the data: firstly, possible tensions between the particularity of the local context and the universal applicability of human rights principles; and secondly, balancing AAI’s central guidance and affiliates’ diverse implementations.

Regarding the first issue, how AAB deals with the tensions between contextual consideration and core principles of a HRBA is discussed in Chapters Six and Seven. This section only briefly considers AAI’s viewpoint on universalism and particularism. AAI generally accepts incorporating contextual consideration, but clarifies that specific contexts cannot justify inhibiting human rights. AAI’s internal policy document (2004) states that:

Paying attention to context does not mean a country gets a pass on achieving the “progressive realization” of human rights…Just as failure to attain a “progressive realization” of human rights is not acceptable, so letting cultural constraints go by without their being addressed is equally harmful to advancing RBA. Being intentional requires finding appropriate ways to discuss these hard matters and not just dismiss them by saying it’s in the culture. (AAI, 2004, pp.18-19)
What is clear within this policy statement is that cultural constraints cannot be an excuse for ignoring human rights. This is confirmed by the following participant, expanding the argument that a HRBA can be implemented in any context:

*In my opinion, in every country, RBA or HRBA could be implemented and used. In that case, we should be very cautious and careful. But we should not withdraw from the situation…It [a HRBA] should be different according to a context, but it can be implemented.* (Participant 17, AAB staff)

The second issue is balancing centralisation and member countries’ autonomy, which was described as a thorny issue faced by AAI (AAI, 2011c). While encouraging context-informed implementation of each affiliate, AAI also needs to keep its profile coherent across the affiliates. The following quotes from AAI’s HRBA handbook stress the necessity of compliance with guidelines for less fragmented practices and greater synergy:

*Where we choose to work on a particular objective or promise we ought to use these resources as a fundamental guideline – so that we can harmonise our work and take full advantage of the added value of working at local, national and international levels.* (AAI, 2012b, p.95)

*Bringing to life the political vision behind ActionAid’s internationalization project, all Members will be expected to participate actively in at least one of ActionAid’s multi-country campaigns.* (AAI, 2012b, p.85)

AAI calls for ‘harmonisation’ and ‘internationalisation’ of its work. This sometimes leads to a misfit with the contexts. Three interview participants gave examples of AAI policies in which the national contexts were not considered. Two participants mentioned the irrelevance of international campaigns, in which they were encouraged to take part:

*None of them (Global campaigns of AAI) are very important in the point of view of Bangladesh.* (Participant 1, AAB staff)

*[The global campaign for] Bio fuel. It is not contextual for Bangladesh at all.* (Participant 8, AAB staff)
As alluded to above, the irrelevance of some AAI global campaigns to the Bangladesh context makes AAB staff feel neglected by AAI. Another participant stated that cultural customs should be respected in implementing a standardised child sponsorship programme:

*In Asia, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, they don't want to take photographs of girl children when they grow up or when they are married...Maybe in such cases, funding affiliates should trust actual situation of country programmes. If they don't want to give photos, there should be some policies not to force them (Participant 24, AAB staff)*

Lack of cultural respect in the programme policy is suggested as reflecting a funding country’s distrust of the implementing countries. This may influence the partnership among affiliates within AAI in a negative way. As discussed earlier in Section 5.3.1, AAI accepts and encourages the diverse application of its guidelines to suit specific contexts. Yet, even when the diversity is nominally protected, it is difficult to maintain without organisational recognition and support:

*AA Bangladesh, Nepal, India and Cambodia, these 4-5 countries only have it (mandate for persons with disability) because of the national context they are working in. But it will be also lost in a few days, as AAI has no mandate. They (AAI) don't give any importance to this. They don't have anything about persons with disability. Then, the country programmes are difficult to continue only because of the country context. (Participant 19, AAB staff)*

As argued above, it is difficult for AAB to maintain its programmes which are not included in the priority issues of AAI. This illustrates that the freedom to design the programmes is nominally given to AAI’s affiliates, but is limited in practice when not fully supported by AAI. The issues of centralisation versus autonomy and coherence versus diversity can be expanded to the relations between AAB and its partner NGOs. AAI’s principle of working in partnership is supported by most interview participants on the basis of the cost effectiveness, sustainability of programmes and rapport with the community. With focus on the HRBA, partnership is regarded as a way of widening and extending the influence of the HRBA from the AAB side:

*ActionAid may not be there after 10 years. But local organisations will be there. Even when we*
withdraw, that particular organisation will work in HRBA spirit. So that is very important to work in partnership. (Participant 6, AAB staff)

For coherent work, partner NGOs are required to have a common understanding of and commitment to the HRBA:

They (partner NGO workers) got the training about HRBA. We are working in partnership. So they learn the same thing. Otherwise, we cannot work together. (Participant 5, AAB staff)

However, the following participant suggests a possible difference in understanding and commitment between AAB and partner NGOs:

Partners may not feel the same interests that community people should know the meaning of RBA…Other international NGOs have direct delivery. In a direct programme…they (other NGOs) are in the position to explain it (the meaning of RBA). So I found some difference here (in AAB)…Partners have many other priorities. (Participant 19, AAB staff)

For this participant, the HRBA may not be delivered well through partnership based on her experience in other NGOs which implement a HRBA directly. Partner NGOs are independent entities with their own vision, goals and priorities, which may be inconsistent with AAB’s HRBA. Aligning practices and tolerating differences makes partnership with local NGOs challenging. Chapter Seven discusses the challenges faced by AAB in practicing the HRBA in partnership with local NGOs.

5.3.3. Summary
This section notes that contextualisation is emphasised in ActionAid as every affiliate works in a different context. The importance of contextualisation is unquestioned. What matters is the degree of contextualisation. AAB is required to comply with AAI’s guidelines and to respond to context-specific demands at the same time. These two processes are not always congruent. Regardless of AAI’s obvious support for contextualisation, AAB experiences difficulty in practice. AAI’s lack of contextual consideration makes its campaigns irrelevant and AAB staff feel not supported.

Working in partnership with local NGOs provides AAB with understanding of the local
context, which is needed for contextualisation. At the same time, AAB face challenges in keeping its HRBA coherent while incorporating differences of partner NGOs.

Based on the necessity of contextualisation as discussed, the next section explores the roles of NGO workers in contextualising a HRBA.

5.4. The agency of NGO workers

The previous sections presented the contextual factors influential in shaping the HRBA of AAB. They also outlined how the contextualisation is perceived and challenged in AAI and AAB. This section suggests another important concept, that of ‘agency’, in order to further explain the process of contextualisation of the discourse of a HRBA.

Agency is conventionally defined as a ‘purposive human action or behaviour’ (Deacon, 2004, p.447). Based on this definition, this study defines agency as ‘NGO workers’ action which includes contextual consideration in a HRBA and shapes the HRBA to fit contexts’. Before discussing examples of these actions in the following two chapters, this section aims to provide a foundation to understanding the agency of NGO workers by examining ‘motivation’ and ‘capacities’ of doing and having options. The relevance of motivation and capacities to the ‘agency’ concept is outlined in Chapter two. Understanding the motivation and capacities of NGO workers in this section will lead to an analysis of their action to contextualise the HRBA in Chapters Six and Seven.

This section consists of two parts, each exploring motivation and capacities of NGO workers. In relation to motivation, the data suggests themes such as values, belief in a HRBA and self-interest. In relation to capacities, knowledge and skills about a HRBA, knowledge of the law, understanding the grassroots and financial resources are identified.

5.4.1. NGO workers' motivation for contextualising a HRBA

This section examines motivation in understanding why NGO workers take action to make a HRBA appropriate to the context. Themes of values, belief in a HRBA and self-interest are explored below in order.
Values
As stressed by Sen (1985, 1992, 2000), values cherished by NGO workers can drive them to exercise their agency. Although explicitly mentioned by only a few, it is clear that participants value human dignity and equality, activism, and national identity. All these values are complicated ideas. This section focuses on the meanings and the implications of these values from the point of view of participants.

Firstly, human dignity and equality emerged as significant values. Valuing human dignity and equality seems obvious for NGO workers given the nature of their humanitarian work. Strikingly, however, most participants reported changes in their thoughts on human dignity and equality by learning a HRBA, which is grounded in universal and inalienable human rights (AAI, 2008):

*I learned that all the people are equal and all have equal dignity and other rights. You know, in our county, we have domestic helpers. Usually they are treated like slaves. When I was working with this approach [HRBA], I started to change my attitudes and my behaviours toward other people. When I communicate with my domestic helpers, I try to treat them equally. (Participant 5, AAB staff)*

*For example, maybe my behaviour with my wife or the way I show respect for her decisions could be different if I worked in a corporate or another place. Yes, definitely, it (the HRBA) is a kind of enlightenment. It is not only learning. It enlightens to see life from a different perspective. (Participant 6, AAB staff)*

As described above, dignity for all is perceived as underpinning a HRBA and nearly all participants experienced changes in their attitudes toward less privileged people while working in the HRBA. Changes are exemplified in the relationship with domestic helpers in the case of female staff and with their wives in the case of male staff. Some participants reflected on their position in social structures, beyond the interpersonal relations:

*It (the HRBA) gives me and many other people different insights. I thought that people are poor because of the mentality. But now I think they are poor because I am a bit richer than them…Why am I rich? Because I have access, opportunities and power to get the resources…I thought okay, maybe I’ve enjoyed their services because of my position. (Participant 4, AAB staff)*
When I started working in AA within RBA, I realised that I exploited people indirectly throughout my life. Maybe by being a part of institution where other people are hired and their wage is not decent…The world I am living in is a very capitalist world and it is built on the concept of exploitation. But RBA is talking about putting people on the same platform and giving people the opportunity to stand on the same platform. (Participant 8, AAB staff)

Both participants suggest that human beings are not equally valued in a polarised society such as Bangladesh. In such a society, most NGO workers, particularly those who work for international organisations, are privileged in terms of education, wealth, and social status. Participants understand that their advantages should be understood as related to the disadvantages faced by others.

Despite the advantages that these NGO workers enjoy, female workers are as vulnerable as other women in a male-dominated society, particularly in their private lives. The importance of gender equality was raised strongly when female staff considered themselves, the organisation and the society. Most female participants described AAB as a ‘woman friendly’ organisation and showed high satisfaction with their working conditions. However, culturally defined gender roles often pose a challenge for female staff, particularly when the job involves frequent field visits (Sardenberg, 2012). A study of Bangladesh NGOs describes difficulties in recruiting female field workers because of the conservative culture hampering women’s social activities (Ahmad, 2007). AAB claims that it has tried to mainstream gender equality within the organisation as well as in field programmes (AAB, 2000, 2012). One of the examples is an affirmative action to recruit female staff for a balanced gender ratio, targeted as 30:70 (AAB, 2012c; Interview Participant 3). However, the following statement shows a clash between the female preference policy and the requirement for the job:

New recruitments are mainly for projects. It requires much field work. Females have babies, so it is very difficult for them. If it involves much field work, they don’t apply…My organisation is keen to recruit females and also emphasises field work. (Participant 18, AAB staff)

It is challenging for female staff to keep a balance between work and family, as suggested above. In AAB, the Feminist Leadership Forum (FLF) provides female staff with
opportunities to discuss profession-related issues based on solidarity (AAB, 2012c). Under the shared vision of feminism, many female workers get together to deal collectively with challenges they face within AAB. However, the following participant points out that the forum should be more than just gathering and sharing:

We have a very vibrant platform, the FLF. It is a platform to share our professional crisis or personal crisis in being a female. We enjoy sharing, but it does not have any power to challenge the management’s decision. (Participant 18, AAB staff)

As implied above, this group of female workers feel they lack decision making power within AAB. Further, the following participant presents their shared vulnerability with other women in the context of Bangladesh, despite their better position:

HRBA is not for me and HRBA is for them, right holders and grassroots people! When it comes to women’s rights issues, we are always saying that the issues are for right holders and grassroots people. My question then is, where do I belong? I could be in a better position in the society and in a community. I could be an ActionAider. But at the same time, as an individual, I also lack some rights as a female, a female in a developing country. (Participant 1, AAB staff)

The above statement highlights that the vulnerability of female workers blurs the boundaries between right holders and workers. For some female workers, the awareness of their disadvantages enhances their strong solidarity with the women they work for and further encourages their commitment to a HRBA in support of their own struggles as women. This will be further discussed in Chapter Eight.

As discussed so far, participants place a high value on dignity for all, regardless of class or gender. Chapter Six discusses how this is related to their efforts to achieve an expanded recognition of human rights in Bangladesh.

Another value articulated by participants is activism. Seven participants mentioned they value ‘action’, ‘grassroots movements’ and ‘advocating rights issues’. Development practitioners tend to be interested in either a reformative or revolutionary changes (Roper & Pettit, 2002). In this study, participants’ interest in revolution was articulated through ‘activism’, particularly people-led movements to achieve social or political change. The
following participant is representative in presenting himself as an 'activist':

As a professional, I had some training and later I started to study development studies. But the thing is that, from the core of my heart, I am an activist. That is number one...The RBA person should be a political person in the mindset. And [the person] should have passion for the poor as an activist. (Participant 4, AAB staff)

This participant perceives that his value base is congruent with the call to action by a HRBA. The association between a HRBA and activism acted as a driver for some staff to join AAB:

Before I joined here, the image of ActionAid is...Its way of working, its approach, its vibrant action, [and its] position for people and for some issues were amazing...In a true sense, among all international organisations, even as an outsider, I felt that it is such an international organisation that their work is clearly different. (Participant 2, AAB staff)

This characteristic of AAB, as being radical and action-oriented, is related to the radical philosophy of AAI as discussed earlier in Section 5.2.1. Like-minded people become ActionAiders and their valuing of action is strengthened by the organisational orientation. However, in Chapter Seven, the value of activism is seen as being challenged by the national context.

National identity, the third value-related theme, is apparent in the responses of at least five participants. National identity is a sense of belonging and attachment to the nation (Andersen, 2001). It is socially constructed by cultural legacy and language, unlike 'citizenship' which indicates a territorial and legal membership of a particular country based on the ‘social contract’ as theorised by Rousseau (Habermas, 1992: pp.4-5). Regarding national identity, Yu and Kwan (2008) observe the importance of 'significant others' whose presence makes people realise what constitutes their national identities (2008, pp.34-35). In that sense, the North appears to be the significant other to some participants:

So when we think of ActionAid, we see AA as an organisation which is also critical of the North, northern countries and northern governments who are dictating to southern countries. Not only
me. All people see that. We are critical about everything from outside in the name of development, democracy, and technology, whatever. (Participant 4, AAB staff)

The expression ‘the North’ was used to suggest differences from Bangladesh in many interviews and was often charged with critical tones. As noted above, the power imbalance between the North and the South is behind this critical voice. The above participant suggests that the North exerts power in a subtle way through development projects and technology transfer. As outlined in Chapter 2, such interventions are based on the assumption that the North is modern and advanced. Opposing this assumption, participants emphasise respect for local and indigenous knowledge developed in Bangladesh. Here are some examples of local knowledge discussed by those who value national identity:

[What people said about climate change are] very simple things. Like, “I do not have access to safe water for 4 months because of the flood. I do not have access to sanitation during cyclone or in water scarce areas.”…Climate change adaptation, according to the literature, is not about these basic development issues. Then we realised that, we cannot work on adaptation if we don’t work on development issues. (Participant 6, AAB staff)

Farmers know what will be highly produced before cultivation. And in the morning, they can say that it will rain in the evening…They don’t miss anything. Such indigenous knowledge, I think, we can learn that. (Participant 18, AAB staff)

These statements show the usefulness of indigenous knowledge for developing strategies for climate change adaptation and sustainable livelihoods. There is agreement that indigenous knowledge can inform NGO workers of the essence of the development issues, which books written by Northern professionals cannot do.

Those who value national identity, characterised by a critical view of the North and a high regard for indigenous knowledge, show their consideration of national contexts when interpreting and practicing a HRBA.

This section has explored the values held by NGO workers. The identified values are human dignity, activism and national identity. At times the same participants are quoted as
holding more than one of these values. For example, some speak in support of gender equality or national identity with belief in activism. This is consistent with the study conducted by Lewis (2004), noting that activism of Bangladesh NGOs is derived from two different sources: the international concept of civil rights and the local tradition of independence struggle. Human dignity and gender equality is more related to international concepts and national identity is rooted in local tradition.

Another interesting point is that their pursuit of values can be limited as they work for an international NGO. The following participants suggest tensions between the value of activism and the nature of an international NGO:

*I will not compromise it [what I believe in and am passionate about]. There could be some policies and some strategies and that global politicians and global business persons are playing. ActionAid as a global organisation, can get trapped in that policy or that strategy decided by global politicians.* (Participant 1, AAB staff)

*These NGOs are coming from highly industrialised countries, like the USA, so that local movements should be obliged to get income and support. And the revolution from the poor class won’t happen.* (Participant 4, AAB staff)

These participants note that international NGOs are greatly influenced by global politics, which does not want fundamental changes. Despite this acknowledgement, the same participant justifies the irony of working for an international organisation as a nationalist:

*Obviously from the point of view of a nationalist, working in the local NGO to change global North is good. Obviously it is always good and will get people’s support. But on the other hand, [working for] an international organisation like ActionAid, it will give you mobility and access to such agencies that you cannot get access to if you work in local organisations.* (Participant 4, AAB staff)

This participant perceives that working for an international organisation provides a better chance of realising their values. This section has shown the importance of understanding the values held by NGO workers, as they exercise their agency on the basis of their values, which are in turn nurtured by the contextual influences. The values discussed so far
explain the engagement of NGO practitioners in the process of contextualising the HRBA.

**Commitment to a HRBA**

The effort of NGO workers to optimise a HBRA in a specific context presupposes their strong belief in it. Interview participants emphasised practitioners’ belief in it as the key to HRBA practice. The following statement is representative:

> The challenge is whether you are the person who really believes in HRBA. If not, then that is a mess... We are not dealing HRBA with so-called techno-professionals. We should deal it with a bunch of HRBA practitioners. (Participant 6, AAB staff)

This participant emphasises the importance of belief in a HRBA, distinguishing HRBA spirit from professionalism. Interview participants largely appear to support a HRBA with enthusiasm. However, in terms of degrees of commitment, some differences were found between programme staff and administrative staff within AAB, and between AAB staff and partner NGO staff among those who involve in administrative work. Most AAB administrative staff agreed with the principles of the HRBA, but stated difficulties in applying them to their work:

> The function unit [AAB teams doing administrative jobs] don’t specify how our work will be in the RBA. In programmes [AAB teams doing programme-related jobs], it is easy. It is very difficult for function people to apply the HRBA. (Participant 16, AAB staff)

The above suggests that a HRBA is understood as an approach mainly for development programmes. Most AAB administrative staff could not articulate how a HRBA guides their practices. Moreover, one participant perceives that a HRBA is not relevant to her work at all:

> I always do financial work. I am not doing any kind of development work directly. My work has no link to HRBA. (Participant 3, AAB staff)

This perceived irrelevance perhaps explains why this person first declined to be interviewed. However, some administrative staff with programme-related field experience accepted a HRBA is relevant to their work:
I provide support to meet every need of AA offices in the field. Procurement, logistics, emergency, security service. I try to do this in the HRBA...Every time I have to discuss with people. Every time there is the HRBA and every time it is the (rights-based) practice. (Participant 7, AAB staff)

Two out of four interviewed AAB administrative workers, including Participant 7 above, showed a stronger commitment to a HRBA than other administrative staff. Both had field experience as emergency relief staff. This implies that involvement in programme activities can influence the degree of commitment to a HRBA. This is supported by the fact that administrative staff from partner NGOs are more inclined to think they are practicing a HRBA as they closely work with the local community:

I am practicing the spirit of RBA in my accounting work. I need to disperse funds in a timely manner for the implementation of programmes that are for poor participants. I need to be transparent in accounting...I sometimes directly work with community people. (Participant 23, Partner NGO staff)

Although their practices are confined to accountable budgeting and transparent information sharing, they perceive that their work is consistent with the values of a HRBA. These observed differences in terms of conformity with a HRBA will be discussed in detail in Chapter Eight.

Self-interest
The last theme related to motivation is self-interest. Two types of self-interest emerged: desire for recognition and pursuit of job security. The former motivates staff members to be proactive in the change process and the latter works in an adverse way.

Firstly, some staff members mentioned organisational recognition as both a reward and a driver for proposing ideas. One participant stated:

I was a participant in a country directorate strategic planning meeting, in Johannesburg. Why I was there? All were AAI directorate staff. I am a country staff member. For the strategic meeting, they invited some of the country programmes which are very influencing international work...They invited Bangladesh, as Bangladesh contributes to the climate change issue. So
In the prominent participant's view, there is a kind of recognition from AAI. (Participant 6, AAB staff)

This participant suggests organisational recognition in two ways: AAB was invited in recognition of its contribution toward AAI and this participant was dispatched in lieu of the Country Director in recognition of his commitment to the issue. As noticeable from the proud tone, organisational recognition means a lot to this participant. Another participant also regards attending in an international conference on behalf of AAB as recognition:

(Name of Country Director of AAB) was very open to innovative concepts. She wanted me to be a part of the conference...I started to build on my ideas at the network. My knowledge was shared through emails, forums and Skype conferences. (Participant 8, AAB staff)

Such recognition led this participant to actively share his ideas. In turn, this active participation is rewarded by AAI’s recognition by incorporating the ideas into its policy. In short, being a representative of AAB and having AAI-wide influence by their input is highly regarded by these participants as organisational recognition.

Secondly, however, the interest of NGO workers in job security appears to restrain them from any change in the HRBA. The following is an example:

Yes, you are part of change management. You participate in workshops and everything, but you do not suggest any change. You are suggesting a very little or tiny change to make yourself secure. You are trying to defend yourself; you are trying to defend your team. In the first workshop for developing the new CSP [Country Strategy Paper], (Name of Country Director) gave every team a specific exercise. She said, “This is a blank sheet. Think about strategy or programmes, everything”. The four groups came up with issues to work with. Those four teams came up with the same twelve issues, old issues. (Participant 6, AAB staff)

The above example shows that NGO staff members tend to stick to existing programmes in order to keep their positions stable. Decisions about priority issues and strategies are closely related to contextual considerations when AAB implements its HRBA. What is described here is that people’s fear of losing their job can prevent a necessary change to contextualise a HRBA if it also involves a change in the organisational structure.
The theme of job security emerged strongly, perhaps because AAB staff members were experiencing an organisational restructuring at the time of the interviews. According to Participant 18, such a situation dissuades staff members from questioning decisions made by senior staff:

*I feel tense and very helpless. So how can I raise my voice? Not only me. Every staff member. I cannot find any staff who want to raise their voice at the moment. Everybody was very vocal and very active. But everybody who challenged the senior management team was kicked out from AA.* (Participant 18, AAB staff)

This quote contradicts the earlier finding in Section 5.2 that ActionAid is perceived as having an open and innovative culture. Most participants, with a few exceptions including the above participant, view AAB as including its workers and partners in the change process. However, the data suggests that ensuring participation in the process does not necessarily guarantee collecting genuine opinions as they are filtered by self-interest such as job security.

5.4.2. NGO workers’ capacities for contextualising a HRBA

Following an exploration of motivation, this section outlines the capacities that NGO workers possess or lack. Knowledge of schemes and control over resources are suggested as essential capacities for creative agency (Sewell, 1992). This research identified knowledge of a HRBA and the law, and available financial resources, as important capacities. In addition to these, the data also suggests empathic understanding of the poor as a critical capacity.

*Knowledge and skills in a HRBA*

Documents from both AAI and AAB suggest staff should be equipped with an understanding of a HRBA and skills in advocating and networking (AAB, 2000; AAI, 2005.; AAI, 2012b). AAB workers, excluding administrative staff, were confident in their knowledge and skills. In terms of the HRBA-related capacities, organisational attention is concentrated on strengthening the capacities of partner NGOs (AAB, 2005; AAB, 2012b; AAI, 2004; AAI, 2012b). AAB staff also perceive that their partners’ insufficient capacity in certain areas creates challenges in implementing a HRBA:
In the RBA, there should be work to influence duty bearers. For that, you have to work with civil society and different networks. This requires some capacity. This is why RBA is difficult for them (local partners)…If you find ones (partners) who are very much local, they didn’t get much education and they don’t have much perception about networking. (Participant 2, AAB staff)

In contrast, partner NGO workers largely perceive themselves as trained and experienced in a HRBA. A considerable number of partner NGO workers regard a HRBA as a continuation of REFLECT, a participatory approach to social change as discussed in Section 5.2.1. One partner NGO worker stated:

After joining AA’s project, I was assigned for REFLECT circle operation. In REFLECT, I learned the process of the RBA. There I learned the root causes of poverty and critical analysis of power relation. This is how I learned the RBA. (Participant 20, Partner NGO staff)

This participant does not distinguish a HRBA from REFLECT, perhaps because both approaches share common principles such as participation and empowerment. However, understanding a HRBA based on their experience in REFLECT tends to confuse these two approaches. The effects of this confusion will be further discussed in Chapter Seven.

Knowledge of the law
Four out of 15 AAB staff majored in law. This is a surprisingly high number given that development NGOs are not a usual career path for law graduates. Hiring staff who have a degree in law or work experience in a human rights organisation is observed as a change in some development NGOs following their adoption of a HRBA (Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001). AAI is one of the representative NGOs which took this strategy in order to practice a HRBA (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004). It is not evident if AAB intended to recruit employees who majored in law for its HRBA. However, the data suggests that law graduates were attracted by AAB’s HRBA approach:

My motivation to work with an NGO was to get opportunities to work with poor people and community people to use my knowledge regarding the law and human rights. (Participant 17, AAB staff)

The law graduates suggest they better understand a HRBA than other colleagues:
The first impression is that I am very comfortable with this approach (the HRBA) because of my educational background. (Participant 17, AAB staff)

Maybe my grasp of HRBA will be faster (than other staff members). (Participant 8, AAB staff)

Although all law graduates denied that a law degree is essential for comprehending the HRBA, all agreed that their legal background provides a familiarity with a HRBA:

*The HRBA is based on the UNHDR and other international laws and policies. So people who are not from a law background are learning these laws and protocols. But I have learned them academically.* (Participant 5, AAB staff)

Their work experience also confirms the significance of having knowledge of the laws and the legal system for development practices:

*Honestly, I was lost at the beginning about how I could link my education with this sector (development). While working, suddenly I realised that knowing the law itself and how the law works is actually a very important part of working in the development sector.* (Participant 8, AAB staff)

The advantage of having legal knowledge led the following participant to pursue a degree in law:

*While working with these excluded communities, I struggled in 2009. There were issues that we had to consult with lawyers and law makers to change some laws…Dealing with these issues, I had to read it [laws], [and I] thought ‘why not [study law]?’.* (Participant 19, AAB staff)

A law degree equipped this group of participants with knowledge which they saw as helpful in understanding and practicing a HRBA. Chapter Six describes in detail how law graduates influence AAB’s understanding of a HRBA.

**Understanding of the field**

Having an understanding of the local context is a critical capacity for contextualisation. In terms of this capacity, partner NGO staff are suggested as having greater capacities than
AAB staff. This is based on their extensive experiences in the field. The following statements suggest that partner NGO staff feel competent as they directly work with people in the community:

*People in Dhaka [the capital city where AAB office is located] sit and discuss many things. In reality, if you work at the field level, this is another experience…Most time I go to see people as I am living here.* (Participant 14, Local Partner NGO staff)

*We work in a rural area at the grassroots level. From my long experience, now I am in this position. It was possible because I participated in all activities at field level.* (Participant 9, Local Partner NGO staff)

As frontline workers, these partner NGO staff emphasise closeness to the grassroots. This implies that they are more likely to represent the voice of the poor with a detailed understanding of their issues. This capacity of partner NGO workers is also highly recognised by five AAB staff who see themselves as lacking the link with the local communities:

*I am not the expert there. I do not have access to the community. I do not know their language, their culture, and their tradition. So, my doing advocacy there will be less effective than someone from the community.* (Participant 6, AAB staff)

The lack of understanding of local communities by AAB staff is not only because of their physical distance. The following suggests the education they received as another reason:

*As a so-called university graduate, I am not local apparently as my mind is not local. Because of my whole education system promoted pro-western.* (Participant 4, AAB staff)

*[Some AAB staff] studied in English medium schools. The curriculum is developed by the UK or the USA. They don’t know the context of our country, tradition of our county. They don’t know poor people. They just saw [poor people] on TV. So it (the poverty) is not their context, not their tradition.* (Participant 18, AAB staff)

These two participants suggest that not everyone from Bangladesh has knowledge of and respect for the local context. This raises a question of ‘who are local staff?’. There is a
tendency to regard nationality as a necessary and sufficient condition for being 'local staff', in the sense of understanding the local context. The data shows this may not be the case as AAB staff are not considered 'local staff' in the communities:

*We are tourists. Actually, it is not my word. It came from Robert Chambers. We are going there as tourists…Even me, who talk in Bengali. They (people living in the local community) perceive me as an outsider. (Participant 4, AAB staff)*

Compared to AAB staff, partner NGO workers are more acceptable to communities. This relative advantage of partner NGO workers, with their high understanding of the field, is the reason why AAB works in partnership:

*AA works through partners. It is because AA believes that it is only partner organisations working in that area can understand the context of the area. People of the community also depend on partners, not on people from Dhaka. (Participant 24, AAB staff)*

In short, partner NGO workers perceive themselves, and are perceived by AAB staff, as having their roots in the community and rich experiences in the field. Their capacity can provide AAB with a profound understanding of the field contexts, which is needed for contextualisation.

**Availability of financial resources**
Data suggests the importance of the financial resources that NGO workers can draw on for their attempts to include contextual consideration in a HRBA. An example is AAB’s climate justice. AAB integrated climate changes issues with a HRBA based on its learning from a long experience in disaster management. The following suggests how an external fund gives AAB the opportunity to develop ideas around climate justice:

*In 2007, we (Disaster Reduction Team) started thinking of including climate change because of Cyclone Sidr…We got the fund in 2008 from the Embassy of Denmark to work on climate change adaptation. The climate change issue was firstly raised by AAB. AAI was not that much focusing on climate change adaptation. (Participant 6, AAB staff)*

As mentioned in Section 5.3.2, it is difficult to initiate and operate a context-specific
programme without AAI’s financial support. In this example, the Danish fund enabled AAB to work on climate justice regardless of financial support from AAI. With a rising concern for environmental challenges, AAI now includes climate justice in the top priorities and AAB contributed to it as a pioneer in AAI.

This example shows how fundraising capacity created opportunities to develop the HRBA framework to respond to issues specific to disaster-prone countries like Bangladesh.

5.4.3. Summary
This section explored the motivation and capacities of NGO workers in contextualising a HRBA. Suggested motivations of values, commitment to a HRBA and personal interests explain why NGO workers take part in the contextualisation process and what NGO workers hope to achieve from it. The data also suggests they are capable of contextualising a HRBA with their understanding of the discourse, laws and local communities, despite a diverse level of understandings among participants. Financial resources can expand the opportunities for NGO workers to promote contextualised practices.

5.5. Conclusion

This chapter has offered AAB’s understanding of its own contexts and the necessity of contextualisation. The data shows wide agreement on the importance of considering the contexts when understanding and implementing a HRBA. The contexts here refer to the organisational contexts of AAI and the national contexts of Bangladesh where AAB is located. As a member of the AAI federation, AAB shapes its own HRBA in line with AAI’s philosophy and guidelines. AAI’s organisational structure and culture were suggested as supportive of AAB’s construction of its own HRBA. Some national contexts appeared to raise challenges, which should be considered in the process of shaping the HRBA. Contextualisation is possible through ‘understanding, engaging and transforming the contexts’ (Westoby & Shevellar, 2012, p.218). This thesis argues that NGO workers who understand the organisational and national contexts can play a role in making a HRBA context-appropriate. In this chapter, NGO workers’ motivation and capacities were explored to make sense of their actions to contextualise a HRBA.
Building on this chapter, two key features of AAB’s HRBA will be discussed in the next chapters. Chapter Six concerns AAB’s understanding of the HRBA, and Chapter Seven looks at AAB’s practice of the HRBA. Each chapter explores how the feature is influenced by the contexts and the roles of NGO workers in shaping the feature.
Chapter 6  Differentiating a RBA and a HRBA

Rights can be different from country to country. But human rights are same to all. So, when we say RBA, it is basically under legal perspective or national perspective. But when we use the term ‘HRBA’, it means we are using human rights perspective and universal perspective. (Participant 17, AAB staff)

6.1. Introduction

This chapter considers AAB’s differentiating of a RBA and a HRBA as one of the features of AAB’s HRBA. In the development community, the terms ‘RBA’ and ‘HRBA’ have been used without consistent definitions (Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004). In most development organisations including AAI, the two terms are used interchangeably. However, as mentioned in the preface, some countries including the researcher’s home country of Korea, prefer the term ‘rights’ to ‘human rights’, because the latter is regarded as being associated with a certain political ideology or a Western idea (Lee, 2012). This differentiation implies that interpretations and implications of these terms can be influenced by contexts. This case study also provides an example of a context-specific understanding of the terms RBA and HRBA.

Some AAB staff argue that a RBA and a HRBA are different, drawing on the conceptual differences between rights and human rights. They regard rights as nationally bound legal rights and human rights as internationally agreed universal rights. This understanding is not consistent with the literature. This chapter discusses the reason behind this understanding, exploring the legal, political and cultural contexts of Bangladesh and the legal knowledge possessed by some participants.

This chapter consists of three sections contributing to answering the first research question about the feature of AAB’s HRBA, contextual influences and the roles of NGO workers (see Section 1.3). The first section explores the perceived differences between a RBA and a HRBA and the implication of distinguishing the two. The second section focuses on the national context of Bangladesh, which influences participants’ perception of rights and lead some to prefer a HRBA to a RBA. The last section discusses the role of some staff who studied law in building AAB’s understanding of a HRBA.
6.2. Understanding of a RBA and a HRBA

6.2.1. Differentiation between a RBA and a HRBA

This section discusses the identified differences between a RBA and a HRBA based upon the perspectives of interview participants. No document from either AAI or AAB discusses the differences. An examination of formal documentation reveals that AAI uses both terms interchangeably. A tendency to a more frequent use of ‘HRBA’ in recent years is observed in AAI’s documents. However, no explanation for this difference is provided. In AAI’s documents, the term HRBA first appeared in 2008, replacing the term RBA. However, AAI states that it has worked in the HRBA framework since its adoption in 1998 (AAI, 2012b). This statement fuelled a debate in AAB as to whether there was any profound difference between a RBA and a HRBA. Unlike AAI, AAB differentiates a HRBA from a RBA.

It is noted that no partner NGO worker distinguished a RBA and a HRBA. This may be because they just accept the terminology used by AAB or because the different terminology does not translate to a difference in their practice, as shown in the following statement:

_”I think it is just a change of term. There is no fundamental change. Nothing at a practical level. It is just an alternative word.”_ (Participant 12, Partner NGO staff)

While partner NGO workers think the difference is only semantic, many AAB staff argue there is a conceptual difference between the two. However, their opinions can be grouped into two: some see the difference insignificant, while others argue the terms should be formally distinguished with preference given to the HRBA. Regardless of whether the difference is regarded as significant, every participant in AAB who commented on the difference agreed that: a RBA is a legal approach which refers to national laws, while a HRBA is grounded in the universal human dignity and the international human rights regime, as suggested below:

_AA does not emphasise the difference, but in my opinion, there are differences between RBA and HRBA. The difference lies in the definition itself. If you define ‘right’ and ‘human right’, you will find some differences. So RBA has the term ‘right’ and HRBA means that the approach_
should be based on ‘human rights’. In general, people think rights mean legal rights. But human right does not need to be legal. It (human rights) does not need to be recognised by the state. As a concept, human right is a broader concept than right. As I mentioned that rights are very much linked to legal things, human rights are linked to human beings and universality. (Participant 17, AAB staff)

With a focus on the difference between rights and human rights, this participant understands that a RBA is confined to legal and national rights, whereas human rights are a broader concept. Likewise, the following participant highlights an important conceptual difference between rights and human rights:

Some state rights can have conflicts with human rights, which is actually natural rights, like right to speak. (Participant 8, AAB staff)

This participant understands ‘human rights’ to be natural rights, and ‘rights’ to be legal rights which are contingent on national legislation. In contrast, Eyben’s opinion (2003) is that a HRBA is legal and normative as enshrined in international treaties and humanitarian law, while a RBA embraces a variety of ideas such as equality and justice.

This difference between AAB’s understanding and the literature flows from the different contexts which shape perceptions of rights and human rights. Differences in contexts are revisited in Section 6.3.

As stated above, AAB staff generally acknowledge that there is a conceptual difference between a RBA and a HRBA. However, some of them do not regard it as significant. After explaining their understanding of the difference between the two, they added:

To me, there is no major difference between RBA and HRBA. The work we were previously doing…I think we can do the same work in the HRBA. (Participant 18, AAB staff)

It was RBA and now we call it HRBA.Is it a really big factor whether we call it RBA or HRBA for people living in poverty? It may create tensions and debates around RBA and HRBA. (Participant 6, AAB staff)

Both Participants 18 and 6 question if the change from a RBA to a HRBA indicates any
meaningful change in practice. Another participant says that AAI terminology was changed in a response to demands from Northern donors:

*ActionAid started RBA in late 1990s. RBA or HRBA whatever. After 9/11, particularly after 2006 or 2007, it has tried to pick those kind of words so that it can show to the externals that general human rights are different from the general perception on rights...Usually I think that notion is from top-down and fund-driven. (Participant 4, AAB staff)*

It is implied that ‘human rights’ sounds more neutral than ‘rights’. This view is consistent with the argument made by Bradshaw (2006) that human rights, as minimally defined and neutrally nuanced, are acceptable to a wider audience.

In contrast to this opinion, other participants who acknowledged a difference between the terms argued that a HRBA is more powerful than a RBA. One participant stated:

*Basically they (RBA and HRBA) are very similar in concept. Almost the same. But when we used RBA, programmes were scattered. We basically worked on legislation, acts and policies. But HRBA is about human beings living with dignity. It is a wider dimension. I think our advocacy can be strengthened [by HRBA]. It can include something which is not recognised yet in laws. (Participant 5, AAB staff)*

Unlike a RBA, a HRBA is understood as expanding the scope of claimable rights as human rights are seen as broader than rights. The following participant suggests human rights can be further expanded:

*RBA will end when all basic rights are given by the state. HRBA does not know what all human rights are, because not all are translated into instruments yet. For instance, CEDAW [Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women] has not covered some human rights which it should have. CRC [Convention on the Rights of the Child] also might have not covered all rights. So in HRBA, you don’t know the end. (Participant 8, AAB staff)*

According to this participant, human rights can be extended as new conventions are developed to cover some missing rights in the current conventions. In this way, human rights are understood as broader than mere rights and with more room for expansion. However, the literature suggests that rights naturally include human rights: rights do not
necessarily bear moral values unlike human rights, and rights are seen as broader than human rights which do not include every right such as property rights (Cruft, 2005; Forst, 2012).

In AAB, rights are seen as enshrined in the national law, which also protects some human rights, however partly in terms of quantity and quality. Other human rights are neither recognised nor protected adequately by Bangladesh law. The following statement exemplifies the difference between a RBA and a HRBA in the Bangladesh context:

The Bangladesh government tells you that it gives all aged people a pension of 300TK (taka, the currency of Bangladesh). In RBA, we are advocating that all aged people should get 300TK. So, our goal is making all aged people receive 300TK. This is RBA. But if you are doing HRBA, you would say that first of all 300 is not enough. The government needs to give a decent pension which covers basic needs. (Participant 8, AAB staff)

This participant suggests that a RBA is concerned with a service being delivered as legislated, while a HRBA asks if the legislated service is adequate for human rights standard. As shown in this age pension example, rights in some cases mean ‘a right to welfare provision’ (Griffin, 2008, p.99). Rights to welfare services are not ensured in many ways in Bangladesh, which is not a welfare state. Hence, many participants understand that rights are very limited in Bangladesh.

In such a context, the debate about differences between a RBA and a HRBA is not confined to the perceived conceptual difference between rights and human rights. Distinguishing the two indicates the scope of AAB’s practices as well. The following participant suggests that a RBA can limit AAB to claiming only legislated rights:

We are limiting ourselves by talking about only RBA. It should not limit us. (Participant 8, AAB staff)

When AAB’s definition of a RBA and a HRBA is applied, AAB’s work could be expanded as suggested below:

For example, in RBA, people are in water crisis. What will you see in RBA? They will go to the
government and press the government to pass the law and to ensure that the government supply water to the community in water crisis. But you are not considering existing situations. You will try to get attention to government. Meanwhile people will die or get diseases...If you follow RBA, you need to follow the existing law. But if you say HRBA, you can think of more about it. (Participant 2, AAB staff)

HRBA does not recognise only established rights...When some human rights are not incorporated [in laws], they should be incorporated as rights. (Participant 8, AAB staff)

Based on their understanding of the difference, their work should shift from providing people with information about claimable rights and urging law enforcement in the name of a RBA to building a consensus about unrecognised human rights and promoting law enactment in the framework of a HRBA. In short, AAB’s HRBA should include work for recognition of some ‘human rights’ to be ‘rights’ enshrined in the national laws.

6.2.2. Advantages of a HRBA

Drawing on the perceived differences between a RBA and a HRBA, this section examines why some AAB staff members insist on calling their approach HRBA, not RBA. Identified reasons are the universality of human rights and the international human rights regime. These two reasons lead AAB staff to perceive a HRBA as a powerful and effective framework for desired changes.

Universality of human rights

In comparison to rights which are perceived as nationally valid, the universal and normative values of human rights are undisputedly highly regarded by AAB workers. Strongly agreed universality was not expected prior to the research. This contradicts the literature which suggests rejection of universality from the South as seen in the debate over Asian values (Donnelly, 2013). As outlined in Chapter Two, a major critique of a HRBA lies in the lack of a cultural consideration due to its roots in Northern philosophy and in the way it imposes its ideology on the South (Donnelly, 1988; Hamm, 2001; Nyamu-Musembi & Musyoki, 2004). One of the most surprising findings is that nearly all participants rejected the idea of human rights as being exogenous or imposed by the North. However, it should be mentioned that the participants’ perception of universal value of human rights may not be typical of the views held by most people in Bangladesh. Human rights are
taken for granted by interview participants possibly because of either the ‘normative appeal’ of human rights (Cornwall, 2007) or their familiarity with human rights language as international development workers. Showing general agreement with the universality of human rights, participants suggest that whether a HRBA is imposed or not is not very important. One participant stated:

*The essence of the HRBA, it is not about who is imposing that (HRBA), but it is about how people are exercising that (HRBA). I think that will decide the HRBA…It is very easy to shut the door saying, “It is a new theory and a Western discourse. So let’s forget about it”. Or you will try to understand what the discourse wants to say and try to contextualise the discourse from your own perspective. Development is global politics. So you need to understand global mechanism for development. We should take development as a political discourse and understand different discourses at a global level.* (Participant 6, AAB staff)

Acknowledging the influence of global politics on development discourses, this participant emphasises the ways the HRBA is implemented and contextualised. Even if a HRBA is imposed from the North, it does not degrade the importance and usefulness of human rights in their work.

The universal value of human rights is reasoned by participants in two ways: it is natural for human beings to pursue human rights and every culture shares the values of human rights. Many interview participants regard human rights as natural in human nature:

*It (human rights) is a natural process. Every person wants to take part in and they want to develop themselves. This is natural. So I don’t think that comes from outside.* (Participant 9, Partner NGO staff)

In justification of the universality of human rights, three participants emphasise that their traditional values share common elements with human rights. These participants argued that a HRBA has been practised in Bangladesh without naming it as such. One of them suggests the tradition of mobilising people as common with a HRBA:

*Maybe the structure or our resource book [on the HRBA] comes from Westerners. But the basic things and movements are not new in Bangladesh. We have voluntarism of people. (Researcher: What do you mean by voluntarism?) There are some clubs. Those kinds of bodies*
worked for poor people who need help. They did these things totally voluntarily…. They did RBA or HRBA even though they did not name it. (Participant 18, AAB staff)

Bangladesh has a long tradition of Samity (meaning association in Bengali) for mutual help and self-reliance (Glasius et al., 2004), as suggested above. Examining if this collective effort can be regarded as a HRBA is beyond the scope of this thesis. What is noted here is that commonality between traditional values and human rights is emphasised here to support the universality of human rights.

Another participant gives an example of Bangladesh-born NGOs working in accordance with a HRBA:

*In Bangladesh, I have seen that, not in Bangladesh, but across the globe, [large] NGOs’ notion of work copied the British document (White paper published by DFID, the UK Department For International Development). Other NGOs are trying to follow what they [the big NGOs] actually do. But it doesn’t mean that a rights-based approach did not exist before. Even in Bangladesh, even since 1974 or 1975, the biggest NGOs of Bangladesh have operationalised the whole thing of human rights…RBA is not an invention. RBA was there.* (Participant 4, AAB staff)

This participant acknowledges the influence of the North on discourse construction and spread. However, he argues that local NGOs have worked in a similar way to a HRBA since the mid-1970s. This also supports that ‘human rights’ is not a purely Northern concept. Interestingly, all three participants who emphasised the commonality between human rights and their tradition were identified in Chapter Five as holding strong national identity. This implies that the concept of human rights should be accorded with local values in order to be accepted by those who have a highly developed national identity and who are critical of the so-called ‘North’. In line with Cohen (2004) who notes the importance of consistency between human rights standards and one’s own rationale, this research shows that the value of human rights is validated by local values grounded in tradition.

To summarise, in AAB the term a HRBA is preferred to a RBA, because it is understood as referring to human rights that are universally valid unlike rights bounded by national law. The universality of human rights is not questioned by AAB staff. The northern root of human rights is dismissed or rejected.
International human rights regime

In addition to the universality of human rights, the international human rights regime was suggested as another reason for preferring a HRBA to a RBA. The international human rights framework is perceived as an important instrument in advocating human rights. Ratification of the international conventions makes the government responsible for the recognition and protection of human rights:

*If it (human rights) is recognised by the international community and international agencies, it means that it has a broader perspective…Yes, it is the strength of using the word ‘human rights’ rather than using the word ‘right’. It gives more space and scope to work on it. We can pressure our government or all different concerned authorities that already signed the instruments. This means they have to recognise it as a right.* (Participant 17, AAB staff)

Distinguishing between the terms ‘rights’ and ‘human rights’, this participant holds that signing conventions should be followed by national laws. This means a transition from human rights to rights, according to AAB’s understanding as discussed in the earlier section. Human rights language is noted as useful for building pressure for the transition:

*It is the grammar you are using when you participate in a meeting. You are using the grammar of UDHR [Universal Declaration of Human Rights]. The government is a signatory to the UDHR. So it [using the right language] is how you are presenting, how you are lobbying, and how you are doing advocacy with the government.* (Participant 6, AAB staff)

As the expression of ‘grammar’ connotes, human rights provide a common language which is understandable and communicable within the international development community and with other stakeholders, including the government. The use of human rights language is suggested as advantageous to NGOs as well. The widely accepted rights language can be a reference for programme management and fundraising:

*There will be equal standards for reference. We can say we are doing this work according to this and this conventions. All country programmes will have common understanding, common references and common campaigns.* (Participant 18, AAB staff)
Some donors now are trying to focus on CRPD (Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities)…They use rights language in everything. Referring to CRPD or specific article is the best right language. (Participant 27, Partner NGO staff)

The first participant suggests AAI’s works is aligned with a HRBA, despite its federal structure. As discussed in Chapter Five, a lack of coherence and weak branding are common weakness of federations (Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001). However, reference to human rights can help AAI overcome this by providing a common framework and standards for quality programmes. Another advantage expected from working in a HRBA is an increase in fundraising opportunities. Unlike the widely-held assumption that donors are more responsive to charity language than rights language, the second participant suggests there is an increase in donors funding human rights-based programmes and hence a benefit in using human right inspired language.

As already discussed, human rights can be characterised by their normative appeal as being universal and by their usefulness in promoting desirable change by referencing to the international regime. These intrinsic and instrumental values of human rights are associated with the preference for the term HRBA, which explicitly shows its reference to human rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights conventions. The next section outlines why, in the context of Bangladesh, the universality and the international system of human rights are highly regarded by participants, in comparison to rights.

6.3. Contexts at play

This section explains why AAB distinguishes between a RBA and a HRBA and prefers the term HRBA. As discussed earlier, the differentiation of the two is based on the perceived differences between rights and human rights. This thesis argues that AAB’s perception of the differences is constructed by the context of Bangladesh. The literature suggests that human rights are minimal, neutral and not powerful without an enforcement mechanism (Donnelly, 1988; Bradshaw, 2006). However, this is the story of developed countries where there is a social consensus on human rights at least beyond the minimum level and general human rights norms are already legislated. Yet, as mentioned in Section 6.2.1, some human rights are not recognised in national laws of Bangladesh. This is why AAB
understands human rights as a broader and more powerful concept than rights, which are regarded as confined to those rights enshrined in national laws. This section focuses on the contexts which influence the participants’ perception of the limitation of national laws.

The data suggests that the related legal, political and cultural contexts influence the participants’ perception of Bangladesh’s national laws. The legal system is perceived as insufficient and inadequate for the protection of human rights. This limitation is understood by participants as a result of the pressures from religious groups and of politicians’ chasing religious voters. The following participant offers an example of how religious power and political power affect legislation:

The first constitution in 1972 declared secularism. But in the 1980s, the next government amended the constitution. It includes a word like ‘Bismillah’, meaning everything should be started in the name of Allah. Later on, under the regime of a dictator, another clause was inserted. It is ‘the nation of Islam’. It defines that this is the country basically for Muslims. So, the constitution is no more secular. But two years back, when the current government came to power, it tried to go back to the first secular one. But due to the pressure of religious leaders, basically Muslim religious leaders, it was not possible. For the sake of getting votes, it is kept. The members of the ruling party are for secularism in their mind, but since most people are Muslim and they want to see it in the constitution, they leave it as it is. (Participant 2, AAB staff)

As a result of religious and political battles, the Constitution, declares Bangladesh as a country of Islam. This enshrines the strong influence of religion over national. Similarly, the legal effect of some articles of international human rights conventions were excluded for religiously motivated reasons when those conventions were adopted laws in Bangladesh. As mentioned in Section 1.5, Bangladesh signed major human rights conventions, but with reservations:

If you look at Muslim countries, whenever the UN comes with the declaration or all these conventions, all Muslim countries take a little time to get into it. They tend to have more reservations. When they finally go into the convention, they find reservations here and there, and they try to think about their social culture and social politics like that. (Participant 27, Partner NGO staff)

Bangladesh ratified the CEDAW [Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination
against Women]. But it had some reservations. They are about enactment of national law against religious personal laws. (Participant 5, AAB staff)

Both participants see the main reason for reservations as a lack of congruence with religion. Personal laws which legislate personal behaviour based on religious scriptures, present examples of a clash between human rights standards and the religious practices of Hindu and Islam in Bangladesh:

*In our country, Hindu women don’t have the right to divorce, the right to adopt, and also the right to guardianship. There is no right of association for Hindu women.* (Participant 5, AAB staff)

*In Muslim, all women will get property and land from their parents. But it would be half of what their brothers get.* (Participant 2, AAB staff)

As discussed, personal laws in Bangladesh reject the fundamental principle of human rights, namely that all human beings are of equal value. However, these personal laws should not be understood as attributes of particular religions. The same religion can be differently practised in different countries and can therefore result in different laws in different countries. One participant stated:

*In Bangladesh, Hindu women don’t get any property from her parents. But in India, Hindu women can get property. So it is different. Hindu women in Bangladesh cannot claim their right to property as legal rights, but in India, she can claim property as legal rights and she can get remedy from the court.* (Participant 17, AAB staff)

The above statement implies that translating religion into legislation involves diverse national contexts – the legal, political and cultural contexts as discussed earlier. Generally, the contexts of Bangladesh were suggested as imposing limits on the scope of recognisable and claimable human rights. Discrimination based on personal laws shows how context bound national laws fail to protect human rights.

The following participants drew attention to some human rights which are not recognised in Bangladesh:
Our major core campaigns are right to food, right to education and right of indigenous people...I am saying constitution and legislation should recognise right to food. (Participant 8, AAB staff)

In Bangladesh, education is not a right. It is not recognised by our constitution and by government. (Participant 2, AAB staff)

The right to adequate food and the right to education are recognised as human rights in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which Bangladesh is a signatory. However, no Bangladesh law embraces these rights. This gap between internationally agreed human rights and nationally enshrined human rights led some participants to prefer the term ‘human rights’ instead of ‘rights’.

This section provided the national context which accounted for AAB preferring a HRBA to a RBA. AAB staff see a HRBA as a more powerful tool than a RBA for inducing change. This is because a RBA is understood as being confined to the promotion and defence of rights enshrined by national laws. Despite ratifying major human rights conventions, Bangladesh has a limited ability to enact national laws due to its legal, political and cultural context. An exploration of the national contexts highlights the importance of understanding which human rights are validated and how they are comprehended in Bangladesh. The next section shows how these contextual considerations are embraced by NGO workers.

6.4. The agency of NGO workers at play

The precedent sections discussed AAB’s differentiating between a RBA and a HRBA as one of the contextualised characteristics. This section describes the role of staff members in the formation of that understanding.

The differentiation of a RBA from a HRBA is strongly advocated by some AAB staff, particularly those with legal qualifications. As discussed in Section 6.2, the major differences between a RBA and a HRBA are drawn in terms of the conceptual differences between rights and human rights and on the procedural differences of the legal frameworks. These differences are noted and emphasised by some AAB staff who majored in law. Other interview participants referenced their colleagues with a law background, rather than documents published by either AAI or AAB, to explain the
differences between a RBA and a HRBA. One participant mentioned:

(Researcher: When I mentioned HRBA, you corrected me to RBA at the beginning. What is the difference between RBA and HRBA?) I also raised the question to (name of an AAB staff) about the difference between RBA and HRBA. There is no perfect answer to this in AA. There are still debates. But from our discussion, I found some minor differences. (Name of an AAB staff) told me that…(Participant 18, AAB staff)

What is suggested here is that some AAB staff are the source of knowledge about the difference between a RBA and a HRBA. As discussed in Section 6.2.1, most AAB staff members acknowledge the difference, but they do not agree on the practical or other significance of this difference. This implies that AAB staff with legal knowledge have contributed to building a common understanding of a HRBA in AAB.

As discussed in Chapter Five, majoring in law is suggested as offering these law graduates motivation, self-confidence and capacity for working in the framework of a HRBA. It is observed that those who majored in law played an important role in explaining the differences between a RBA and a HRBA and in advocating for a HRBA in AAB. The following quote is representative in illustrating the roles of such staff in disseminating knowledge:

There was no orientation or training for them (administration staff) [regarding a HRBA]. They are not acquainted with development jargon. So to them, sometimes they are very new terms. We also think of organising advanced training. I have a plan on behalf of my team. We will organise…HRBA gossiping. It is not a formal discussion. Anybody can participate and discuss over tea. Through this process, I think their knowledge and concept about the HRBA can be developed. I already started to share a Bangla version of my own understanding. I already shared two documents…Sometimes, it (language) can be a barrier. But I developed a Bangla version mainly to use for LRP (Local Rights Programmes) training. Our LRP staff are not very comfortable with English. (Participant 17, AAB staff)

Translating the HRBA resource book and organising training or casual talk is not included in the job description of this participant. While no person has formal responsibility for assisting the comprehension of other staff and partners, this participant nonetheless sees it as his duty. His personal interests in the HRBA encourage him to take the initiative and
his educational background in law is acknowledged by others as giving him credibility.

The following participant further insists that a group of law graduates helped promote a HRBA across AAI:

*Once we worked in RBA, while some of us wanted to work in HRBA…. Our organisation wanted to work with RBA only. But some of us were working with HRBA from the beginning. In the meeting we talked about the concept of the HRBA…. What I am saying is that some of us have been working in HRBA since 2004, for instance, but most people were guided by documents, which said we were following the RBA. So, there was a conflict there. Now we all accept that we have to follow HRBA. (Researcher: Is it because AAI recognised HRBA as its approach?) Yes. It is because AAI recognised this. But behind AAI’s recognition, there was our internal advocacy. (Participant 8, AAB staff)*

According to this participant, a HRBA has been promoted by some staff within AAB and AAI responded accordingly. However, there is no evidence that the advocacy of such staff was what promoted AAI to change its terminology from ‘RBA’ to ‘HRBA’. What is interesting is this participant’s belief in their ability and the perceived existence of opportunities to influence the discourse within the organisation, particularly given his junior position within AAB.

To summarise this section, AAB distinguishes a HRBA from a RBA, whereas AAI uses the two terms interchangeably. AAB’s interpretation and perceived difference between the two terms was in response to AAI’s unexplained change in terminology from RBA to HRBA. In this process, law graduates among AAB staff took the lead in distinguishing a HRBA from a RBA. Their understanding of the difference is shared within AAB and presumably now with AAI.

As claimed by those who majored in law, conceptual differences between a HRBA and a RBA are widely accepted in AAB. There is no official document which identifies the difference, but interview participants other than administrative workers and partner NGO workers share a common understanding of the differences. This is possibly because AAB provides its workers with the opportunities to discuss it both formally and informally. This process of sharing knowledge will be further explored in Chapter Eight.
6.5. Conclusion

This chapter suggests distinguishing a HRBA from a RBA as part of AAB’s contextualised understanding of the HRBA. The first section discussed how AAB differentiates a HRBA from a RBA. Some participants regard the change as merely a change in terminology and therefore insignificant. However, for some AAB staff the difference is very important conceptually and practically. Conceptually, a RBA is regarded as limited as it refers only to national laws, rather than to a comprehensive and broader concept of human rights. This understanding is challenged by the literature which suggests that rights are the broader concept and they include human rights. The reason behind AAB's perception arises from the context of Bangladesh in which not every human right is recognised and properly fulfilled by national laws. Bearing this difference in mind, some participants prefer the term ‘HRBA’ as being more flexible and able to accommodate a broader range of rights than those officially recognised in Bangladesh. A HRBA is suggested as having both a normative value which is universal and an instrumental value through the international human rights regime. The change from a RBA to a HRBA means changes in practice as well as in language. When the conceptual difference is applied, AAB’s work should be extended to make certain human rights (e.g. education and gender equality) recognised as rights, beyond just claiming rights entitled by legal systems.

It is noteworthy that no AAB document provides its collective understanding of the difference and that the discussion is dominated by a handful of AAB staff who majored in law. Interestingly, the understanding of most AAB staff of the conceptual difference between a RBA and a HRBA is very similar, to the point of them using similar examples to explain the difference. This implies that the knowledge of key people is shared within AAB. How individuals’ knowledge is shared amongst staff and codified as organisational knowledge will be detailed in Chapter Eight.
Chapter 7  Revolutionary ideas and evolutionary practices

It (the HRBA) is not kind of revolution of conceptions. It is evolution. The new HRBA certainly does not come from nowhere. The basis is our earlier work. (Participant 6, AAB staff)

7.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the second feature of AAB’s HRBA – the inclusion of various and even contradictory developmental thinking. The data suggests that AAB’s HRBA is distinctive and transformative as it aspires to be. At the same time, AAB’s HRBA embraces diverse and even opposing ideas which are embedded in other approaches, thus suggesting its similarity to other approaches. The distinctiveness from, and resemblance to, other approaches is captured in the above quote which refers to ‘revolution and evolution’.

The HRBA is understood by participants as ‘revolution' because it is different in many ways from other approaches to development as it focuses on fundamental changes; and as ‘evolution’ because it draws heavily on precedent ideas and practices but improves them. This seeming contradiction, or at least tension in interpretations of the HRBA, is related to the complexity of AAB translating its HRBA into practice. This chapter aims to understand this complexity by exploring the influence of the contexts and NGO workers.

This chapter consists of three sections. The first section discusses the feature of AAB’s HRBA, which is identified as different from and overlapping with other approaches. In the second section, incorporation of other approaches is explained by reference to the organisational and national contexts in which AAB works. The last section examines how these contexts shaped participants’ agency in relation to hybrid practices of the HRBA and other approaches.

7.2. The translation of revolutionary ideas into practice

7.2.1. Claimed distinction from a needs-based approach (NBA)
As outlined in Chapter Two, the key features and values of a HRBA are often understood
in the literature by comparison with a needs-based approach (NBA) (Boesen & Martin, 2007). Likewise, the data of this study explains AAB’s HRBA by contrasting it with a NBA. Four themes are identified as distinguishing AAB’s HRBA from a NBA: entitlement, tackling power imbalance to eradicate poverty, participatory and empowering processes and sustainable impact.

Entitlement
AAI holds out ‘entitlement’ as the biggest difference between needs and rights, with official documents explaining that:

*The use of the word ‘rights’ recognises poor people’s entitlement to their rights in a way that the word ‘needs’ does not. (AAI, 1999, p.2)*

AAI documents explain how entitlement can make a difference:

Needs are also legitimate but they are aspirations. Without diminishing their importance, aspirations and obligations by the government do not go together in a mutually enforceable manner. As a savvy practitioner put it, “satisfaction of a need cannot be enforced.” So rights are associated with dignity and being, and needs are associated with possessing and having. (AAI, 2004, p.7).

AAI suggests the difference between human rights and needs is claimability and human dignity. The language of human rights turns development interventions into a matter of accountability which can be claimed with dignity, while the language of needs appeals to charity and assistance. In light of the difference, the following participant states that replacing ‘needs’ with ‘human rights’ can change the relationship between NGOs and programme participants:

*In a so-called needs-based support, it is the giver-and-receiver relationship. But when you turn to rights, then who are givers and who are receivers? There is a question of dignity and accountability both horizontal and vertical. To me, this is the beauty of the RBA. (Participant 19, AAB staff)*

The above participant suggests that the HRBA gives dignity to programme participants
and greater accountability of NGOs. This change is reflected in the shift in language from receiver to right holder and from giver to duty bearer (Boesen & Martin, 2007). The HRBA transforms the development processes to a relationship between rights holders and duty bearers.

*Understanding of and solution to poverty*

The second difference between a NBA and AAB’s HRBA is drawn from the analysis of poverty. AAI understands poverty as an issue of power imbalance:

> In a world of material plenty, poverty and injustice are not inevitable. So what causes them? Decades of frontline experience working with poor and disadvantaged communities has led us to conclude that the answer lies in unequal and unjust power relations. (AAI, 2005, p.9)

AAI’s understanding of poverty is widely shared by interview participants. One participant stated:

> Other international NGOs and other local NGOs mostly, even the government, they see that poverty is a situation due to lacking resources. That means you don’t have resources and that is why you are poor. But ActionAid is saying that you are powerless and that is why you do not have access. (Participant 4, AAB staff)

This poverty analysis leads AAB to challenge the power relationship and to commit to supporting social movements as discussed in Chapter Five. Working with other organisations in supporting social movements is something else that distinguishes a HRBA from a NBA as suggested in the following statement:

> In the RBA, there should be work to influence duty bearers. For that, you have to work with civil society and different networks. If it is service delivery or other approaches, they can just go and work for the community only. (Participant 2, AAB staff)

This analysis implies different geographical coverage and working styles between a NBA and a HRBA. In the framework of a NBA, an NGO tends to work for a specific community on its own. In contrast, AAB’s HRBA encourages a nation-wide or translational collective action for greater pressure on duty bearers.
**Participatory and empowering process**

Another feature of the HRBA that distinguishes it from a NBA is the emphasis on the process, rather than results. This is confirmed by AAI’s guidelines and interviews:

> A rights based approach involves not charity nor simple economic development, but a process of enabling and empowering those not enjoying their economic, social and cultural rights to claim their rights. (AAI, 2004, p.7)

> The beauty of HRBA is that it talks about the process as well…. It (the HRBA) needs to think about whether it promotes the dignity of the people and whether the approach is empowering people. (Participant 6, AAB staff)

As suggested above, the process of implementing the HRBA should be empowering. This is contrasted with a NBA which has a process of identifying the needy who deserve assistance and is seen as disempowering (Max-Neef, 1992; Manji, 1998; Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003; Sachs, 2010). Participation is suggested as the key to the empowerment process in the following AAI’s guidelines for its HRBA:

> This is in stark contrast to a top-down, service-led approach where such decisions are made externally and where poor people do not participate in the processes that affect [them], simply because they are wrongly considered to be mere beneficiaries or recipients. (AAI, 2008, p.7)

The above statement suggests that ensuring participation of people living in poverty is associated with a view of them as empowered rights holders, not as objects of development interventions. Participation is generally stressed more in a HRBA than a NBA in which needs are identified by experts and met technically by service providers (Ife, 2002). A participant also states that participation makes AAB’s HRBA distinguishable from other approaches:

> The basic difference between development organisations who are doing RBA and who are not doing RBA is…NGOs implementing RBA are more grassroots oriented. They work with people and they involve people in every process. (Participant 22, Partner NGO staff)
Similarly, nearly all partner NGO staff mentioned participation as the essence of the HRBA and some of them even equated a participatory approach with the HRBA.

As suggested by many research participants, participation and empowerment are the main components of a HRBA (OHCHR, 2006; Boesen & Martin, 2007). However, these principles are hardly new to development (Uvin, 2007). Both participation and empowerment have been popularised in development discourse to varying extents and focuses (Cornwall, 2007). Even the neoliberal notion of development embraces participation and empowerment, albeit with a focus on their use in an apolitical and managerial way (Kamat, 2004). However, the meaning of participation and empowerment in a HRBA is not identical to that in other approaches. For the same reason, AAI distinguishes its HRBA from other approaches which emphasise participation and empowerment at the individual or community level (AAI, 2010a; AAI, 2012b). The differences are understood by a participant as follows:

_HRBA can include all the things, but in different ways. In other development organisations, they believe that if people are empowered, then change will come automatically. Maybe they think they empower people by giving them microcredit and non-formal education, ignoring existing policies of the government. They do not take into account the policies and practices of the government. They just want to give some money, knowledge, and tools to the community, and then the community will change the situation by themselves. (Participant 2, AAB staff)_

The above participant clarifies that empowerment in the HRBA involves changing government policies to influence social structures. This is the difference from other approaches which focus on empowering individuals and communities with the provision of services, skills and knowledge.

_Sustainable impact_

The last distinguishing feature of AAB’s HRBA in comparison to a NBA is the sustainability of impacts. The following participant explains this:

_Service delivery is immediate, but there is no long-term impact. If we want to ensure sustainable development, we have to make service providers and local governments provide services in the local area. (Participant 20, Partner NGO staff)_
Many NGOs in Bangladesh deliver social services with financial services with the orientation of a NBA (Banerjee, 2005). This suggests that sustainable provision of services is possible only when duty bearers become accountable. Here the focus lies in making duty bearers take the responsibility for social services through the HRBA.

With regard to ‘sustainability’, it is interesting that three participants drew the following analogy to show the difference between the NBA and the HRBA:

*You can give a person a fish every day or you can give a person a fishing net and teach [them] how to fish. Then, you don’t need to feed the person every day.* (Participant 27, partner NGO staff)

Providing fish to feed a person is a NBA. However, teaching a person to fish can be interpreted as an empowerment approach. In the analogy, a HRBA should be beyond empowering an individual as discussed earlier. It may be about claiming the right to fish when a river is polluted or exploited by the government or multinational companies. As revealed in the above quote, confusion about a HRBA is recognised in AAB.

**Summary**

This section identified four features of AAB’s HRBA. These features distinguish the HRBA from a NBA. The HRBA is suggested as a transformative path to development by addressing problems of a NBA. However, it is questionable if these features are found exclusively in the HRBA. Interview participants, mostly from partner NGOs, presented a confused understanding of the differences between the HRBA and a participatory empowerment approach. Sections 7.3 and 7.4 provide possible reasons for this confusion. The following section focuses on how a NBA is combined with the HRBA despite AAB’s strong objection to a NBA.

7.2.2. Providing services in the framework of a HRBA

The previous section outlined how the HRBA is understood in AAB. Interview participants regard the HRBA as profoundly different from a NBA. However, AAB’s HRBA does not exclude meeting people’s needs despite the identified differences between the HRBA and a NBA. This section focuses on how AAB understands this seeming inconsistency.
**Justification for service delivery**

It seems natural for AAB to blend its HRBA and a NBA, as it started its work by supporting an orphanage in 1983 and operated needs-centred programmes until the early 2000s (ActionAid, n.d.). This is accidental blending of these approaches. The focus now is on AAB’s intentional blending. As discussed in the preceding section, AAB and its partner NGOs expressed a strong preference for a HRBA. They also suggested that a HRBA and a NBA sit in different paradigms. As a result of the adoption of a HRBA discourse, a retreat from service provision was observed in AAB according to the external review on AAB’s second country strategy paper (AAB, 2004). The following participant reports that the first reaction of AAB staff was to refuse any services:

> Dealing with RBA, I’ve experienced that many colleagues think that we will pull off all kinds of services and we will work on only rights, only environment, only education and awareness. (Participant 4, AAB staff)

However, recent documents from both AAI and AAB confirm that a HRBA does not necessarily exclude service provision. AAB suggests addressing basic needs is necessary for achieving human rights:

> This rights-based approach to development builds on people’s desire for inclusion and dignity and the satisfaction of their basic needs. (AAB, 2005b, p.9)

AAI replaces the phrase ‘basic needs’ with ‘basic rights’. AAI conceptualises ‘basic rights’ as follows:

> Our human rights-based approach means that we assert basic needs as basic rights, engaging in service delivery work only in ways that help to strengthen people’s leverage to claim their rights from the state more effectively and sustainably. (AAI, 2011a, p.10)

People living in acute poverty may lack even the most basic needs (water, food, education, shelter etc.) required to survive and live a life of dignity. We are very clear that all these basic needs are basic rights – and our focus is on empowering people to secure these rights... Basic services assume importance as they are part of basic rights and they contribute enhanced...
AAI acknowledges the importance of meeting basic needs as a prerequisite for human rights realisation. The words ‘basic rights’ are intended to emphasise claimability, which is missing from ‘basic needs’. However, the literature suggests that the term ‘basic rights’ can be problematic in two ways. First, human rights are about dignity not about possession. Uvin (2007) explains the difference between dignity and possession, giving the example of a well-fed slave. Claiming should be around rights to a social condition, not to necessary goods (Bradshaw, 2006). Second, the term ‘basic rights’ suggests that certain types of rights exist as a basis for other rights. This can nullify the indivisibility of human rights’ that all rights are of equal importance and there is none that can be classed as less important. In a similar way to Shue’s (1980) idea around instrumental rights as reviewed in Chapter Two, the use of basic rights denies the indivisibility of human rights.

These conceptual problems aside, AAI’s attempt to link human rights and basic needs with the concept of ‘basic rights’ is not comprehensively shared by AAB staff. The phrase ‘basic rights’ was mentioned by only two participants. However, their understanding of them is slightly different from AAI’s understanding. One of the two stated:

There are more rights which are not incorporated into basic rights. For instance, not all rights in HDHR are basic rights that is given by the government. Let’s say, the difference of state rights and human rights. (Participant 8, AAB staff)

By ‘basic rights’ this participant means a set of human rights recognised in the national laws, not instrumental rights as suggested by AAI’s definition.

Without using the term ‘basic rights’, most participants hold that the HRBA should embrace service provision in countries like Bangladesh. Their argument is based on their field experiences, not on the conceptual marriage between needs and rights defined by AAI:

When I was in (name of human rights organisation), even they told me that AA is not doing RBA and in the name of RBA AA is providing services…. After ten years working in this development agency, it is my personal view that it is very much required that rights holders have basic
necessities. (Participant 17, AAB staff)

More specifically, one of the lessons from field experiences is that people living in poverty expect direct benefits from NGOs. The following quote captures people’s first reaction to the HRBA:

*In earlier stage, those who are in poverty and vulnerable situation were not interested when I talked about rights. It is because they were suffering from hunger, shelter, or water. But I don’t meet these needs. They asked me, “Why are you telling us about rights? We are not interested in rights and we don’t want to go and claim the rights”. This is the situation in the community.* (Participant 25, Partner NGO staff)

As described above, participants, from partner NGOs in particular, experienced the indifference of community people toward the HRBA. The existence of service providing NGOs in the same community raises people’s expectations of tangible assistance:

*In practicing the RBA, when we work in the same area where another NGO is working in service delivery model. People see that getting involved in service delivery mode they can get a tube well, a sewing machine, or a power pump etc, but here (in the HRBA) they don’t get directly anything from the organisation. The difference is difficult to convince participants. This is a big challenge.* (Participant 9, Partner NGO staff)

Participants’ experiences are consistent with another case study on Bangladesh, which suggests that the provision of direct services is a means of retaining people’s interest in rights-based programmes (Banerjee, 2005).

In a HRBA, the government is expected to provide public services as a prime duty bearer. However, the reality is that the Bangladesh government fails to meet people’s basic needs. The inability and unwillingness of the government to meet basic needs confirms the need for services provided by NGOs. This leads some NGOs to replace the government in delivering services as discussed in Chapter Five. In contrast, AAB’s engagement in service delivery aims to strengthen the capacity of government to take the responsibility. For example, AAB’s service provision acts as a model for the government:
We have the strategic service delivery. Basically we do it to create some alternatives. This is an example to draw attention. Then we make pressure on the government to follow the process based on the alternatives we’ve created in the community. (Participant 2, AAB staff)

This participant describes AAB’s service as strategic because its service model can be advocated as an alternative to the government. Other participants agree with the need to be strategic for desired changes. As the literature suggests, confrontational claim making can be counter-productive in practice (Hickey & Mitlin, 2009). This is particularly so in Bangladesh where confrontational activities are oppressed by the government (Banerjee, 2005; Crawford, 2007; Zafarullah & Rahman, 2002).

As discussed thus far, AAB does not purge service provision from its HRBA. Interview participants support this. However, two participants questioned whether AAB really agrees with providing services. Both gave an example involving wheelchairs:

Our unit planned to distribute 50 wheelchairs to 50 children with disability for their right to mobility to ensure their right to access to school. I remember very well that a senior of this organisation told me, “Do you think AA is a service delivery organisation? We never provide wheelchairs”. Wheelchairs are materials, but these are to ensure the right to mobility and their access. Because children cannot go to school without it. (Participant 19, AAB staff)

Service delivery and rights are not a black and white thing. When you shift from service delivery to RBA, there are many grey areas between the two. But when you talk about disability programmes, that grey area is huge. There are many things – some call them services, but I’d call them rights. There are many things that I cannot ensure rights [rights realisation] without services. If I give you an example of what I am saying, suppose that we want to give beneficiaries 5,000TK for buying wheelchairs. Is it a service or is it a right? There were some people in AA [saying] that we believed in service delivery. But when we give a wheelchair to a person, it is to increase the person’s mobility and access to education, environment, income, recreation, and other services. That is not a service. It is a right. (Participant 27, Partner NGO staff)

Both participants, one from AAB and the other from a partner NGO, have been told by AAB that providing wheelchairs is not appropriate for the HRBA. But they argue that some services are essential for realising rights. Further, the second participant holds that the
distinction between services and rights is not as clear cut as it sounds. In the above quotes, a wheelchair is valid as an instrument for realising human rights. In that sense, services and human rights can be distinguished: the former is a means and the latter is an end. It is noteworthy here that there is no consensus in AAB about the level of service provision that is acceptable under the HRBA.

In short, AAB went through a transition from a NBA to a HRBA. On this journey, needs were firstly denied were but later incorporated into human rights under the new name of ‘basic rights’ suggested by AAI. The term ‘basic rights’ raises a question of whether needs and human rights are conceptually compatible. However, some participants suggest that from their experience development is not about choosing either service or human rights. The theoretical dichotomy between service and human rights is rejected where both are closely related and needed to assist people to live in dignity.

**Hybrid practices of the HRBA and a NBA**

Following the perceived necessity of meeting some needs in the HRBA, this section discusses an example of combining the HRBA with a NBA. As outlined in Section 7.1.1, most research participants claim the distinctiveness of AAB’s HRBA by contrasting it with microfinance programmes which are seen as a typical example of a NBA. AAB openly criticises microfinance programmes. However, some microfinance components are found in AAB’s programmes. Some partner NGOs even developed a HRBA-inspired microfinance programme.

Microfinance was conceived by local organisations following the bond-based money-lending tradition and it is now widely operated in Bangladesh (Gauri & Galef, 2005). AAB itself operated a microfinance programme in the 1990s but abolished it because of its adverse effects. The following reflection suggests that a microfinance programme hindered AAB in addressing extreme poverty:

*Experience in working with communities for the past 15 years leads us to think we have been unable to reach the poorest of the poor, much as we would have liked to have done. The main reason was that our programme was centred on savings and credit.* (AAB, 1998, p.31)

AAB has stood against microfinance since it stopped providing microcredit itself. Based on
its nation-wide research, AAB strongly criticises microfinance for its high interest, unrealistic timeframe for instalments and marginal impacts, particularly on women’s empowerment (AAB, 2007). As an alternative to microfinance programmes, AAB suggests building people’s organisations, namely ‘self-help groups’:

We started a self-help group, not microfinance, in 2004, probably. It is almost the same. 50,000TK (taka, the currency in Bangladesh) goes to a bank account of the self-help group, not to the partner organisation or implementing organisation…. AA also gives the seed capital. The interest rate is fixed by group participants….They decide where the money goes, when the instalment time should be, and what the interest rate is. These decisions are made by group members, not by organisations. (Participant 11, AAB staff)

We are operating a self-help group. We provide technical support to develop enterprise and to help them earn money. We develop women as entrepreneurs. Women are getting involved in trade and business as entrepreneurs. But we are not charging any interest or any service charge…. This is the basic difference. We are not doing business through self-help groups as micro credit organisations are doing. (Participant 20, Partner NGO staff)

AAB’s self-help groups also provide financial and technical support to lift poor people out of poverty. Unlike profit-making microfinance schemes, self-help groups do not permit NGOs to generate income for themselves. Another difference between self-help groups and microfinance programmes is the extent of participation and autonomy of the local community. Participant 11 explains that key decisions such as the interest rate, the use of pooled money and the instalment plan are made by group members in AAB’s self-help groups. Also, the following AAB document spells out that self-help groups are embedded in the HRBA:

The empowerment of self-help group (SHG) members derives from the concept of Rights that includes three aspects – social, political and economic empowerment. Basically, in the SHG approach, socio-political empowerment is working as an associated force to economic empowerment…Ideologically, the issue of ‘Rights’ is the fundamental difference between traditional micro-credit (MC) and self-help Group (SHG). All over Bangladesh, MC is being operated exclusively as financial intermediation while SHG is being implemented as an empowerment approach for the poor…The initiative of SHG is very much linked to HRBA as the issues of empowerment, solidarity and campaign are part SHG activities. In the case of
empowerment SHGs are operating social mobilising activities following a process of a series of dialogues on different social issues that make poor people aware of their rights. It helps the poor to claim and access their rights at different stages of family and society. And finally, it is contributing to ensure the dignity of the poor. (AAB, 2011b, pp.4-6)

The above statement claims a fit between the HRBA and self-help groups in terms of rights awareness, socio-political empowerment and rights realisation. However, the fit is disputed within AAB. The following participant asserts that self-help groups are not very different from microfinance programmes as both are mainly interested in generating income:

In our self-help group approach, there are conscientisation, awareness and empowerment in a way. They can be mobilised and organised. They can go to the government to claim their rights. But people are more engaged in maximising their money, savings and profits. They are more involved in income generating. So this is the difference. If you give money to community people, they will be very much interested in maximising the savings instead of moving forward to claim their rights from government agencies. So this is the issue…. In an economic sense, empowerment can be done through self-help groups and microcredit, but if you consider the whole process including the policies and practices of the government, you have to have some people-led movements. People have to be mobilised for their rights. If it does not happen, HRBA does not work. (Participant 2, AAB staff)

This participant acknowledges some differences between AAB’s self-help groups and microfinance; however, he regards the differences as marginal. In fact, self-help groups are also widely used by microfinance institutions (Wilson, 2002). The argument above is consistent with AAI’s understanding that self-help groups are led by ‘economic interest among members (i.e. savings and credit)’ (AAI, 2012b, p.59). Whether economic centred activity can be called the HRBA depends on what constitutes the HRBA. As noted in Chapter Two, a HRBA brings about a shift in focus from economic growth to the socio-political dimension of poverty. However, this does not mean excluding all economically framed programmes. Many participants understand this as a matter of extent or ultimate aim, similar to the debate about the boundaries between service and human rights in the previous section. Improving people’s lives in economic terms is not denied, but it is not the primary goal of AAB’s HRBA.
The difference between AAB’s self-help groups and general microfinance created a difficulty for AAB in finding partners. As stated several times throughout this thesis, most Bangladesh-born NGOs are involved in microcredit services. In fact, that is how the majority of local NGOs raise their funds. AAB’s principle of working in partnership with local NGOs is challenged when they do not agree with AAB’s idea about self-help groups:

Some organisations were not willing to work with self-help groups. They were so self-interested. They wanted to keep the money like (names of microfinance providing NGOs in Bangladesh)...It is because that is the source of their own income. (Participant 11, AAB staff)

Because most local NGOs are involved in microfinance, AAB perceives it has no choice but to work with microcredit organisations despite AAB’s strong stance against microfinance. Partnership with these local NGOs is perceived by some AAB staff as a compromise between the values embedded in the HRBA and the reality of the work:

The thing is AA wants to work in remote areas....We strongly want to find some organisations that do not have microcredit or do not believe in microcredit, as it is against our values. But it is very difficult to find such organisations. That is why we compromise our values because of the reality. (Participant 18, AAB staff)

Partnership with organisations providing microfinance also raises the question of whether AAB can tolerate microfinance if some human rights-guided activities are added. Interestingly, some partner NGOs claim their microfinance services have been transformed by the HRBA principles. As stated above, for many partner NGOs microfinance is their only sustainable income and therefore cannot be abandoned. These partner NGOs run their microcredit programmes separately from AAB-funded programmes given AAB’s official opposition to microfinance. Some of them invented a different type of microfinance programme influenced by AAB’s HRBA. Participants from two different partner NGOs provided examples:

Our organisation is doing microcredit, but as we are complying with the RBA, we make our microcredit programme pro-poor...We are trying to make the microcredit with a flavour of the RBA. We are dealing with social issues through microcredit. This is not done by other microcredit organisations, but we do social programmes. Money can supplement education,
savings, health, disaster management system development, climate adaptation, social forestation, increase [of] social capital, leadership development and support for local infrastructure development. This is the basic difference. However, because of funding limitations, we cannot do the self-help group everywhere. (Participant 20, Partner NGO staff)

Now we are also following an integrated social development in microcredit with PKSF (a state-run company to provide funds for microcredit organisations). PKSF is the main funder of microcredit in Bangladesh. We are piloting a project with the PKSF fund following an integrated approach which covers health, sanitation, education, infrastructure development, disaster [relief], climate change, sanitation etc. (Participant 9, Partner NGO staff)

Both of these partner NGOs pool the money generated by microfinance programmes and use it for social development. This is claimed as a hybrid of microfinance and the HRBA. An AAB staff member expresses a disapproval of such programmes:

_We found some contradictions… Sometimes they (partner NGOs) mix it (the HRBA) with their other programmes. For example, they separate self-help groups from microcredit programmes, but they sometimes make members take [form] self-help group for their microcredit program. And they sometimes make [invent] the logic that microcredit also can make sense in the lives of poor people. Sometimes they make their own programmes for microcredit programmes that we [AAB] don’t believe in._ (Participant 2, AAB staff)

As noted earlier, this participant argues that microfinance is not compatible with the HRBA. Partner NGOs’ new programmes are understood as an attempt to retain and justify their microfinance programmes. There is no other data showing AAB’s reaction to partner NGOs’ revised microfinance programmes. What is discernible here is that both AAB and partner NGOs provide financial services in the name of the HRBA while at the same time including a NBA. Providing financial support damages the advantages of the HRBA is debated in AAB.

**Summary**

This section discussed AAB’s rationale for service provision in spite of its understanding of the differences between a HRBA and a NBA. Meeting people’s needs by providing direct services is justified under the name ‘basic rights’, meaning basic needs in rights language. This section described how the concept of ‘basic rights’ is employed in AAB to distinguish its HRBA from a NBA while at the same time including a NBA. Providing financial support
is an example of justified services. Despite AAB’s official stance of being strongly opposed to microfinance, the legacy of microfinance is found in AAB’s alternative programme, ‘self-help groups’. Added to this, partner NGOs have developed their own microfinance programmes that include elements of the HRBA. Some participants present AAB’s self-help groups and partner NGOs’ microfinance programmes as examples of how the HRBA can transform existing programmes. Others doubt whether these modified programmes can be called the HRBA.

This thesis suggests these programmes are ‘hybrid’, following Long (2001) who defines it as ‘a strategic combining of different approaches without internally generated transformation’ (p.91). AAB’s self-help groups and partner NGOs’ microfinance programmes both mix two different approaches, namely a HRBA and a NBA, in a strategic way. This leads to an ongoing debate between the purist approach and the hybrid approach. In theory, a HRBA can transform old practices when it is translated in a purist way. However, in practice, a HRBA is often combined with other approaches because of the contexts. This resonates with the theme of ‘revolution’ and ‘evolution’ in the introduction to this chapter. The data suggests HRBA’s revolutionary aspects discussed in Section 7.1.1 are highly regarded in AAB. However AAB has evolved its own hybrid practices which contain elements of other approaches as explained in Section 7.2.2.

Combining the HRBA with other approaches is not AAB’s optimal choice. Rather it is suggested as something that has ‘evolved’ naturally, given that AAB pursued similar approaches before it introduced a HRBA. In some cases, it is also regarded as a strategic choice for advancing human rights. AAB’s trajectory is related to changes in AAI and AAB’s strategic provision of services recognises the difficulties faced in field work. The next section takes the discussion about contextual consideration further.

7.3. Contexts at play
The previous section identified AAB’s HRBA as distinct from other approaches but inclusive of varied ideas. This section aims to understand the reason for the identified feature in two parts. Firstly, the organisational context of AAI provides an explanation for the existing confusion as to whether a participatory empowerment approach can be regarded as the HRBA. Secondly, an exploration of the national context of Bangladesh
assists in understanding AAB’s service provision, including its financial support.

7.3.1. Organisational context of AAI – a legacy of REFLECT
This section explores how the context of AAI creates confusion in AAB about the HRBA and a participatory empowerment approach in AAB. Participatory and empowering processes were suggested as key components of the HRBA in Section 7.1.1. This raises a question about the relationship between the HRBA and the preceding approach which focused on participation and empowerment.

Most participants suggest the HRBA has elements in common with participatory and empowerment approaches, mentioning REFLECT. Chambers (2008) suggests that participatory rural appraisal (PRA) includes REFLECT, which is characterised as a combination of Freirean ideas and participatory tools (AAI, 1998). REFLECT has represented AAI’s vision of development since 1993, and AAB, as one of the three countries which piloted REFLECT, has led its development and spread (Hossain, 2012). This implies that REFLECT has informed participants’ understanding of participation and empowerment in a specific way. This section explores participants’ perceptions of the relationship between the HRBA and REFLECT in order to understand why some participants equate a participatory approach with the HRBA.

The relation between the HRBA and REFLECT was understood by participants in two ways: REFLECT as a foundational approach to the HRBA and as a methodology for the HRBA. Firstly, participants largely understand the HRBA as an extension of REFLECT. This is related to the fact that an emphasis on participatory process and empowerment emerged earlier than the discourse of a HRBA (Korten, 1990; Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001). However, both participation and empowerment are open to a wide range of interpretations and implications. For example, even the notion of neoliberal development embraces participation to legitimise the activities and to cut costs (Kapoor, 2005; Penderis, 2012). However, in this case study the terms participation and empowerment did not emerge with diverse meanings. This is possibly because REFLECT has shaped the meaning of these words in a specific way. Freire’s theory sits in the radical stream, suggesting critical education for social change (Hossain, 2012; Penderis, 2012). Participation and empowerment in REFLECT have a specific focus on social justice and democratic
processes as does a HRBA. This is why Freire’s work is regarded as ‘one of the precedents for the current rights discourse’ (Harris-Curtis, 2003, pp.559-560).

Secondly, some participants understand REFLECT as a methodology for the HRBA. One participant observes:

*We are doing the RBA through REFLECT.* (Participant 18, AAB staff)

The most mentioned nexus between the HRBA and REFLECT is awareness raising, called ‘conscientisation’ by Freire. REFLECT was regarded as providing a theory and tools for achieving critical awareness, which is essential to the HRBA:

*In HRBA, we usually want to see that people are empowered…In Paulo Freire’s word, conscientisation. People should have some understanding why they are poor, why they are landless and marginalised, [and] who are responsible for that.* (Participant 2, AAB staff)

*HRBA is about conscientisation, making people aware of their rights, making people come up with solutions, making people more innovative, creative, and more active.* (Participant 6, AAB staff)

The key message of conscientisation is enabling people to bring about social change by ‘perceiving the reality of oppression, not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform’ (Freire, 1972 in AAI, 2012b). However, Freirean conscientisation is sometimes criticised as a paternalistic method (Sachs, 2010). It is argued that people are described as objects to be conscientised by professionals, as discernible from the above expressions such as ‘making people aware of’ and ‘people are empowered (by professionals)’. Despite this possible danger of underestimating people’s agency, no conflict is suggested by participants between REFLECT and the HRBA. Rather REFLECT is regarded as a way of applying the principles of empowerment and participation to the HRBA:

*It (AAB) is different with its HRBA. For its work and working process. Some empowerment tools are different from other organisations. We use REFLECT with circle groups, PVA [Participatory Vulnerability Analysis], and some participatory processes.* (Participant 2, AAB staff)
This participant suggests that AAB’s HRBA is different from other NGOs with its methodology widely used in REFLECT. Likewise, the following participant takes it further arguing REFLECT is the best kind of programme to the HRBA:

AA globally established the human rights framework, which has three basic components – empowerment, solidarity and campaign… Through REFLECT process, they are mobilised and organised as well as they are aware of different issues. They are taking actions to solve their problems, which means the whole process is conscientisation process. In Bangladesh, there are more than 200 Reflect circles in different areas, in different issues. They try to pressure the government to change any policy or to enact a specific law. Through this campaigning, this is also solidarity part….We have 47 Reflect circles with disabled people. But other Reflect circles also raise their voices for the rights of persons with disability. It means they are taking part in solidarity part. (Participant 17, AAB staff)

This participant shows how three components of the HRBA established by AAI (AAI, 2012b) – empowerment, solidarity and campaign – can be linked and realised through REFLECT.

In short, AAI’s two-decade commitment to REFLECT was noted by participants as influential in shaping staff members’ understanding of the HRBA. REFLECT is perceived as compatible with the HRBA. Its radical and political ideology has paved the way for the HRBA in AAB and its methodologies have been employed in its HRBA. The discussion so far explains why a participatory and empowerment approach is not distinguished from the HRBA by many participants, most of whom learnt principles such as participation and empowerment from their experience with REFLECT.

7.3.2. Political contexts and NGOs in Bangladesh
This section explores the influence of the national context of Bangladesh on AAB’s decision to provide some services. As outlined in Section 7.2.2, the need for service provision in the framework of the HRBA is agreed by most participants. AAB’s self-help groups and partner NGOs’ revised microfinance programmes are examples of providing financial services employing some principles of the HRBA. This section explores in two parts the contextual factors that influenced the decision to provide services, including
financial services: the political context with a focus on the perception of the government’s performance; and the NGO context characterised by the prevalence of microfinance.

**Inability of the government to meet basic needs**

In relation to the political context, AAI permits service delivery only when the state cannot do it, as clearly stated below:

*We should only deliver services when the state is incapable of providing them and we should never provide them in such a way that the state is allowed to shirk its responsibilities as a duty holder or divert its resources away from fulfilling the rights of people or community we work with. In other words, we should never duplicate, displace or replace the state, but supplement it, when necessary.* (AAI 2008, p.6)

In line with the above guidelines, AAB provides services where the government fails to take responsibility for people living in extreme poverty. Participants showed two different reactions to the inability of the government. The majority find it difficult to trust the government. Corruption is the main reason:

*There are corruptions. There is lack of good governance. So people who are eligible to get it (service) from the government are deprived due to the corruption and due to the lack of transparency in the mechanism.* (Participant 2, AAB staff)

Another participant suggests more fundamental limitation of the government:

*Who form the government? The political parties. Who form the parties? Those who have better access [to resources and power] and influences on others…Who are influential? Nowadays those who have money, like businessmen, are transforming politicians and forming the government, and they are leading us. We believe that this government, this corrupt one, is going to protect our lives. But how come? Isn’t that funny?* (Participant 4, AAB staff)

According to this participant, it is nonsense to expect the government, which consists of powerful people who have no concern for powerless people, to work for the poor. Some participants, including the above participant, had no expectations of the government. Their perception leads them to pressure the government in confrontational ways and to support
AAB’s involvement in service delivery. The same participant holds that the HRBA should include the provision of services the government is not capable of providing:

*Without services, local people have no alternative.* (Participant 4, AAB staff)

While some participants showed deep distrust of the government, other participants suggested the government lacks financial and human resources, not willingness:

*Considering limitation of resource allocation, manpower and institutional development, the government is not concerning about this issue. The government has limitations.* (Participant 25, Partner NGO staff)

*Maybe the state does not have the resources or do not have the capacity to distribute the resources…The government always has the will…Maybe there are not right people who can do it. Maybe they do not know how to do it. The state is too big, so the government cannot supply everything to so many people.* (Participant 6, AAB staff)

Based on this perception, NGOs are expected to strengthen the capacities of the government and to provide alternatives:

*NGOs try to complement the government with suggestions from poor people’s perspectives…If you can provide the government with a model or a process, that helps the government to make the best use of money. So you are not going to the government with only problem, also [with] kind of alternatives.* (Participant 6, AAB staff)

As suggested above, AAB prefers a complementary approach to a confrontational approach in order to make the government take more responsibility. This is consistent with the literature which suggests a strategic approach is needed to avoid a counterproductive relationship with the government and to bring about greater change to the lives of poor people (Hickey & Mitlin, 2009). AAI also confirms the need to be strategic:

*Often a positive strategic relationship with government is needed to influence their thinking, to promote innovation, to obtain information, to help government strengthen its delivery capacity, or to enhance accountability systems.* (AAI, 2012b, p.37)
In AAB, service provision is understood as a strategic and pragmatic way of making the government more accountable for, and more capable of, human rights protection. The following participant notes AAB’s HRBA also improves the government’s service delivery:

_Actually the government is showing a positive reaction toward the RBA. When the government wants to provide service, it is not possible to provide service person to person. It becomes much easier when they can access a group of people. It is possible in a RBA, as the RBA organises people’s platforms like REFLECT circles or self-help groups. So they can easily access people and they can provide services. In RBA, the government can easily access people, especially responsible people, who become aware and who can express their needs, who can question, and who can provide logic. So the government has access to right-sensitive and educated people._ (Participant 20, Partner NGO staff)

Not only AAB’s service model but also its conscientisation and mobilisation are described as a way of supporting the government in fulfilling its responsibility to provide social services. As a result, the relationship between the government and AAB is described as productive by this participant.

This section has explored the reason for AAB’s service delivery focusing on the failure of the government. Discussion revealed two different perceptions of the reasons for the inability of the government. One is a lack of willingness and the other is a lack of resources and capacities. But all agree that AAB should be involved in service provision because in Bangladesh basic needs are largely unmet by the government. AAB’s services are suggested as an alternative, or as complementary to, government services. Participants understand AAB’s service provision as strategic intervention, which, while not conventional in a HRBA, is useful in the context of Bangladesh. Consistent with the literature outlined in Section 1.5, the research data suggests that NGOs having a confrontational approach to, and adversarial relationship with, the government is unlikely to advance human rights or to change the lives of people in Bangladesh.

**NGO context of Bangladesh**

Moving to the second national factor in AAB’s HRBA, the data suggests the considerable influence of Bangladesh-born NGOs, most of which provide microfinance:
Sometimes, it (microfinance NGO) affects our work when we are working here and other communities of the same district are participating in microcredit. So they (community people) are used to think that if an NGO comes then they will get money or a loan. This is the perception and their understanding. But we work in HRBA. When we intervene in community, they ask, “Oh, will you give a loan to us? How much is the instalment rate?” So it takes time to make them understand that this (HRBA) is another approach and how it will fit with the community. (Participant 5, AAB staff)

This statement suggests that people’s expectation of NGO activities was built on their experience with microfinance providers. People in local communities expect tangible material assistance from AAB. However, a HBRA is embedded in a different ideology as discussed in Sections 2.2.2 and 7.2.1 and described by the above participant as ‘another approach’. This participant’s experience presents difficulties when a HRBA competes with a differently oriented approach. This is consistent with the literature which suggests that a HRBA is comparatively weak in Bangladesh where most NGOs provide microfinance (Banerjee, 2005).

However, participants noted that when community people learn by experience about a HRBA and microfinance, they express a preference for a HRBA. One participant from a partner NGO observes:

Microcredit people try to dissolve self-help groups with a help of other community people, as their activities go through difficulties…There was conflict between self-help group members and microcredit staff. They were trying to influence group members to take microcredit. But our programme participants are not taking any loan from these organisations which implement microcredit…Due to our self-help group activities, microcredit programmes are almost closed. It is because people are aware that microcredit providers are doing business with them. So, there is no organisation that does micro credit in our working area because of self-help group. They do know that they have options like self-help group. Why do they go to microcredit NGOs? (Participant 20, Partner NGO staff)

This participant suggests people do not choose a microfinance service when there is an alternative. AAB’s self-help groups are such an alternative. The initial indifference of the local communities to AAB’s work evolved into a preference for its HRBA. This might be because AAB’s self-help groups mix a HRBA and financial services. In AAB’s self-help
groups, human rights principles assure ethical implementation unlike some business-like microfinance organisations, and financial services meet people’s urgent needs which are not prioritised in a HRBA.

The proliferation of microfinance NGOs is influential in another way. As outlined in Section 7.2.2, AAB has difficulty in finding local partners to work with:

*Most NGOs are doing microcredit programmes. We found that all (six local NGOs, candidates for partnership) are using this approach, microcredit. But in terms of how much they are involved in microcredit and how much they are experienced in HRBA or RBA, we found two organisations [suitable for partnership]. (Participant 2, AAB staff)*

As shown above, it is challenging for AAB to find like-minded partners amid the proliferation of microfinance NGOs. In Section 7.2.2, this participant took a purist position to the HRBA and strongly criticised self-help groups. Interestingly, the above statement shows the participant’s understanding that implementing either a microfinance approach or a HRBA is a matter of degree. Such an understanding can be related to the context in which development approaches are not translated in a purist manner.

In short, the NGO context in Bangladesh makes it challenging for AAB to implement its HRBA. The prevalent microfinance programmes build people’s expectations of material support and risks compromising the essence of the HRBA when partnering with local NGOs that provide microfinance services. Some AAB and partner NGO staff find this context provides an opportunity to present how the HRBA can transform the conventional microfinance programme. The HRBA’s transformability is based on its revolutionary features. However, at the same time changes in microfinance, such as improvement by partner NGOs and the termination of some microfinance programmes, occurred when the HRBA evolved out of financial services.

**7.4. The agency of NGO workers at play**

AAB’s practices are identified in Section 7.2 as distinct from but overlapping with a participatory approach and a needs-based approach. This section explores what blurs the boundaries between these approaches in light of the agency of NGO workers. The
previous section suggested contextual factors: a close link between the HRBA and AAB’s participatory approach through REFLECT, the government’s inability to provide services and the prevalence of local NGOs providing microfinance. These contexts also influence NGO workers.

As outlined in Chapter Five, NGO workers’ values, beliefs and capacities are suggested as relevant to an understanding of their agency. This section examines how their values, beliefs and capacities shaped AAB’s HRBA into an approach that overlaps with other approaches to development. In the first section, the fact that some participants equate a participatory approach with the HRBA is explained by their valuing participation as REFLECT practitioners. The next section suggests partner NGO workers develop hybrid practices of the HRBA and microfinance as a way of compromising their beliefs in the HRBA and financial restrictions.

7.4.1. Values as REFLECT practitioners

It was earlier noted that some participants, mostly from partner NGOs, emphasise participatory and empowering processes as the most significant feature of the HRBA and do not distinguish REFLECT from the HRBA. AAB’s commitment to REFLECT in the 1990s is the reason. At least five participants from partner NGOs started their career in a REFLECT circle as a participant, a facilitator or a trainer. One of them stated:

*I joined in AA’s project in 2002. I started work as a REFLECT trainer. In REFLECT, my work was to ensure empowerment of people through building people’s awareness of rights, claiming rights, making duty bearers accountable. (Participant 21, Partner NGO staff)*

This participant identified himself as a REFLECT practitioner and being a REFLECT practitioner means valuing people’s participation and empowerment. This participant puts empowerment first, suggesting rights awareness and rights claiming as a way to empowerment. This is different from AAB’s view that REFLECT assists people’s empowerment to have awareness of rights and a voice for claiming them.

For partner NGO workers who see themselves as REFLECT practitioners, participation and empowerment are the most important moral imperatives. As these two are emphasised in the HRBA, these workers do not distinguish the HRBA from REFLECT.
7.4.2. Clashes between belief in the HRBA and available financial resources

The choice of development discourse by NGO staff is greatly influenced by the organisation they work for. This is apparent in the case of partner NGOs’ hybrid programmes of the HRBA and microfinance. With the exception of three workers every partner NGO worker was introduced to the HRBA through partnership with AAB:

As we work under AA’s fund, this project is in the RBA. That is how we know about the RBA. (Participant 15, Partner NGO staff)

The HRBA was introduced to partner NGO staff through funding relations. When partner NGOs take the funds from AAB, they are required to learn and follow the principles of the HRBA. It implies that partner NGO workers are subject to the approach taken by donor agencies. By the same token, partner NGO’s practicing the HRBA can be hampered by receiving funds from organisations which are oriented differently. And most partner NGOs have multiple donors in addition to AAB. As discussed in Chapter Five, all partner NGO staff showed a strong preference for the HRBA over other approaches based on their experience. However, their practices are decided by the demands of diverse donors. One practitioner from a partner NGO stated:

When other organisations fund our project, they give us some instructions like objectives, targets and activities. And we are bound to follow such an instruction…As an employee of an NGO, I don’t have anything to do. It is because everything is already designed by donors and donors’ proposals. It is not possible to implement or add some activities as we want. Never. Donor organisations expect us to play a role just as planned. But I know we need to work much more if we intend to do the RBA. But donors do not allow that. (Participant 25, Partner NGO staff)

The above statement suggests that personal agency is confined by the organisation. This participant’s commitment to the HRBA is restrained by conflicting demands of donors with a different orientation. Such a clash between the HRBA and other approaches that an individual worker experiences also exist within partner NGOs, where some workers are influenced by the HRBA and others are not. A participant reacted to this division within the organisation as follows:
We sensitise our colleagues who are working with other donors. We invite them to our training or workshop on rights. That makes them aware of RBA. We try to influence them to practise it at field level. (Participant 22, Partner NGO staff)

This participant outlines their efforts to sell the HRBA to colleagues. Possibly as a result of such efforts, this organisation took up a HRBA as an overarching approach for the whole organisation:

(The name of NGO the participant work for) was not a rights-based organisation. After working with AA, it has become a rights-based organisation. We agreed to adopt the RBA as our implementing approach at grassroots level. (Participant 22, Partner NGO staff)

As shown in the example of this NGO, some partner NGO workers exert significant influence to move their NGOs toward a HRBA. In Chapter 5, some participants from AAB are concerned that partner NGO workers lack the understanding, commitment and skills required of a rights-based practitioner. By contrast, this section suggests partner NGO staff are in fact more committed to a HRBA than appreciated by some AAB staff.

Microfinance illustrates this point. In earlier sections, partner NGOs are criticised for misusing the HRBA to maintain their microfinance programmes. However, the data suggests that most partner NGO staff are as strongly opposed to microfinance programmes as AAB staff. Some of them report negative aspects of microfinance as follows:

I have a bitter experience about micro credit. I got shocked by the way micro credit is run in our country…The bank is getting 40-43% benefit [interest]. (Participant 14, Partner NGO staff)

Basically micro credit is operated as a business. They have high interest rates and high service charges. So they are doing their business. Poor people can have access to credit, but they cannot change their economic situation as the interest rate is very high. In order to refund the loan, they get another loan. This is how they got involved in the vicious circle of micro credit. (Participant 20, Partner NGO staff)

In my personal experience, I observed and I also took part in research on microcredit, that
Microcredit has done tremendous work for participants, but only for show and display. It did not surely achieve actual development and outcomes for women. Money only cannot change women’s lives. (Participant 10, Partner NGO staff)

It is noteworthy that expressions such as ‘bitter experience’, ‘business’ and ‘show’ that are based on their field experiences are emotionally charged.

However, most partner NGOs are not self-sufficient and microfinance remains their primary income source. This limits the options available to partner NGO staff. As discussed in Section 7.2.2, most partner NGOs choose to operate a microfinance programme apart from the rights-based programme funded by AAB. Some workers from partner NGOs try to integrate two different approaches by bolstering their microfinance programme with some HRBA principles.

This section has noted that partner NGO workers become believers in the HRBA through partnership with AAB. However, the limited options for income lead them to continue a microfinance programme. Some partner NGO workers suggest that their HRBA-influenced microfinance is a result of rationalising their beliefs in the HRBA with their limited financial capacity.

7.5. Conclusion

This chapter has explored the seeming contradiction between revolutionary interpretation of the HRBA and evolutionary field practices overlapping with other approaches. For example, some practitioners equate the HRBA with a participatory empowerment approach, and even combine it with microfinance programmes which are strongly opposed by AAB. A case study of AAI concludes this as an incomplete transition from preceding approaches to a HRBA (Gready, 2013). This research suggests this results from encounters between the HRBA and the contexts in which operates.

Data shows that most research participants perceive a HRBA as revolutionary with transformative and distinctive ideas, when compared to a NBA. However, the extent to which a HRBA is distinct from the principles of participation and empowerment is not clear. Confusion over the HRBA and participatory approaches was observed by participants,
particularly partner NGO workers. This was explained by AAI’s history of working on a radical notion of participatory approach called REFLECT. Its understanding of participation and empowerment is close to the HRBA and its tools are perceived by participants as useful for translating the HRBA into practice. Hence, REFLECT still remains in AAB, partly combined with the HRBA. This is an accidental blending of the HRBA with a participatory empowerment approach because of the organisational context.

AAB’s HRBA is also intentionally blended with a NBA. AAB provides services because of the national contexts, despite AAB’s argument that the HRBA and a NBA are inconsistent approaches. Meeting basic needs is acknowledged as necessary for rights realisation, particularly in the context of Bangladesh where basic needs are not met by the state, which, in turn, hampers the claiming of rights. Moreover, Bangladesh is dominated by NGOs which reach the poor by providing financial services. AAB established self-help groups as an alternative to microfinance to minimise its negative impacts in Bangladesh. Partner NGOs create new types of microcredit programmes by incorporating some elements of the HRBA. Some participants question whether these programmes are compatible with the HRBA which emerged as part of rejecting the economic focus of dominant discourses. Disputed opinions on these programmes leave questions about which services can be provided in the framework of the HRBA.

This thesis identified that AAB’s HRBA is combined with other approaches, sometimes accidentally and sometimes deliberately. Regardless of how they come about, these hybrid practices cause confusion and tension in AAB. The following two quotes are representative. Both call the HRBA ‘a flexible approach’ but regard it in a different way. One states:

As it (HRBA) is so flexible, you and I can never do the same thing. You and I might want to go to the same place. But we might not end up with going to the same place. So that is also a problem. (Participant 8, AAB staff)

This participant thinks flexibility, which allows diverse interpretations, hinders consistent practices. To the other participant, flexibility should be encouraged:

It (HRBA) is not just coming out of the air. It is not saying that this is HRBA and it is totally
different. It is not about difference, about how it evolved. Evolution of the concepts of HRBA....

HRBA encompasses all. It is not about either or. It is about how comprehensive and how flexible this approach is. (Participant 6, AAB staff)

This participant ascribes the HRBA’s flexible applicability to its evolving nature for betterment. To this participant, desirable features of other approaches are distilled into so-called HRBA components. The different views between Participants 8 and 6 resonate with the themes of this chapter – tensions between understanding of the HRBA as a revolution and an evolution and between purist application and hybrid application of the HRBA. Participant 8 understands the HRBA as revolutionary ideas which need to be translated in a purist way, while Participant 6 suggests it has evolved from precedent discourses as suggested by hybrid practices. Some hybrid programmes build on non-HRBA programmes to bring out revolutionary changes to them and to tailor the HRBA to the contexts. The contexts are suggested to promote alternative ideas of practitioners rather than compromise the principles of the HRBA.

This chapter and Chapters Five and Six presented the features of AAB’s HRBA and identified contextual factors and the role of practitioners in those features. The following chapter provides theoretical explanations for the process of how AAB’s HRBA is shaped.
Chapter 8  Theorising the Interplay between Discourse and Agency within an NGO

The framing is very important how we frame our issues and how we frame ourselves to audiences. It is very important. (Participant 6, AAB Staff)

8.1. Introduction

Chapters Five, Six and Seven explored how the human rights-based approach (HRBA) of ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB) was shaped to fit its organisational and national contexts and how NGO workers influenced this shaping process. This chapter focuses on explaining research findings, responding to the second research question: ‘How can the contextualisation process be theorised?’ Theorisation involves two activities: accounting for the research results involving existing theories, that is, a theory-testing exercise, and developing new ideas to make sense of some generated concepts and their relations, that is, a theory-building exercise.

As discussed in Chapter Three, this research is mainly informed by discourse and agency theories. System and organisation theories provide a view on the interaction between an NGO and its contexts. Organisational learning theories are later added to clarify the changes in the HRBA. Looking at the HRBA in AAB through these theoretical lenses clarifies the research focus and takes it beyond a descriptive case study of an NGO.

This chapter consists of three sections: one relates to theory testing, another to theory building and the third to synthesis. More particularly, the first section discusses the research findings in relation to theories on discourse, agency and organisational learning; the second section suggests data-driven knowledge pertaining to knowledge transfer and creation with a focus on the agency of individual NGO staff; the third puts all this together both theory-informed and data-generated knowledge and builds a model which offers an explanation for the contextualisation process of a development discourse.
8.2. Exploring the findings with existing theories

This study is mainly located in the scholarship of discourse and agency. The structure versus agency debate has a long history. However, the relation between discourse and agency has rarely been discussed. One of the exceptions is Bleiker (2003), who holds the usefulness of one for understanding the other. This thesis reconciles discourse and agency. As outlined in Chapter Three, each theory on discourse and agency sits in social constructionism and constructivism respectively. Use of both theories is possible as both are common in terms of epistemology, denying the structuralist view (Jary & Bryant, 1991; Schirato et al., 2012).

This section examines the HRBA from the perspective of both discourse and agency in order to articulate intersections. In examining the HRBA, the focus is given to the shaping process – any changes, change drivers and justification for change.

In addition to theories on discourse and agency, some organisational theories assist in understanding this shaping process. As outlined in Chapter Three, this research looks at the interaction between contexts and an NGO, referring to system and organisational theories. This research focuses on the agency of NGO workers, which entails considering the organisational setting that determines the extent of the agency exercised by NGO workers (Sewell, 1992). In particular, organisational learning theories, a sub-discipline of organisational theories, provide a useful framework to explain the discourse use and reproduction by NGO workers. They also assist in clarifying the internal process of knowledge sharing and transformation.

8.2.1. Examination of AAB’s HRBA through discourse theories

Looking at a HRBA as a development discourse involves ‘knowledge and power’ from Foucault’s (1978) perspective. The meaning of knowledge and power needs to be articulated first in order to clarify concepts referred to in this thesis. With regard to ‘knowledge’, Foucault focuses on discursive practices (Foucault, 1972), while the development community generally use the term to mean information (Alsop, 2005). Foucaudian power is also different from traditional concepts of power. Power is not possessed but exercised, and not necessarily oppressively but possibly productively
Following Foucault’s concept of knowledge and power, this section examines how discourse of a HRBA is interwoven with knowledge and power which influence each other (McHoul & Grace, 1993).

Firstly, the spread of the HRBA can be explained by power. As stated previously, ‘the’ HRBA means AAB’s product flowing from a contextualisation of a HRBA discourse. As discussed in Chapter Five, most interview participants learned the HRBA when they started working for AAB as staff members or partners. This suggests that endorsing and disseminating knowledge about the HRBA involves discursive power, which is exercised through disciplining in the form of staffing, training and partnering. Not every AAB worker knew that AAB was working in the framework of the HRBA before they joined AAB. But generally those who chose to be an ActionAider did so because of its HRBA. Either way, AAB staff interviewed were found to have a strong commitment to the HRBA after joining AAB.

In the case of partner NGOs, their work in the HRBA can be understood as the result of funding relations. Some previous studies conclude that donors impose their discourse on Southern NGOs by tying it to funds (Tvedt, 1998; Parpart et al., 2002). However, the data also suggest that individual workers do not regard their experience of learning about the HRBA as an imposition. They perceive themselves as HRBA supporters of their own accord. This shows the productive power of a discourse, which shapes people’s values and practices (Schirato et al., 2012). In this way, the process of widening the circle of the HRBA accords with Foucault’s idea of power which is pervasive, relational and productive.

Secondly, reported conflicts with microfinance programmes present a competition for recognition between differently oriented discourses. As discussed in Chapter Seven, the HRBA and microfinance compete as legitimate practice in eradicating poverty and being accepted by local communities. As a result of this discourse competition, microfinance programmes were terminated in some communities where AAB works. This phenomena can be explained as ‘coexistence and disappearance of’ a discourse (Foucault, 1972, p.38), when plural discourses exist. In other words, discursive practices of the HRBA are greatly influenced by the existence of competing discourses.
In summary, the discourse literature provides an explanation for the diffusion of the HRBA in AAB and its partner NGOs and for competition between the HRBA and microfinance programmes. Concepts of ‘knowledge and power’ are useful for making sense of these findings.

8.2.2. Examination of AAB’s HRBA through agency theories
The concept of ‘agency’ suggests the possibility of reconstruction of the HRBA. As outlined in Chapter Two, Long (1992) understands plurality and changes of discourses through the concept of agency. This understanding can be applied to AAB. It develops its own interpretations and implementations of a HRBA differently from AAI and other development NGOs. Further, the observed diversity among interview participants is attributed to their individual agency shaped by their contexts.

AAB’s development of its own HRBA is aimed at getting a better fit between its HRBA and its contexts. This is possible by Giddens’s idea of agency, being situated and being capable of making a difference (1984). Individual workers understand and contextualise a HRBA based on their understanding of those contexts. While Giddens neglects ‘intention’, the data shows that the willingness and motivation of participants is significant in their contextualisation. As noted in Chapter Five, what one values and pursues should be counted as agency in accordance with other agency-related studies (Sen, 1985; Alsop et al., 2006).

In short, this research highlights the active disposition which can bring changes to discourses in line with Giddens’s idea of ‘agency’. In Chapters Five, Six and Seven, the agency of NGO workers was analysed using the components suggested by Sen (1985): what one values and what one can do, including available options. Each component of agency was understood as constructed by discourses and contexts, as suggested by theories on discourse and agency.

8.2.3. Examination of AAB’s HRBA through organisational learning theories
Organisational learning theories offer ways of understanding how knowledge about the HRBA is produced, used and transformed within AAB. Organisational learning is defined as ‘a process of developing new knowledge that changes an organisation’s behaviour to
improve future performance’ (Garvin, 1993 in Power et al., 2002). As the theories have their origin in the profit sector which is different from development NGOs in many ways, the fit has been questioned (Power et al., 2002; Roper & Pettit, 2002). However, development NGOs, including AAB, have claimed they are learning organisations on the basis of their general belief in learning and change (Roper & Pettit, 2002) and on the basis of the acknowledged importance of learning for aid effectiveness and organisational survival (Edwards, 1997).

The organisational learning literature offers various concepts: tacit and explicit knowledge (Polanyi, 1966), single-loop and double-loop learning (Argyris, 1976), knowledge creation modes of socialisation, internalisation, combination and externalisation (Nonaka, 1994), expert and everyday knowledge (Long, 2001), cognition models of information-process approach, situated-practice approach and cultural-historical approach (Lorenz, 2001). These theories clarify the nature of knowledge and the ways in which knowledge is transferred and created. Drawing on these theories, this thesis looks at knowledge through the following dimensions: tacit and explicit knowledge; individual and organisational knowledge; and formal and informal knowledge transfer.

One of the main findings of this study is that NGO workers shape the HRBA with their context-relevant knowledge. Borrowing terms from Polanyi (1966), this finding can be interpreted as conversion of tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge. However, how tacit knowledge is codified as explicit knowledge is under-researched in organisational theories (Nonaka, 1994). This thesis theorises, later in Section 8.3.2, that the process of knowledge transfer from tacit to explicit knowledge involves another dimension of individual and organisational knowledge. With regard to knowledge transfer, how the HRBA is shared among AAB staff and partner NGO staff can be explained by the ‘internalisation’ of explicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994) through ‘socially produced tools and artefacts’ (Lorenz, 2001, pp.318, 325). For example, in this case study, AAB’s mechanisms such as apprenticeships, training and guidelines are identified as significant for transferring knowledge about the HRBA. Through these organisational mechanisms, NGO workers internalise the HRBA.

In contrast to this formal transfer, the concept of ‘situated learning in communities of practice’ (Lave, 1988; Suchman, 1987 in Lorenz, 2001, p.314), meaning knowledge
transfer in an informal group of shared practice, is useful in making sense of how AAB staff share knowledge which is not codified by AAI. As described in Chapter Six, some context-specific knowledge is circulated by casual conversation among staff members. Drawing attention to the importance of this informal method of knowledge transfer and creation, Section 8.3 builds an explanation for the process of contextualisation.

To summarise, organisational learning theories offer analytical concepts for knowledge types and knowledge management. These concepts are applied to this research in the following ways: context-related knowledge is regarded as ‘tacit knowledge’ in contrast to discourse-related knowledge as ‘explicit knowledge’; individual familiarisation of the HRBA is conceptualised as ‘internalisation’; organisational learning takes places in both formal and informal ways, articulated as ‘institutional tools’ and ‘communities of practice’ in the theories. While these organisational theories suggest an organisation as a subject of knowledge management, this thesis focuses on individual agency. In other words, this thesis is not about an organisation’s learning, but about individuals’ learning within an organisation. Another difference is the meaning of ‘learning’. While ‘learning’ in organisational theories conventionally refers to knowledge gain, the focus on discourse shaping in thesis expands its meaning to knowledge creation. Section 8.3.2 further develops these ideas about learning.

8.2.4. Linking theories on discourse, agency and organisational learning
The theories on discourse and agency shed light on knowledge production and transfer from different perspectives. Theory on organisational learning assists in understanding how an organisation institutionalises knowledge. As depicted in Figure 8.1. below, these theories can be related.
Figure 8.1 illustrates that this thesis draws on three bodies of knowledge. Employment of these different theories is possible because of some common concepts as portrayed in the intersections of the circles above. As discussed in Sections 8.2.1 and 8.2.2, theories on discourse and agency focus on knowledge and power from different angles. Context is also regarded in both theories as ‘the conditions of existence of a discourse’ (Foucault, 1972, p.38) and as ‘the structures and social systems which enable and restrain agents (Giddens, 1984). In relation to organisational learning theories, explicit knowledge transferred by formal mechanisms corresponds to discourse, and tacit knowledge earned from individual experience is relevant to agency. Likewise, some common ideas, although named and conceptualised differently, make it possible to link different theories. The focus of this research also lies in the intersection of agency and discourse in an organisational setting. Some missing links, such as the influences of tacit knowledge on discourse and power issues in recognition of knowledge, will be filled by data-driven knowledge, which is discussed in the following section.
8.3. Theorising the findings with ideas informed by data

The previous section discussed how findings can be interpreted and understood using existing theories. This section theorises some findings with knowledge derived from data. This data-generated knowledge can inform what influences participants’ understanding of and commitment to a HRBA and how implicit knowledge contributes to an increased fit between a HRBA and the contexts. The former is conceptualised as ‘internalisation’, and the latter as ‘contextualisation’. These two ideas are related. The first idea discusses the varied understanding of participants of a HRBA and their commitment to a HRBA. This leads to the second part, which illustrates participants’ interests in and contribution to contextualisation of a HRBA. This knowledge assists in addressing the following question: ‘How are NGO workers influenced by a HRBA and contexts, and how do they influence contextualisation of a HRBA?’ This third sub-question of Research Question 1 is designed to examine the agency of NGO workers.

As discussed in the earlier section, some literature argues the importance of individual human agency including tacit knowledge. However, its contribution to discourse construction, the latter part of the above research question, is under researched. Nonaka (1994) suggests this is related to the nature of tacit knowledge, which is difficult to articulate. On the other hand, Long (2001) points out that focusing on agency, such as individuals’ rationale and voluntaristic choice, often ignores the contexts which shape agency. This research focuses on the interaction between discourse, agency and contexts. This focus makes tacit knowledge more researchable by confining it to context-related knowledge. Overcoming the limitation of agency-focused studies, this research explores the agency of NGO workers in relation to contexts and discourse.

8.3.1. Internalisation of a HRBA
The first data-generated knowledge describes how individual workers internalise a HRBA. Interview participants showed various degrees of understanding of and commitment to a HRBA. Overall, the data reveals a consistency in the understanding of a HRBA between AAB staff and partner NGO workers, despite the varying degrees of articulation. However, variation in terms of integration and commitment to the HRBA, which this thesis named ‘internalisation’, was observed.
As presupposed in the sampling criteria based on previous studies, the diversity appears to be related to whether a participant works for AAB or a partner NGO, and whether their main job is programme implementation or administrative work. AAB staff generally showed a deeper understanding of and reflection on the HRBA than partner NGO staff. Data suggests that programme staff are more comfortable with internalising the principles of the HRBA than administrative staff. However, positions held do not yield noticeable differences, contrary to the assumption applied in the sampling criteria.

What is new here is the different commitment of administrative workers who have ever worked in local communities; and of female staff. In an attempt to explain these identified differences in terms of internalisation, this thesis suggests two concepts; ‘distance from the source of discourse diffusion’ and ‘distance from people who they work for’. These two concepts are discussed below.

**Distance from the diffusion source of the HRBA**

Data suggests that AAB workers are more exposed to the HRBA and therefore have greater opportunities to learn the discourse formally and informally than partner NGO workers. The mechanisms of disseminating knowledge about the HRBA are reference materials, training and informal discussion.

As noted in Chapters Six and Seven, AAI’s handbook (2012), which was waiting for finalisation at the time of interviews, is the key reference for clarifying concepts and tools of the HRBA. This English language handbook is lengthy and not easy to comprehend. This means lower accessibility for partner NGO workers, as they are generally not confident in English. With difficulty in gaining knowledge from English-written materials, training and workshops appear to be the principal ways that partner NGO workers obtain knowledge of the HRBA. Most participants from partner NGOs expressed satisfaction with training and workshops organised by AAB. However, in terms of frequency and intensity, AAB workers enjoy far more opportunities to learn the HRBA than partner NGO workers. In most cases, AAB staff who took part in AAI-organised training provide the same training to some AAB colleagues who, in turn, play a role in training partner NGO workers. The
nature of this cascade training\(^{22}\) may yield some limitations in knowledge transfer. Partner NGO workers are not able to gain knowledge to the same extent as AAB workers who receive it at an earlier point in the knowledge transfer chain.

Additionally, AAB workers have a greater opportunity to learn the HRBA informally. The existence of knowledgeable staff and a debate culture promotes mutual learning within AAB. The understanding of the difference between RBA and HRBA, discussed in Chapter Six as one of the key features of AAB’s HRBA, illustrates how knowledge is shared through informal discussion. This informal knowledge transfer will be further discussed in Section 8.3.2.

In short, AAB staff members are generally closer to the HRBA with more opportunities to learn and discuss it than partner NGO staff. In other words, the shorter distance from the sources of HRBA diffusion assists AAB staff to have a better understanding of it.

*Distance from marginalised people*

Participants who work in implementing and supporting programmes show a higher internalisation of a HRBA than administrative staff. Although most participants experienced their transformative changes in values and attitude by learning a HRBA, some administrative workers denied its applicability and even its relevance to their work, as discussed in Chapter Five. This is mainly because a HRBA is regarded by administrative staff as an approach to development programmes, not to overall organisational practices. This perception is the result of AAB not providing its administrative staff with any training on a HRBA. The first workshop for such staff was held during my field work in 2012. As a result, a HRBA is not integrated into the work of administrative staff, despite their acknowledgement of the value of a HRBA.

The fact that administrative workers are less familiar with a HRBA than programme workers is consistent with a previous study (Scott-Villiers, 2002). However, a new finding of this research is that field experience, even if only brief, can enhance the commitment of administrative workers to a HRBA. Administrative workers who have closely worked with

\(^{22}\)An individual who got the training provides in turn the same training to others. Cascade training is often used for institutionalisation of a certain change (Jacobs, 2001)
impoverished people tend to accept the relevance of a HRBA to their administrative work. On the other hand, administrative staff without field experience tend to think of people as abstract and collective. This links to another concept, ‘distance from people who they work for’. This concept explains the different degree of understanding of and commitment to a HRBA in three ways: 1) programme staff have a greater understanding and commitment than administrative staff; 2) administrative workers from partner NGOs than ones from AAB; 3) and some AAB administrative staff with field experience than others without such experience.

Further, this concept can be applied to the difference between male and female staff, particularly in AAB. As Chapter Five noted, AAB staff generally come from the middle or upper levels of Bangladesh society in terms of education, wealth and social recognition. This can create a distance from the people who they work for. Despite their relatively high status, female staff are just as vulnerable as other women in a male dominated society like Bangladesh, particularly in their private lives. As described in Chapter Five, such a lived experience of vulnerability as a woman narrows the distance between female workers and the people for whom they fight. This narrowed distance means some female workers are commitment to a HRBA. This is not observed in male staff. Female workers’ commitment to a HRBA is often based on their experiences in the place of the marginalised.

**Relationship between the two concepts**

To put together the two concepts discussed earlier, the internalisation of a HRBA is influenced by the distance from the discourse of a HRBA and from grassroots people. These two types of distance are represented as the horizontal axis and the vertical axis in Figure 8.2. As depicted, participants were categorised into three groups by the relative position decided by the two axes:

1) AAB programme staff who are closer to the discourse of a HRBA than AAB administrative workers and partner NGO workers. In terms of the distance from grassroots people, they are generally located in the middle between partner NGO workers and AAB administrative workers.

2) AAB administrative workers who are far from both discourse and field practices. Some experience in the field can explain a variance with the distance from marginalised people.
3) Partner NGO workers, whether programme staff or administrative staff, who closely work with community people but who are scattered in terms of distance from a HRBA.

In Figure 8.2, the cross-line suggests that the degree of internalisation of a HRBA is decided by the distances from a HRBA and from the grassroots people targeted by the HRBA. As the line points, closer positioning to the intersection of the axes means greater internalisation of the HRBA. This knowledge suggests that provision of opportunities to learn a HRBA and to experience the field programmes can enhance staff’s internalisation of a HRBA. Although not captured in Figure 8.2, this knowledge is also supported by the experience of female workers who share the vulnerability with other women. Their gender-related deprivation explains the closeness to rights holders and the consequent attachment to the values of a HRBA.

8.3.2. Contextualisation of a HRBA
The second finding to theorise is the significance of individual knowledge for changes in a HRBA. Knowledge generated from the empirical material specifies the change as contextualisation and suggests individual workers’ context-related implicit knowledge is the key to contextualisation. The following sections offer the details of this knowledge, discussing differences from existing knowledge.
Changes to contextualise a HRBA

This research produces knowledge about the process of increasing the fit of a HRBA with contexts. Some scholars call this process ‘localisation’, which originated from economics and is now used in various academic disciplines (Robertson, 1994; Swyngedouw, 2004). ‘Localisation’ means adaptation and tailoring of global ideas to local contexts (Robertson, 1994; Swyngedouw, 2004; Harrison & Melville, 2011).

This research suggests that the HRBA of AAB is more than the adaptation of contexts for implementation purposes. The HRBA is a result of active and intentional changes that increase its legitimacy and relevance to a specific context. Identified features discussed in Chapters Six and Seven present reconstruction of a HRBA: naming the approach as HRBA, not RBA, expands AAB’s activities to validate some unrecognised human rights in Bangladesh; and providing necessary services is justified by making a HRBA relevant to the lives of deprived people.

Also, this thesis conceptualises the changes as ‘contextualisation’. It differs from ‘localisation’ which is based on the concept of ‘globalisation’ and means the reverse process or a part of it (Robertson, 1994). Both localisation and globalisation are centred on the integration of two different worlds. This thesis rejects the dichotomy between global and local. The term ‘contextualisation’ is not confined to changes which reflect the contexts of Bangladesh. In this research, context also include organisational contexts of AAI, although the national contexts are more mentioned as a change driver. Consideration of both the organisational and national contexts is particularly appropriate for an NGO like AAB that is a member of an international entity.

The role of individual workers with their context-related knowledge

The features of the contextualised HRBA were illustrated in Chapters Six and Seven. In the example of distinguishing a HRBA from a RBA in Chapter 6, it is evident that law graduates played a role in generating and sharing knowledge about differences between human rights and rights. In Chapter Seven, NGO workers’ knowledge gained from their work in the field accounts for the HRBA’s expansion into service delivery. There are other examples which capture the role of AAB staff in constituting the HRBA. Two participants who had experienced the adoption of a HRBA in the early 2000s reported that an AAB
staff member, who later became the first Bangladesh-national Country Director, played an active role in introducing a HRBA to AAB, even prior to AAI’s adoption. Another example is the recent inclusion of new themes such as climate justice and youth rights in AAI’s mandate. This has been driven by AAB staff. Two participants claimed to have contributed to these emerging themes. There is no document verifying this. Examining whether their claim is true is not the concern of this research. What is of note here is the influence NGO workers perceive themselves as having on the formation of the HRBA and the possibility of more examples which are not found in documents.

These examples suggest that AAB staff played significant roles in constructing the HRBA within and beyond AAB, extending their influence to AAI. This demonstrates the agency of NGO workers for a discourse change. In this regard, context-related knowledge appears to be critical. In this research, context-related knowledge means not only information about contexts, but also beliefs and know-how shaped by contexts. In the above examples, context-related knowledge includes an understanding of the legal system, beliefs in social movements and youth power and knowing how to cope with climate change. Beliefs in social movement are strengthened by the organisational contexts and others are based on participants’ experiences in the national contexts of Bangladesh.

Based on organisational learning theories (Nonaka, 1994; Polanyi, 1966), context-based knowledge is conceptualised as ‘tacit or implicit knowledge’ in contrast to codified knowledge in the form of discourse or ‘explicit knowledge’. As this research is interested in individual workers’ contribution to discourse change, it overlays ‘organisational and individual knowledge’. Figure 8.3 illustrates four types of knowledge: (a) organisational-implicit, (b) organisational-explicit, (c) individual-implicit, and (d) individual-explicit. Each quadrant shows examples of knowledge identified in this research.
The research focus of contextualisation of the HRBA can be understood as the conversion of the context-rooted tacit knowledge possessed by individual agents (c) into the institutionalised discourse HRBA (b), as the arrow indicates in the figure. The other quadrants, (a) and (d), can promote the conversion process.

For example, distinguishing a HRBA from a RBA suggests knowledge conversion of (c) into (b), promoted by (a) and (d). As detailed in Chapter Six, the reason for differentiation of the two is grounded in the national context of Bangladesh. The knowledge about the difference was implicitly held by a few NGO practitioners. Then it was shared with other practitioners in informal ways, mainly through casual conversation. This knowledge sharing was possible because of the NGOs’ implicit knowledge that values mutual learning and debates. Those who first paid attention to the difference were law graduates. Their legal knowledge as professional knowledge helped justify their argument. As a result, their understanding of the differences between a HRBA and a RBA now represents AAB’s view.

Returning to Figure 8.3, the theory that (c) is converted into (b) with assistance of (a) and (d) can be also applied to explain the AAI-wide influence of AAB workers. Individual
workers’ implicit knowledge is weighed by AAI which encourages contextual consideration. When the implicit knowledge can be supported by explicit knowledge, it is more likely to be incorporated into AAI’s HRBA. For instance, AAB workers’ experience of adverse impacts of climate change was studied from the justice and human rights viewpoints and conceptualised as ‘climate justice’. Climate justice was recently integrated into AAI’s priorities, backed by scientific data on climate change.

This research mainly concerns the way an individual’s context-related tacit knowledge can shape an organisation’s explicit knowledge of a discourse. As discussed above, this research also notes the importance of an organisation’s enabling conditions and individuals’ supporting knowledge for the legitimisation of tacit knowledge as explicit knowledge.

8.3.3. Discourse contextualisation model

This section suggests a model to explain how a HRBA is contextualised by the agency of NGO practitioners. This model was built on theories about discourse, agency and organisational learning and data-driven knowledge conceptualised as internalisation and contextualisation.

This model basically aims for reconciliation between discourse and agency. Foucault (1972) suggests that knowledge is not produced by agency or ‘activity of subject’. According to him, individuals are just constituted by discourses in which they are located (Schirato et al., 2012). Because of Foucault’s influence, agency is largely considered as passive in key studies about development discourses, as discussed in Chapter Two. This model intends to fill a gap in the literature, drawing upon the concept of ‘agency’. As outlined in Chapter Three, this research highlights the importance of agency in endorsing, challenging and changing a discourse. The linkage between discourse and agency is made by ‘context’ and ‘knowledge’. Chapter Five suggested the components of agency as ‘motives and capacities’ based on a review of agency literature. Embracing all key concepts such as discourse, agency, context and knowledge, the agency for contextualising a HRBA is defined here as ‘motivation and capacities to apply the knowledge about a HRBA to the contexts and to shape the HRBA with context-related knowledge’.
As indicated by the above definition, the contextualisation of a HRBA involves a discourse change, not just implementation with a contextual consideration. In the discourse literature, the nature of discourse change is described as ‘existence, maintenance, modification and disappearance’ (Foucault, 1972, pp.27-28, 38). From an agency-oriented perspective, the change is described as the ‘adjustment to, confrontation with and reconstitution of a discourse’ by agency (Arce & Long, 2000, pp.190-192). Drawing upon these two perspectives, this research suggests ‘internalisation and contextualisation’ of a discourse as key changes needed for creating context-appropriate practices. The words are deliberately chosen to emphasise the active agency of NGO workers, by placing them as subjects who internalise and contextualise a HRBA. At the same time, individual workers are considered as constituted by the contexts as depicted below.

The model of relations between discourse, agency and contexts, as shown in Figure 8.4, accounts for key concepts and their interactions. This relation model was developed from a map of the key concepts (see Figure 3.3) with knowledge which clarifies the relation between concepts as discussed in Sections 8.3.1 and 8.3.2.
As illustrated in Figure 8.4., this research is centred on a development discourse and the agency of an individual worker located in contexts. On the basis of knowledge generated from this research, interactions between discourse and agency are conceptualised as internalisation and contextualisation. The empirical data suggests that individual workers gain agency (values, commitment, knowledge and skills) while internalising a discourse and their agency is exercised to contextualise it. The thesis focus lies in contextualisation, which highlights the proactive agency of NGO practitioners to optimise a HRBA to fit the contexts. However, contextualisation presupposes internalisation. In other words, transferring contextualised knowledge to a HRBA takes place when the discourse is accepted and appreciated by individual agents.

This thesis highlights the dynamics in which discourse and agency interplay, an organisation and an individual worker interact, and explicit and tacit knowledge reverse. With a focus on the dynamics, this thesis proposes a process model visualised as Figure 8.5. This process model captures the knowledge flow in the dynamic process of contextualisation. As the left arrow indicates, a development discourse is individually internalised by a practitioner, a small circle in a bigger circle of ‘organisation’. An individual develops their own knowledge, informed by a discourse and contexts. In an organisation,
individuals’ knowledge is shared in formal and informal ways and is amplified as illustrated by the widening spiral. When the knowledge is legitimised by the organisation, ‘a’ discourse is changed into ‘the’ discourse, which reflects specific contexts of the organisation. As depicted in Figure 8.5, plural contexts exert influence over a discourse, an agent and an organisation and throughout the whole process. It should be noted that this is not a once off sequential process, but an iterative process which repeats internalisation and contextualisation.

< Figure 8.5 The process model of the discourse contextualisation in an organisation>

There is also an observed resistance to a discourse change. When any change occurs, dynamics may be generated in two ways: ‘negatively to moderate changes to keep stability’ and ‘positively to reinforce changes’ (Mitleton-Kelly, 2003, p.37). Some participants reacted negatively to a discourse change. However, this does not necessarily mean they objected to it. Rather, their resistance was caused by some changes in the organisational structure that accompanied the discourse change. Changes at the discourse level can result in the merger or abolition of teams in the organisation, which naturally destabilises employment as mentioned in Chapter Five. Interviews revealed that a possible threat to positions can hinder staff members’ creativity for and participation in a discourse change. This implies that staff members’ resistance to a discourse change can be provoked by
organisational matters which may not directly relate to the discourse itself. In the process model depicted in Figure 8.5, it should be noted that the knowledge amplification process and the contextualisation process of a discourse can be hampered by non-discursive factors, such as a desire to keep the job.

Likewise, Sections 8.3.1 and 8.3.2 suggest possible barriers to the process of internalisation and contextualisation respectively. Internalisation can be limited when a staff member does not have significant encounters with the discourse and the grassroots. Contextualisation can be negatively influenced when organisational culture and individual professional knowledge do not support the context-related knowledge.

8.4. Conclusion

This chapter addressed the second research question about the theorisation of findings with theory-informed interpretations and data-generated insights. Theories on discourse, agency and organisational leaning were considered together to determine how a HRBA is disseminated, challenged and changed in an NGO. This chapter also provided new knowledge in internalisation and contextualisation of a HRBA.

The extent of internalisation appears to be determined by the proximity to the discourse and the field – more specifically conceptualised as ‘the distance from the source of discourse diffusion’ and ‘the distance from marginalised and impoverished people who they work for’. Given that opportunities to take part in the discourse shaping process are directly linked to the distance from the discourse, it is noteworthy that not many workers are close to both the discourse and the grassroots people. For example, partner NGO workers may have abundant knowledge about contexts. However, their opportunities to transfer such knowledge to the hub of the HRBA are limited compared to AAB staff. This explains why individual contribution toward contextualisation is mainly reported by AAB staff even when the contribution is largely related to contextualised knowledge.

With regard to contextualisation, the dynamic was articulated with knowledge dimensions, categorised by implicit and explicit knowledge, and by organisational and individual knowledge. This context-relevant knowledge is implicit by nature. The implicit knowledge
can be extracted and utilised with organisational support. In particular, this research shows the importance of building an organisational culture that maximises informal knowledge transfer as well as a formal knowledge management system. Implicit knowledge of individual practitioners is circulated formally and informally to include contextual considerations in a discourse and the contextualised discourse itself becomes explicit knowledge. In short, ‘contextualisation of a discourse’ means transformation of individuals’ implicit knowledge into organisational explicit knowledge.

The following final chapter of this thesis presents the implications of this theoretical discussion, providing suggestions for development and organisational practices.
Chapter 9  Conclusion

9.1. Introduction

This concluding chapter encapsulates the overall findings and significance of this research. First, it critically examines core findings and arguments in relation to the research questions. Second, it discusses the limitations and the strengths of the research. Third, it considers the implications of the research for theory and development practices. It concludes with suggestions for future research.

9.2. Conclusions in relation to research questions

The primary aim of this research was to understand how a HRBA is interpreted and practised by an NGO in a developing country. For this purpose, a qualitative case study was employed, using the HRBA of ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB) as the case. The following research questions clarify the research focus:

   Question 1: How does the contextualisation of a HRBA take place in ActionAid Bangladesh?
   Question 2: How can this contextualisation process be theorised?

This research focuses on how a HRBA achieves a better fit with contexts. There are two contexts of interest: the organisational context of the federation of ActionAid International (AAI) to which AAB belongs; and the national context of Bangladesh in which AAB works. The following sections respond to each research question.

9.2.1. Core findings and arguments in relation to Research Question 1

The first research question is about the process of contextualising a HRBA with three associated sub-questions: 1) What characterises the HRBA of AAB? 2) To what extent can the characteristics of AAB’s HRBA be explained by its organisational and national context? 3) How are NGO workers influenced by a HRBA and the contexts, and how do they influence contextualisation of a HRBA?

These three sub-questions are related to the contextualisation processes and dynamics in
three ways: first by looking at the characteristics as the results of contextualisation, second by examining the influences of contexts on the identified characteristics, and third by exploring NGO workers’ role in the contextualising process. Responses to these sub-questions are discussed below.

*Characteristics of AAB’s HRBA – contextualised perception and practice*

The first sub-question is addressed by identifying two features of AAB's HRBA: differentiating between a HRBA and a RBA, and combining the HRBA with other approaches. As extensively discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, the research findings indicate these two features are a product of contextualisation.

An examination of both documents and interviews reveal that AAB prefers a HRBA to a RBA, unlike AAI which uses the two terms interchangeably. Research participants understand a HRBA as more comprehensive and more powerful than a RBA which is confined to legal and national laws. This understanding is different from some literature in which human rights are seen as minimal, legal and weak (Cohen, 2004; Bradshaw, 2006; Eyben, 2003). The finding indicates this different understanding is shaped by national contexts.

This differentiation became apparent during interviews when some participants corrected my use of the word ‘RBA’. Following the conventions, I had used the term RBA as a shortened form for a human rights-based approach to development. During the field research, AAI’s provisional handbook provoked a lively debate in AAB over the unexplained change in terminology from a RBA to a HRBA. This debate heightened sensitivity to language use among research participants and resulted in AAB’s own interpretation.

Of note is that the universal value of a HRBA was accepted by research participants with no objection. This was contrary to my initial assumption based on the literature that a HRBA would be regarded as a North-driven discourse causing problems in the context of Bangladesh. Participants’ perceptions of the universality of human rights imply the possibility of a HRBA being more widely valid.
In practice, AAB’s HRBA is sometimes combined with a participatory empowerment approach and even a needs-based approach (NBA). Some participants regard the HRBA as identical or subsequent to a participatory and empowerment approach, while AAI’s documents and some AAB staff articulate differences between the two approaches. More interestingly, AAB provides services to meet basic needs in the name of the HRBA despite AAB’s strong objection to a NBA. AAI justifies its meeting needs by framing needs as ‘basic rights’. In AAB, without referring to the concept ‘basic rights’, most research participants agree they should respond to needs because of the context of Bangladesh. In this context, Chapter Seven provided an example of a hybrid of the HRBA and a microfinance programme, the latter being a typical example of a NBA. This example illustrates how the HRBA was challenged and modified by microfinance and vice versa in the context of Bangladesh. Blending the HRBA with other approaches was understood by some participants as natural or intentional given the contexts. However, this opinion was disputed by others who doubt the compatibility of the HRBA with differently oriented approaches.

These contested views raise the issue of a purist approach and a strategic approach to the HRBA. In development practices, a contradiction between a purist approach and a strategic approach is not new. In other studies, taking a strategic approach is mostly described as a self-limiting choice to avoid challenges (Gottlieb & Belle, 1990) or a compromise between ideals and reality (Plipat, 2005). However, this research suggests it is the result of negotiation with contexts.

Putting together these two characteristics – differentiation between a HRBA and a RBA and inclusion of some elements of a NBA in a HRBA – this research concludes that AAB has contextualised its HRBA in both the perception of what it entails and its practice. As a result of contextualisation, AAB’s HRBA emphasises validating some unrecognised human rights in Bangladesh and embracing other approaches to respond to the reality that people’s basic needs are largely unmet by the government. These two approaches to the HRBA emphases are quite different and, in a sense, contradictory. That is, validation of human rights can be followed by challenging the national context; while providing tangible assistance to the needy generally means accepting the national context as a precondition. In terms of development practices, the former generally involves campaigning and
advocacy, while the latter includes service delivery to meet needs. It is also noted that the former is strongly suggested by some AAB staff who showed their belief in activism in Chapter Five and the latter is supported by those who emphasised the reality in the field as discussed in Chapter Seven. These identified differences can cause confusion and tension. In Chapter Five, confusion about the essential nature of a HRBA was expressed by the question of whether AAB is a human rights NGO or a development NGO. Chapter Seven presented obvious tensions between rigidity and flexibility when translating the HRBA into practice. Some participants call its transformative nature ‘the beauty of the HRBA’ emphasising adherence to the principles, while others use the same expression to indicate the flexibility of the HRBA. This conflicting understanding indicates that AAB’s HRBA is a product of very complex interactions between contexts and agents.

Organisational and national contexts which shaped AAB’s HRBA
This section relates to the second sub-question regarding the contextual influences on the identified characteristics of AAB’s HRBA. The first feature, differentiation between a HRBA and a RBA, is grounded in participants’ perception of national laws which stipulate ‘rights’ but fail to cover and protect ‘human rights’ in accordance with international standards. The national laws of Bangladesh reflect their legal, political and cultural contexts, as discussed in Chapter Six. The legal context of Bangladesh was described as constrained as shown in the reservations about human rights treaties and in the failure of national laws to recognise some human rights, such as education and gender equality. These legal limitations were understood to be the result of low rights awareness in the public and the unwillingness of politicians to enact national laws in line with international human rights conventions. Lack of both public awareness and political will are suggested as closely related to the dominant religion, Islam.

The second feature of AAB’s HRBA that is, practices in combination with other approaches, is influenced by both organisational and national contexts. As to the organisational context, AAI’s long commitment to REFLECT, a liberating educational programme based on Freire’s theory and participatory tools, explains why a participatory empowerment approach is often equated with the HRBA in AAB. With regards to the necessity to meet needs, AAI has justified this by coining the term ‘basic rights’. The term ‘basic rights’ emphasises that basic needs should be met first to empower people to claim their human
rights, turning basic needs into rights language. In AAB, without referring to ‘basic rights’, most research participants provided a rationale for their service provision on the basis of the context of Bangladesh. Relevant contexts are the inability of the state to ensure basic needs are met and the prevalence of microfinance programmes centred on financial needs.

An examination of national contexts is warranted as existing studies which present Bangladesh as a very challenging context for practicing a HRBA (Banerjee, 2005). However, this research presents the enabling aspect of national contexts as well. For instance, the prevalence of microfinance programmes presents difficulties in implementing the HRBA, but also presents opportunities. Amid prevailing microfinance programmes, the HRBA could be recognised as an alternative and extend its influence over microfinance, as shown in the example of the ‘self-help groups’ and the ‘HRBA-flavoured micro finance’ in Chapter Seven.

In considering the national context, the interaction between Bangladesh and the rest of the world cannot be ignored. With the research focus on context-specific influences, the Bangladesh context tends to be described in terms that contrast it to other parts of the world. For example, politics, laws and culture are framed as being specific to Bangladesh. However, this does not mean that the Bangladesh contexts is different or isolated from the rest of the world. This study understands both Bangladesh and AAI as located within international influences and draws attention to the dynamics of interwoven contexts.

**Mutual influences between the HRBA and staff members**

The last sub-question, ‘how are NGO workers influenced by a HRBA and the contexts, and how do they influence the contextualisation of a HRBA?’ was added while analysing data. The findings indicate individual NGO practitioners may not be powerful, but neither are they passive in the change process of a HRBA. The noted roles of NGO workers in the contextualisation led me to explore their agency. In the above question, the focus lies in the later part, containing the argument that local staff exert their agency in shaping the HRBA. However, as noticeable from the first part of the question about the influence of a HRBA and the contexts on NGO workers, this study suggests agency as being shaped considerably by discourses and contexts.
To answer the latter part of the above question first, the influence of NGO workers is evident in relation to the first feature of the contextualised HRBA, namely the differentiation between a HRBA and a RBA. Some AAB staff who majored in law played a key role in sharing and generating an understanding of the differences. In terms of the second feature, namely combining a HRBA with other approaches, the role of individual AAB staff is not apparent. However, partner NGO workers' influence is noticeable. For example, partner NGO workers who identified themselves as REFLECT practitioners regard the HRBA as a continuation of a participatory empowerment approach; and their close work with the grassroots influenced their belief that meeting needs and claiming human rights are complementary.

Turning to the influences affecting NGO workers, data does not clearly indicate whether the above listed components of agency – legal knowledge, identify as REFLECT practitioner and work experience in the framework of REFLECT – are constructed by discourse of a HRBA and organisational contexts. It would be possible to reason that legal knowledge could be valued in AAI as it is a HRBA organisation. The fact that some partner NGO workers identify themselves as REFLECT practitioners was possibly built by AAI's commitment to REFLECT and by the lessons learnt from challenges in the field while practicing the HRBA. More generally, Chapter Five discussed how the HRBA and organisational and national contexts shaped NGO workers' motivation and capacities for contextualising a HRBA.

In summary, the research findings contribute to answering all three sub-questions. The arguments drawn from these findings centre on ‘contextualisation’. This links concepts such as development discourse, organisational and national contexts and the agency of staff. The subsequent section clarifies these main concepts and their relationship drawing on a range of theories.

9.2.2. Core findings and arguments in relation to Research Question 2
The second research question pertains to the theorisation of the findings discussed in the previous section, which are conceptualised as the ‘contextualisation’ of a HRBA. As discussed in Chapter 8, theorisation was attempted in two ways: theory testing and theory building.
As to theory testing, the lens of discourse and agency shaped the focus when exploring the ways AAB translated a HRBA into practice. The theories provide useful accounts for interaction between the HRBA and NGO workers who are working in the framework of the HRBA. The discourse perspective explains the production, diffusion and reproduction of the HRBA, and the agency perspective sheds light on the roles of active agents in these processes. However, these theories are situated separately despite some possible links around knowledge, power and context. Making the linkage was assisted by some organisational theories which consider knowledge, power and context together to discuss organisational learning. These organisational learning theories provide the foundation for understanding how knowledge is transferred and legitimised within an NGO.

Existing theories about discourse, agency and organisational learning provided explanations for the following findings:

*The HRBA spreads within AAB and its partners and even across Bangladesh through competition with different development discourses.*

Chapter Five discussed how the HRBA is seen as valuable by staff members of AAB and its partner NGOs, and Chapter Seven showed that AAB’s HRBA survived the disturbance caused by microfinance NGOs. These findings can be understood mainly from a discourse perspective. Foucault’s (1972) term, ‘mechanisms of power’ accounts for discourse dissemination and circulation in AAB and its partner NGOs. In this case study, membership of AAB and funding from AAB are mechanisms of power for AAB staff and partner NGO staff respectively. Foucault’s (1972) discourse life cycle of ‘existence, coexistence, modification, and disappearance’ can be applied to explain the relationship between the HRBA and other development discourses. The cycle provides a frame to analyse changes in microfinance: existing microfinance was challenged by the emerging HRBA (existence and coexistence); some microfinance programmes changed into ‘the HRBA-guided microfinance’ by partner NGOs (modification); some microfinance NGOs terminated their loan service in the area where AAB works in the HRBA (disappearance).

*There exist diverse interpretations and practices under the name of the HRBA.*

Overall, the findings show a varied understanding and practice of the HRBA. The multiple
understandings and uses of the discourse imply the existence of agency (Long, 2001). Agency-oriented theories argue the importance of contexts as well as individuals’ disposition (Giddens, 1984; Long, 2001). Building on the argument, this research defined agency in Chapter Five as constructed and situated in various contexts. Interweaving agency with contexts, the concept of ‘contextualisation’ shows how NGO workers incorporate contextual consideration into their interpretation and practice of the HRBA.

Some of the participants’ knowledge is widely shared and legitimised. Chapter Six described how law graduates’ knowledge shaped AAB’s understanding of the HRBA. In Chapter Seven, some context-related knowledge of participants is reflected in hybrid practices. Organisational learning theories offer understanding of the nature of knowledge (Polanyi, 1966; Nonaka, 1994) and the ways in which knowledge is shared (Lorenz, 2001). These theories suggest looking at a dialogue between tacit and explicit knowledge and at organisational supports for the dialog in both formal and informal ways. Some individual’s tacit knowledge is amplified through informal discussions and becomes explicit through formal procedures.

Putting together these different theories on discourse, agency and organisational learning, this research attempts to build a theory by adding knowledge acquired from data. Generated knowledge was conceptualised as ‘internalisation’ of a HRBA and ‘contextualisation’ of a HRBA.

Internalisation explains the following findings:

Understanding of, and commitment to, a HRBA was generally higher in AAB staff than partner NGO staff, in programme staff than administrative staff, and in administrative staff with field work experience than administrative staff with no connect to the field.

As discussed in Chapter Eight, this finding suggests differences in commitment to a HRBA by the organisation, the job type and the proximity to people living in poverty. These observed patterns of internalisation are explained by ‘the distance from the discourse’ and ‘the distance from people they work for’. Literature suggests possible differences between AAB and partner NGOs, and between programme staff and administrative staff. These differences can be explained by discourse theories. This research noted differences in engagement in development fieldwork among administrative staff. This insight was
conceptualised as ‘closeness to the grassroots people’ to understand internalisation of the HRBA by individual staff. This concept may also be applicable to other staff differences such as gender. In this case study, female workers show their support for human rights work based on their gendered experiences. The commitment of female staff to a HRBA can be explained by their shared vulnerability with other women in Bangladesh. In the case of male staff, their commitment to a HRBA is not related to any commonality with the grassroots people.

**Identified characteristics of AAB’s HRBA are mainly related to contextual consideration.**  
**Individual workers’ context-related knowledge contributed to the formation of the HRBA by being informally shared with colleagues.**

The core argument of this research is that the contextualisation of a development discourse occurs through the agency of NGO workers. Firstly this research started with the concept of ‘reconstruction’ of a discourse but later specified this as ‘contextualisation’, since data suggests the importance of context-relevant knowledge for a discourse change. Interviews show that context-related knowledge largely resides in individual practitioners and their knowledge is shared with a wider circle of practitioners mainly through workshops or casual talk. This led me to pay attention to ‘informal ways’ that individuals circulate their ‘tacit knowledge’, borrowing concepts from organisational learning theories. In this way, the idea of ‘contextualisation’ engages with theories about discourse, agency and organisational learning, making connections between the theories. This research theorises contextualisation of a HRBA as a conversion of context-related tacit knowledge into discourse-generated explicit knowledge. The former indicates individual agency and the latter is produced and validated by an organisation through mechanisms of power.

To summarise, ‘internalisation’ and ‘contextualisation’ of a HRBA are core arguments drawn from responses to Research Question 2. These two processes can be partly explained with insights from the theories on discourse, agency and organisational learning. For a comprehensive understanding, these theories are considered together with caution. In this research, the concepts of discourse, agency and organisational learning were connected by their common emphasis on knowledge, power and context. Taking the relationship between these concepts into consideration, this research concludes that contexts are the key to discourse change and NGO workers exercise their agency for
change by transferring and constructing knowledge which embodies their contexts.

9.3. Limitations and strengths of the study

9.3.1. Limitations of this study
This research is limited in three ways. Firstly, the data were collected by interviewing NGO staff, rather than grassroots people. So while this research put an emphasis on local agency, it missed the voice of local people living in poverty. This is not because their agency is any less significant, but because their voices could not be accurately captured due to limited access and resources. Some data indicated that local people living in the poverty exercised their agency, particularly in terms of local knowledge. Since the focus of this study lies in the contextualisation of a HRBA, local people who own local knowledge are regarded as a major source of NGO practitioners’ contextual knowledge. This research suggests learning and reflecting on the local knowledge as a significant capacity of NGO workers for contextualisation.

Secondly, the research findings have a limited transferability given their emergence through a case study. However, knowledge of factors on internalisation and process of contextualisation might be applicable to other NGOs, other countries and even other development discourses.

Thirdly, in relation to data collecting, conducting interviews in English could limit the richness of some interviews, particularly those involving a translator, given that English is not the first language of the interviewer and the interviewees. Being an outsider researcher meant more time was needed to learn about the organisation and the country. It also limited the analysis of contextual influences as the analysis was based on the given information. In order to overcome this limitation, sensitivity was given to interpretation of contexts, in particular national contexts.

9.3.2. Strengths of this research
The major strength of this research is the recognition of the contribution of NGO practitioners to contextualising a HRBA. In the literature, a HRBA is largely understood as a normative discourse, and local contexts and local workers are often suggested as the
reason when it is not implemented as predetermined. Challenging this view, this research explored the necessity of integrating contextual influences into the discourse and the active roles of NGO workers in the integration process.

This research also has theoretical strengths by linking theories on discourse, agency, context and organisational learning. Despite an extensive discussion about each concept in the literature, little attention is paid to the relationship between them, particularly in development studies. For a comprehensive understanding of AAB’s HRBA, these concepts are examined together. This research also provides an empirical account of the links between these concepts. The attempt to link these theories is embodied as ‘internalisation’ and ‘contextualisation’. These concepts have also drawn on knowledge generated by data. This research hereby claims contribution to building a data-driven theory as well as synthesising existing theories.

In terms of methodology, the case study design proved its strength by providing a deeper understanding of the discourse practices and the surrounding contexts. Interviews with AAB staff were very informative with diverse opinions offered. Including partner NGO workers in interviews enriched the data and enabled me to identify the challenges faced by frontline development workers and how they meet the challenges. Documents produced by AAI and AAB supplemented data acquired from interviews. They offered background information and further insights into the way knowledge is circulated. This confirmed the usefulness of collecting data in multiple ways.

9.4. Implications of this research
This research has implications for theory and practice – development practice and NGO practice. Implications derived from this research support the significance of this study.

9.4.1. Implications for theory
This research contributes to scholarship in the area of development discourse, and a HRBA in particular. This research has heightened the understanding of the HRBA and the contexts in which the HRBA is shaped. As a case study, this research provides a description of understanding and practices of a HRBA in a specific country and in a
specific organisation. This research can also inform theories on a HRBA in four ways. Firstly, this research suggests that a HRBA is not necessarily a Northern discourse. This finding differs from previous studies. Rejection of labelling a HRBA as a Northern discourse can widen its applicability. Secondly, this research considers both discourse and agency, which are rarely discussed together, for a comprehensive understanding of the HRBA in practice. Thirdly, an explanation for observed group differences in understanding of and commitment to the HRBA is offered. In particular, this research suggests that NGO practitioners with field experience are highly committed to a HRBA. Fourthly, a central argument of this research is the importance of the contextualisation of a discourse. This research illustrates how the HRBA is contextualised by clarifying the nature of knowledge and the process of knowledge acquisition, use, transfer and creation.

**Beyond the North-South binary**

This research presents a counter-argument to the assumption that Northern human rights views conflict with Southern values. As outlined in Chapter Two, the literature argues that a HRBA is based on Northern philosophies which are alien to Southern countries. However, this research suggests, within the scope of this small sample, that the universality of human rights is widely accepted, as discussed in Chapter Six. In respect of the universal values of human rights, participants emphasised the conformity with their traditional and religious values. This is striking as some literature (Donnelly, 1984; Nyamu-Musembi & Musyoki, 2004; Offenheiser & Holcombe, 2003) draws attention to innate conflicts between the North and the South – more specifically between individual and collective approaches to human rights, and between human rights law and religious and customary law. What this research suggests is that the reality of development practice is more complicated than a North-South divide.

Data shows both continuity and discontinuity of this North-South binary worldview. For instance, participants still describe themselves as ‘the South’ and others as ‘the North’ or ‘Western countries’. However, the data also presents the fading boundary between the two worlds. It is discernible from some participants’ comments that their mindset is not merely local, as being also shaped by Westernised education systems and international work experiences. Participants’ exposure to a wider world can be one reason they do not regard the HRBA as a Northern discourse. In this way, this finding suggests the North-South
divide is a fallacy of when looking at the HRBA and its translation into practice.

**Discourse change induced by the agency of NGO workers**

This research highlights the agency of NGO workers, which is largely neglected in the literature on development discourses. Previous studies on a HRBA often regard local NGO workers as a barrier to implementing a HRBA because of their lack of capabilities (Plipat, 2005). This argument is based on the assumption that the HRBA is predetermined and a set of knowledge and skills must be translated into practice as prescribed. What this research suggests is the possibility that a HRBA can be shaped or moulded to fit the contexts and the important role of NGO workers in that shaping. As mentioned several times throughout the thesis, the change is conceptualised as ‘contextualisation of a discourse’ and NGO workers are suggested as change agents.

**Internalisation of the HRBA**

This research provides an explanation for the differences in individual workers’ internalisation of a HRBA. The degree of understanding of and commitment to a HRBA is influenced by: organisation type (AAB, partner NGO), job type (programme-related work, administrative work) and field experience (administrative workers from partner NGOs and some AAB administrative staff with experiences in emergency relief, AAB administrative staff with no fieldwork experience). These identified differences are commonly related to the extent of exposure to a HRBA and of contact with community people. It suggests that individual NGO workers may show a good understanding of and high commitment to a HRBA when they have had an opportunity to learn a HRBA and have engaged directly with marginalised people. This research suggests two concepts, ‘the distance from the discourse of a HRBA’ and ‘the distance from people who they work for’, to explain the different level of association with a HRBA. These concepts seem applicable to other organisations, other countries and even other people-centred development discourses. This knowledge can contribute to understanding and promoting individuals’ internalisation of a development discourse.

**Contextualisation of the discourse with context-related knowledge**

This thesis generated knowledge around reconstruction of a development discourse. Earlier, the possibility of discourse change was suggested by agency theory. The data
shows that some discourse change is influenced by context-related knowledge, often through informal ways. One of the key arguments of this research is that NGO workers mould development discourses to their contexts with their knowledge about contexts. This research shows that the contextual knowledge is mostly acquired, shared and transferred in informal ways. This argument highlights the importance of an individual’s tacit knowledge and informal learning to shaping a contextualised discourse.

9.4.2. Implications for practice

Implications arising from this research are mainly for development practices and organisational practices in NGOs. The research findings can contribute to development practices in two ways. Firstly, this study identified enabling and restraining national contexts for human rights-based practices. This can help development practitioners understand their own contexts and be prepared for challenges. Secondly, balancing the HRBA and the necessity to respond to needs is a dilemma that HRBA organisations often face. Examination of how AAB deals with the dilemma offers lessons for successfully balancing these approaches.

For organisational practices, three suggestions in relation to contextualisation arose from the research findings: having staff members who truly know the contexts, encouraging organisational learning in both formal and informal ways, and balancing organisational alignment and decentralisation. The first suggestion with regards to staffing informs the need for diversity in AAB staff and the importance of partnership with locally based organisations for context-relevant practices. For the second, in order to encourage sharing and creating context-related knowledge, organisational efforts should be made to establish both enabling structure and culture. Lastly, contextualising a HRBA raises an issue as to the coherence of AAI’s work. Contextualised practices of each affiliate may not always be aligned to the ActionAid brand.

**National contexts to consider in human rights-based practices**

Firstly, this research offers practical insights into national contexts for implementation of a HRBA. The legal, political and cultural contexts of Bangladesh present challenges when translating a HRBA into practice. For instance, the lack of rights awareness and failure to enact national laws in line with international human rights conventions are explained by
combination of the legal, political and cultural contexts. Based on this finding, NGOs are advised to conduct research into national contexts with a focus on legal, political and cultural aspects. This suggestion is consistent with the literature which stresses the importance of analysing these contexts for human rights-based work (Freeman, 2004; Forst, 2012). Learning legal, political and cultural contexts can inform HRBA practitioners the issues they need to consider and address by human rights-based practices.

Another point is that NGO workers can turn contextual challenges into opportunities to generate a creative practice. The contexts restrain the implementation of a HRBA, but also spur staff to exercise their agency. As exemplified in this research, some misfits between a HRBA and the identified national contexts resulted in shaping the HRBA with some new interpretations and practices. This implies that NGO workers can promote and be instrumental in the creation of context-appropriate HRBA.

**Meeting needs in the HRBA**

A NBA (needs-based approach) is regarded as completely different from a HRBA in both the literature and the empirical data of this research. Many development organisations that have made the transition from a NBA to a HRBA have faced difficulties in positioning themselves between the two (Korten, 1990; Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001). This research suggests that it is not an either-or-choice. In many developing countries, basic needs are largely left unmet. Acknowledging the necessity to respond to needs, research participants take the two different approaches together. The conceptual justification is ‘basic rights’. The practical justification is ‘strategy’, which enables AAB to be involved with people in need, to assist human rights realisation, to advocate an alternative way of meeting needs and to leverage the HRBA across the community. However, combining differently oriented approaches is neither easy nor necessarily desirable as shown by the oppositions by some participants to hybrid practices. Literature also points out the risk of mixing only ‘end-products without internally generated and transforming process’ (Long, 2001, p.91). In short, AAB’s hybrid practices show how the HRBA can be maintained while meeting basic needs, but also leave unanswered the question of whether the combination is possible without compromising some principles of the HRBA.

**Staffing with those who are knowledgeable about contexts**
This research holds that context-related knowledge is essential for making development discourses relevant to and appropriate for a specific context. With regard to context-related knowledge, the importance of having staff with knowledge is suggested. As the tacit knowledge basically belongs to individuals, organisational learning theories discuss how to transfer it to organisational knowledge (Nonaka, 1994). Knowledge about organisational contexts can be learnt from on-the-job training or work experience. However, with regard to national contexts, it is important to have knowledgeable staff in the first place. This suggestion is supported by some interviews, which reveal that not every staff member of Bangladesh nationality can claim to have relevant knowledge of Bangladesh. This is because many NGO workers were educated in a Westernised system, even in English medium private schools, and have never experienced poverty or rural life. This does not necessarily mean that only those from disadvantaged backgrounds can understand the people they work with. However, development NGOs should try to recruit more staff who know and understand the reality in the field. Encouraging diversity in staffing is one way. As seen in the case of AAB, partnership with local organisations is another important means by which international NGOs gain knowledge of the local context.

**Nurturing organisational learning**

This research suggests development NGOs should encourage knowledge sharing and creation for context-appropriate practices. This suggestion confirms the need to create space for innovative learning in line with organisational learning theories. As identified in Chapter Five, AAI values context-based knowledge; and its federal structure and open culture encourage incorporating such knowledge into organisational knowledge. Under the influence of AAI, AAB has developed its structure and culture for knowledge circulation. Structural support, mostly in the form of training and workshops, enables AAB staff and partner NGO workers to gain knowledge. Providing staff with learning opportunities is important for coherent understanding and improved work performance, as prescribed in AAB’s strategy papers and human resource development policy (AAB, 2005; AAB, 2012b). AAB’s feminist leadership forum is an example of staff-led voluntary learning for which there is organisational support as shown by the allocation of funds and time (AAB, 2012c). Providing structural support is important. Many NGOs do not take learning seriously and they therefore do not invest in learning in terms of staff time, financial resources and incentives (Edwards, 1997; Roper & Pettit, 2002).
In addition to formal learning, this research draws attention to the informal ways of transferring knowledge. As discussed in Chapters Six and Seven, the context–specific knowledge is implicit by nature and this knowledge is shared with colleagues through informal discussion. Such a knowledge circulation is possibly more apparent in Bangladesh, where the majority of local knowledge has been orally transferred and most people enjoy their routine tea breaks with conversation. However, this is not different from other NGOs. My prior work in the NGO sector and some studies (Javernick-Will & Levitt, 2009) suggest that knowledge acquired from field experience mostly resides with individual workers and is not documented. How to identify and store this implicit knowledge is the key to transforming it into organisational knowledge. The significance of informal ways of transferring tacit knowledge push NGOs to nurture a culture of knowledge sharing.

In relation to knowledge transfer, high staff turnover can be a hindrance. AAB has faced a high degree of turnover, like other NGOs in Bangladesh (Ahmad 2007). Both documents (AAB, 2004, 2012f) and interviews (Participants 17 & 19) suggest staff turnover is an obstacle to knowledge accumulation. This shows the importance of retaining experienced staff, particularly considering the tacit nature of context-specific knowledge as noted earlier.

**Balancing organisational alignment and decentralisation**

AAI’s federal model was suggested as promoting contextualisation of a HRBA discourse with an emphasis on national contexts of each member country. The implication for NGOs, particularly for big international NGOs, is that context-appropriate practices can be encouraged by a decentralised system which gives affiliates discretionary power. However, decentralisation can result in fractured and misaligned practices in the name of the same organisation. With regards to contextualisation, NGOs should draw the line at losing organisational alignment.

**9.5. Directions for future research**

A consideration of limitations and implications lead to suggestions for future research. Relating to the need for more empirical studies, further research concerning local agency is required. As stated earlier, one of the strengths of this research is putting the concept of
'agency' at the centre of the contextualising process. However, this requires the further exploration of local agency, including the agency of the grassroots people. The voice of local people, in particular regarding a development discourse, is rarely captured in the literature. More empirical data could strengthen the argument in favour of local agency.

As mentioned earlier, a case study as a research design has both strengths and limitations. Comparative studies involving several NGOs or countries would be useful for testing and revising theories suggested by this thesis. In particular, further study involving several cases would show whether the knowledge generated from this case study can explain different cases and what can be added to increase transferability.

With regards to human rights-based practices, numerous issues remain. This thesis explored how contexts construct understanding of human rights. Data shows some human rights are not recognised in Bangladesh and the rights of people with disability are not prioritised in AAI. I suggest studying which types of human rights are more compatible with national contexts or organisational contexts, and even further with development than other human rights.

This thesis did not examine whether particular programmes or organisational practices are aligned with a HRBA. Tensions between different programmes or practices are suggested in the literature and were also noted during the field research. For example, ActionAid raises funds from child sponsorship, which is generally regarded as undesirable from a human rights perspective, as shown by the objection of other HRBA NGOs. How a HRBA transforms non-programme practices should be further studied.

9.6. Conclusion
Following some critical views of a HRBA as outlined in Chapter Two, this thesis started by questioning whether a HRBA could be valid in developing countries, particularly where political and cultural resistance to the concept of human rights was reported. Using a case study of an NGO in Bangladesh, this thesis concludes that the universality of human rights was generally accepted, at least the extent they were compatible with the values embedded in culture and tradition. Sharing common beliefs in human rights and a HRBA, research participants presented issues regarding terminology and its practical implications,
the extent of flexibility in implementation and consideration of contexts.

This thesis highlighted the importance of contexts and agency when exploring the understanding and practice of a HRBA. Understanding of the concepts ‘rights’, ‘human rights’ and ‘basic needs’ and practicing a HRBA in combination with other approaches are examples of the ‘contextualised HRBA’. Previous studies largely criticise context-influenced practice as ‘new wine into an old sack’ to emphasise the loss of transformability of a HRBA. Rather, this thesis looks at it as ‘new wine with a flavour changed by the container’. Retaining the essence of a HRBA is critical. However, the essence should be redefined and reconstructed by contexts. This thesis argued that the agency of NGO workers is critical for this process, theorising the process of redefining as ‘internalisation’ and of reconstructing as ‘contextualisation’.

The key findings can be used to improve development and organisational practices. Provision of a model to explain the contextualisation of a HRBA in an NGO may deepen the understanding of the dynamics of discourse change.
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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Interview Guide

Objectives of interview
- To understand personal perception on ActionAid and its rights-guided practices
- To gather reflections on personal experiences in learning and practicing the RBA
- To understand participants’ experience of changes in AA’s RBA
- To explore the influence of discourses on participants’ agency

Introduction
Introduce the research purpose, confidentiality and timing issues, etc.

Opening
Brief personal history
- Motivation to work in development
- Educational background
- Working history

Work at ActionAid Bangladesh
- When started
- Roles and tasks

Section 1 – AAB’s practices of the RBA
1. Perceived features of ActionAid (AAI and AAI)
   - Probe: any differences from other NGOs
2. (only to AAB staff) Perceived features of AAB
   - Probe: any differences from AAI branches in other countries or particular practices in AAB
3. The way the identified features are delivered to stakeholders (that is to partner organisation, communities, duty bearers)
   - Probe: Identified reactions of stakeholders
4. Any particular belief or practice in development in Bangladesh
   - Probe: Its influence, if any, on AAB or its RBA
Section 2 – Personal perception on the RBA
5. Your experience in building understanding of the RBA
   - Probe: reactions when first learning the RBA, the ways of learning the RBA
6. Your own understanding of the RBA
   - Probe: difference from other approaches to development
7. Any personal consequences of learning the RBA / any changes at personal level
   - Probe: thought, attitude, behaviour
8. Any unsolved issues / issues you want to explore further

Section 3 – Added values / challenges in practicing the RBA
9. Changes you want to see in your work/goal in your work (≠programme goal)
10. Any example which shows that you are achieving the aim/goal
11. Challenges you have faced in your work
   - Probe: personal/organisational, relationships with which stakeholders
12. Measures taken to address any challenges

Section 4 – Changes in the RBA
13. Any changes you have experienced in terms of recommended practices or strategies
    ( use ‘timeline’)
    - Probe: reasons for changes, influences on your work and on stakeholders
14. Your role in the changes
    - Probe: the process of decisions made and how they were shared
15. How to hear the voice of people affected by the changes
16. Any further changes you want to suggest

Closing
Overall summary of the interview
Anything want to add/other issues
Advice/recommendation for other NGO workers in similar situation

Ask if willing to do a follow-up interview if needed and provide feedback on the interview transcript.
Appendix 2 – Information sheet for interview participants

School of Social Work and Human Services
HEAD OF SCHOOL
Professor Howard Karger

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Facsimile +61 7 3365 1788
Email swahs@social.uq.edu.au
Internet www.uq.edu.au/swahs

Research Project

“Exploring a human rights-based approach in Bangladesh”

You are being invited to take part in a research project which forms part of my doctoral dissertation at The University of Queensland. Before you decide whether to participate it is important for you to understand what the research is about and what your participation will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Purpose
The purpose of the research is to understand how the human rights-based approach (hereinafter called the HRBA) is practiced in your organisation.

The interview
The interview will ask questions about your perception of the HRBA, your organisations’ practices of the HRBA, and any challenges that you have faced in practicing the HRBA. Your participation is voluntary. The interview would take no more than 90 minutes of your time.

Audio taping and data management
The interview will be recorded and later transcribed by me. All materials, including the transcript and your consent form, will be kept in a personal laptop with password controlled access, and in a locked suitcase while I am in Bangladesh. Then, the data will be moved to a personal desktop and a locked filing cabinet when I return to the University of Queensland in Australia. Only the researcher and the advisory team will have access to the materials.

Confidentiality
All your responses will remain completely confidential. Your name and any other identifying information will not be included in the dissertation or any report on the study unless you decide to disclose your identification. Confidentiality will be assured by
assigning codes rather than use your names, and data will be reported as group data not individual data.

**Data use**
The research findings will be shared with your organisation in both an oral presentation and a written report. Collected data is to be used in my thesis. In addition, this research may be presented in conferences or published in academic journals.

**Potential benefits and risks**
There is no personal benefit for you, except the opportunity to reflect upon your practice. However, your participation in this research will contribute to a better understanding of rights-based practices in NGOs, particularly in the context of Bangladesh and to the further development of theories on the HRBA. There is no foreseeable risk or harm, but there may be some minor inconvenience or discomfort.

**Follow-up contact**
You will be sent a draft of the interview transcript. You can let me know if there is anything I misheard or you want to change. It is for this purpose that you will be asked to supply your contact details on the consent form. Your contact details will be stored in a database, which can be accessed only by the researcher, and will be deleted at the end of the study.

**Your rights**
You are free to refuse to participate or to withdraw your consent to participation at any time. If you choose to withdraw during or after the interview, any information you have provided will be deleted and not used. You can also choose not to answer any question. You will not be disadvantaged if you refuse to answer or participate, as this research is independent of ActionAid. You can request any further information about this research during or after the interview.

This study has been cleared by one of the human ethics committees of The University of Queensland in accordance with the National Health and Medical Research Council's guidelines. You are of course, free to discuss your participation in this study with the research advisor, Jill Wilson on +61-7-3365-1254. If you would like to speak to an officer of the University not involved in the study, you can contact the Ethics Officer on +61-7-3365-3924.

Jae Eun Noh

PhD candidate
At the School of Social Work and Human Services
The University of Queensland
Brisbane QLD 4072 Australia
jaeeun.noh@uqconnect.edu.au
Appendix 3 – Participant consent form

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Research Project
“Exploring a human rights-based approach in Bangladesh”

1) I have been given clear information, about the study and I understand what is required of me.

2) I understand that participation is voluntary and there is no personal benefit from participating in this study. I can refuse to discuss any topics that I do not wish to discuss and can choose to withdraw at any time. If I choose to withdraw, I can also request any information I have provided to be deleted and not used.

3) I understand the interview will be audio recorded for transcription purposes. All information provided during the interview will be treated as strictly confidential.

4) I understand that these audio recordings will be kept in a secure electronic filing system and be destroyed after seven years. Further, the recording will not available to anyone apart from the researcher and her advisory team which consists of three academic staff from the University of Queensland.

5) I understand that the findings of the study will be disseminated through a doctoral dissertation, conferences and academic journals. In a dissertation or published papers, my name and any identifying information will not be revealed.

6) I understand and consent to be contacted by the researcher to clarify the data I provide for example by providing feedback on the transcript.

7) I am aware that I may ask any further questions about the research study at any time.

I have read the information sheet and I hereby consent to take part in an interview as part
of this research project.

Name: ...........................................................................................................
Signed: .......................................................... Date: ..........................

**Participant Contact Details:**

Email address.................................................................
Mobile Number .............................................................
What’s the best time to contact you? ............................
Appendix 4 – Interpreter consent form

Research Project
“Exploring a human rights-based approach in Bangladesh”

1) I will provide the researcher with an interpretation service during interviews conducted by the researcher as part of her doctoral dissertation at the University of Queensland.

2) I am responsible for converting Bengali into English and vice versa.

3) I understand that my service can involve field trips.

4) I understand that I am expected to provide consecutive interpreting, which begins when the speaker has finished 1-2 sentences.

5) I will render, to the best of my ability, a complete and accurate interpretation without changing the meaning, omitting anything that is stated or adding my own explanation.

6) If I have interpreted inaccurately or incompletely, I will inform the researcher of this and will provide a corrected interpretation, even after the interview.

7) I understand that all information gained in the course of interpretation shall remain strictly confidential.

8) I will notify the researcher of any real or perceived conflict of interest which may affect the interview as soon as I am aware of such conflict.

9) I understand that I am expected to present myself in a professional manner and to arrive on time.

10) I agree the following rates shall be paid for my interpreting services.

- Full-day rate: 3,000 taka
- Half-day rate: 1,500 taka
The above rate does not include travel expenses. The researcher will bear the costs of accommodation and food.

I have read this consent from and I hereby consent to perform services in accordance with this agreement.

Name: ..............................................................................................................................
Signed .................................................................................................................. Date: ..................
Appendix 5 – Topic codes

1) Examples of topic codes for interviews in NVivo
2) Examples of topic codes for documents in NVivo

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Appendix 6 – Presentation at AAB

Date and time: 29 May 2012 / 3pm to 5pm
Venue: a workshop room in AAB office

A. Presentation by the researcher (about 30 minutes)

The basis of the research and its perceived significance were explained. The data collection process was outlined. Preliminary findings from the collected data were then presented, including identified differences in understanding and implementing the HRBA, distinct features of AAB’s HRBA, challenges faced by AAB. The presentation was concluded by mentioning that the unique understanding of a HRBA was found in AAB and that this might be a product of the context of Bangladesh and proactive staff as change agents.

B. Q&A session (for one and a half hours)

I was asked about selection criteria for interview participants; particularly the decision to exclude newly joined staff and community people. I explained that the participant selection criteria were driven by the nature of research interest, namely organisational changes over time in the HRBA.

Much time was spent discussing AAB’s child sponsorship programme, promoted by the researcher’s brief mention of it in the context of the opposition of other HRBA NGOs to such fundraising programme. This discussion provided an opportunity to share a critique of child sponsorship from the literature. Positive aspects experienced by AAB were mainly supported by its justification for human rights work and by its second-hand involvement in fundraising through the sponsorship scheme.

Findings about confusion as to what is meant by HRBA in both theory and practice were confirmed by AAB staff who attended the presentation. Explanations for this confusion were further discussed. In this context, the recent development of the handbook in AA and the need for service delivery in Bangladesh where basic needs are generally not met by the government were also discussed.
**Issues to be reflected in the analysis**

This two-hour discussion left some issues to be further explored. The presented findings were mostly validated by AAB staff in attendance, and could be richer with feedback gained from the session. For example, the practical implications of the existing diversity were identified as important to AAB staff. Although the process of developing various ideas and practices for the HRBA was of interest to this research, the inconsistency was negatively perceived from the viewpoint of an organisation. The process of institutionalising the HRBA should be examined considering diverse intents and effects.

Another insight was the reality of partner NGOs. This research could only capture the voices of staff engaged in AAB’s programmes, losing possibly conflicting voices of other staff whose work was sponsored by different funding organisations. As the influential role of funding in adopting a certain development approach was acknowledged by attending AAB staff, adoption and implementation of the HRBA in partner NGOs might be highly complicated with differently oriented multiple donors. This contextual understanding of partner NGOs will enrich the analysis.