

Advancing Dignity in Global Development

In his book *The Life You Can Save*, Peter Singer says that helping people in poverty is not just about giving people things. It's also about treating them with respect and dignity. Research shows that people receiving aid often feel powerless and unheard.



Respect for dignity is something that people receiving aid deeply value but often don't get. Even when these people get the help they need, they can come away from these interactions feeling bruised, mistreated and ignored.

There are many challenges to upholding dignity in global development.

- Cultural differences
- Unequal power dynamics,
- The need for quick results

It's hard to measure the impact of treating people with dignity, especially in areas where resources are limited. This makes it easy to accidentally cause harm, even with good intentions.

For example, if a charitable organisation provides people living in poverty with new clothes without asking those people if they want them or what kind of clothing would be the best for them, the people may feel they have not been treated with respect as they haven't been asked what they actually need. If, in the process, this charity puts some clothes-makers in the community out of business, this might be an example of doing harm despite good intentions. We can understand the challenges to upholding dignity using the example above.

- **Cultural differences**
 - Providing new clothes without asking the recipients can in some cases be culturally insensitive. Clothing preferences and styles can be quite different across cultures, but even more importantly, some cultures have different feelings about accepting charity in the first place. Having a one-size-fits-all approach may disrespect the diverse needs and preferences of the community members.
- **Unequal power dynamics**
 - The charitable organisation has resources and authority. If they decide to provide new clothes without consulting the recipients it can result in a power imbalance as they assume they know what is best for the community without listening to the people's voice—respecting their needs and input.
- **The need for quick results**
 - Wanting to make a quick impact can mean a charitable organisation rushes to provide immediate assistance to people without taking the time to connect with the community and understand their needs and wants

Any effective charity must prioritise the dignity of its recipients. It's up to philanthropy (charitable acts or other good deeds that help others or society as a whole) to lead the way in making global development more respectful and fair. Treating people with respect is not only the right thing to do, but it also leads to better outcomes, like improved well-being, self-confidence, better health, more cooperation, and greater satisfaction with the services received



Ensuring Dignity Through Data

There are three factors that should be considered when thinking about the concept of dignity

- **Fairness/Equity:** Does the organisation treat recipients as if they were equals?
- **Agency:** Does the organisation give their recipients choices and meaningful chances to consent?
- **Representation:** Does the organisation offer recipients the chance to be and feel seen?

Evaluating Whether a Charity Upholds Dignity

The Life You Can Save incorporates the concept of respect and dignity as one of the factors used to assess the effectiveness and impact of a charity. There are four criteria that help show whether a charity upholds the dignity of its recipients

- **Priority:** Is the service the charity providing something people in the area value and are calling for? Most importantly, how does the charity know this is something people need and want? A good charity will ask what people need and want. A good charity should openly discuss any choices they have to make and explain why they chose one thing over another.
- **Interactions with recipients:** A respectful charity will take steps to ensure that their recipients are treated fairly and in the way they wish to be treated.
- **Culture and People:** A respectful charity will also make sure their staff are treated with respect and the organisation has a good culture
- **Listening and Learning:** A respectful organisation needs tools to know that they are treating people with respect. A charity that respects people's dignity will measure the quality of their recipient's experiences and will adapt their programs based on this feedback.

