Best practices, challenges and lessons learned concerning integrated approaches to the promotion and protection of human rights and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level (A/HRC/61/13)

KEY MESSAGES

Report 61/13, mandated by the UN Human Rights Council, shows how systematically integrating human rights into implementation of the 2030 Agenda can accelerate SDG delivery and eradicate extreme poverty without leaving anyone behind. It presents good practice examples of initiatives that advance development while fulfilling human rights across the environmental, economic, and social dimensions of sustainable development.

The report concludes that efforts to end poverty, protect the planet, combat discrimination, and achieve the SDGs (including on health, education, gender equality, reduced inequalities, and decent work) are more effective when they apply people-centered, human rights-based approaches. It calls for building human rights economies, closing the gap between human rights and sustainable development implementation, adequately resourcing relevant work (including enhancing collection and analysis of disaggregated data), and aligning national development strategies with States' human rights obligations and recommendations from international human rights mechanisms.

It further urges that human rights norms and standards guide national policies and reforms of the global economic governance. The report addresses key issues such as high debt burdens, relatively weak accountability mechanisms, and measuring progress beyond GDP, while emphasizing gender equality, expanding means of implementation (including fiscal space for human rights and development), meaningful, safe, and inclusive participation, just transition, and more.

The big picture: Shared commitment, dwindling progress

Adoption of the 2030 Agenda represented a major achievement - a global agreement on a path towards more just, equitable and sustainable development that pays particular attention to the worst off among us.



A decade later the **shared commitment remains**, and efforts have resulted in tangible impacts, including millions of people gaining access to essential services, falling child and maternal mortality and a 10-percentage point leap in social protection coverage. Yet **progress has been uneven and insufficient, and is increasingly jeopardized** by rising geopolitical tensions, more frequent and intense conflicts, climate and environmental crises, economic shocks, surging debt, shrinking civic space and deepening inequalities - at times further overshadowed by competing national priorities, such as defense - amounting to what the Secretary-General has described as a "development emergency".

Human rights and sustainable development go hand in hand

Human rights and sustainable development are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. This was explicitly affirmed in the 2030 Agenda and has been consistently reaffirmed, including at the key global meetings such as the SDG Summits (in 2019 and 2023), the Summit for the Future, the Fourth Financing for Development Conference and the Second World Summit for Social Development. As SDGs closely mirror human rights (e.g. SDG 4 on quality education mirrors the human right to education), global challenges do not only impede SDG achievement, they also erode enjoyment of human rights, often disproportionally affecting the most marginalized in our societies.



Acknowledging that the 2030 Agenda is grounded in human rights is more than a semantic exercise. It requires applying international human rights law and using the work of international human rights mechanisms to guide SDG implementation, ensure the benefits of development are enjoyed more equitably, safeguard our environment, and include those impacted in all relevant decision-making. In short, when human rights are fully integrated - rather than treated as separate or optional - we create fairer societies, more just economies, and a healthier planet for all.

The report cites numerous examples of integrated approaches accelerating progress at the national and local level. Some of the examples are captured in more detail in the publication "Seeding Change for a Human Rights Economy - Unlocking the Potential of Human Rights to Accelerate Achievement of the 2030 Agenda." Given that SDG progress is lagging, examples featured in the report try to offer inspiration for creating scalable solutions for greater impact.

The most impactful solutions are grounded in the understanding that human rights are relevant to all dimensions of sustainable development and can help unlock the full potential of the 2030 Agenda, including by informing tailored policy action, enhancing freedoms, ensuring meaningful participation, and strengthening accountability and transparency. Integrating human rights in development brings with it the high reward of improving data quality, smarter spending, building public trust and protecting those in need.

Key messages

Systematically integrating human rights across the 2030 Agenda implementation has demonstrated potential to accelerate progress. Supported by the international community, States need to take steps to widen the fiscal space and devote the maximum of available resources for rights-based action to achieve the SDGs, consulted across all sectors and all segments of society. National efforts need to be augmented by global reforms of the international finance, tax, and debt architecture, guided by human rights.

Social dimension of sustainable development

- Fighting inequalities and discrimination is key to eradicating extreme poverty and requires “human rights first” planning and implementation addressing the root causes and systemic barriers keeping people trapped in poverty, sometimes for generations.
- Commitment to ‘leave no one behind’ is too seldom systematically translated into policy and practice. A comprehensive analysis of who is at risk and which population groups are the worst off will help make laws, policies, and budgets more concrete and impactful, avoiding fragmented and incomplete approaches.
- Data, disaggregated by prohibited grounds of discrimination, is essential to ensuring progress in leaving no one behind, yet chronic underfunding of data and statistics remains a persistent challenge.
- Accelerating progress requires prioritizing and further improving SDG targets and indicators, especially those most directly linked to inequalities (SDG 5, SDG 10), with a view to ensure they are grounded in human rights norms and standards and that their implementation is aligned with the States' existing human rights obligations. In this context advancing work on measuring progress beyond GDP is key.
- Gender equality, social and racial justice, including social protection, are among the key elements of a holistic, multi-dimensional approach to poverty. They should be prioritized and adequately resourced.

Economic dimension of sustainable development

- Aligning economic policies with human rights obligations - central to building human rights economies - results in more investment for SDGs and human rights, with higher returns for society at large.
- States have a duty to allocate maximum available resources for the progressive realization of economic, social, and cultural rights also when fiscal space is limited. Human rights analysis can help allocate these resources to where they have the most impact.
- Human rights approaches can help catalyze sustainable growth, reconceive the flawed growth-driven economic development models, and ensure private development finance does not sideline public interest.
- Debt emergency is also a human rights emergency. To ensure debt repayment does not jeopardize the enjoyment of human rights (access to education, health, social protection and others), human rights assessments should inform relevant decision making.
- Globally, economic justice will remain out of reach unless States integrate human rights in international finance, tax, and debt architecture reforms. Sevilla Commitment reaffirmed that the global financing framework must uphold human rights for all - delivery on this vital recognition is critical.

Environmental dimension of sustainable development

- As the 2030 Agenda predates the recognition of a human right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, this right and the advances achieved in various COPs since 2016 have not been adequately integrated in implementation.
- Just transition is central to delivering sustainable development and requires a principled approach grounded in international law to ensure that transformations also advance human rights, dignity, equality and justice.
- The number of environmental human rights defenders facing repression has been surging. Protecting civic space, meaningful and inclusive participation, and access to effective grievance mechanisms as well as securing free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples is vital.
- We need to prevent the rising demand for minerals from worsening human rights violations and abuse. Principles to guide critical energy transition minerals towards equity and justice require human rights to be placed at the core of all mineral value chains.

Fundamental freedoms and participation

- Fundamental freedoms are key to enhancing accountability and empowering people and communities. Alongside SDG 16, they can help unlock the true potential of sustainable development by forging a transparent, responsive and accountable institutional environment.
- Human rights approaches can help address democratic backsliding, corporate capture or human rights risks of digital transformations. They also encourage responsible investment and protect civic space.
- Further efforts are needed to institutionalize access to information, transparency, stakeholder engagement and public participation. Strengthening institutions and protecting advocates is crucial to advancing sustainable development.

Accountability for SDGs and human rights

- Systematically connecting the 2030 Agenda and human rights accountability processes will enhance follow up and implementation. This includes Voluntary National Reviews, which can be meaningfully informed by the work of the international human rights mechanisms (and vice versa).
- Systematic collaboration between national mechanisms and processes that support human rights implementation (e.g. NHRIs and NMIRFs) and those that focus on SDG delivery will enhance impact, delivery and accountability.
- Local action on the 2030 Agenda creates additional opportunities to enhance accountability and localized impact.

NB - The report also notes trends that require more in-depth discussion going forward, such as demographic change, the implications of urbanization, the impact of artificial intelligence and the negative impact of corporate consolidation and corporate capture of governing institutions and regulatory processes.

Summary: Conclusions and recommendations

Make human rights a non-negotiable, systematic element of every policy decision, budget allocation, and data collection effort tied to the 2030 Agenda. Doing so will help States better identify those most in need, distribute resources more equitably, and ensure that development never comes at the expense of human rights or planetary boundaries.

- **Close the gap between human rights and sustainable development implementation.** Prioritize efforts aimed at **achieving gender equality** and **building human rights economies**.
- **Increase resources for tailored technical advice on human rights and sustainable development**, especially at the regional and national level.
- Prioritize **aligning national development plans and strategies with human rights obligations**.
- Systematically **utilize the work of the international human rights mechanisms** to inform national and local development efforts.
- **Commit to systematic LNOB analyses** that identify marginalized population groups, determine the most excluded among them, examine the structural causes of their marginalization, and define priority action needed to address them.
- Strengthen the collection and analysis of **disaggregated data**, invest in **data systems that align with international human rights law**, and systematically **apply human rights standards to measure SDG progress**.
- Accelerate SDG progress, address extreme poverty and inequality, and promote a just transition by building **human rights-based economies that use international human rights law to guide economic policymaking**.
- **Systematically connect human rights bodies** - such as national human rights institutions and national mechanisms for implementation, reporting, and follow-up - **with the national institutions responsible for SDG implementation.**
- Systematically conduct **human rights, gender, and equality impact assessments**, along with **human rights–based analyses** of public spending, taxation, and budgeting.
- Ensure that the obligation to **use the maximum available resources** to realize economic, social, and cultural rights guides the design of budgets and economic policies.
- Prioritize efforts to establish **universal, adequate, predictable, and non-discriminatory social security systems** that focus on marginalized populations, and to build **comprehensive, rights-based care and support systems**.
- Prioritize just transitions and ensure that the **right to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment** is fully integrated into the implementation of the SDGs.
- Enhance **access to justice**, including for economic, social, and cultural rights; institutionalize **access to information**; build **transparent and accountable institutions**; **safeguard and expand civic space**; and ensure **meaningful participation** of all stakeholders in development efforts.
- **Embed human rights in reforms of the international finance, tax, and debt architectures,** including the structural governance and operations of international financial institutions, private creditors, and credit rating agencies.

Additional information - click to access



podcast series

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL & CULTURAL RIGHTS **KNOWLEDGE HUB**

online resource



OHCHR & human rights economy



regional and country examples