

THE DANISH
INSTITUTE FOR
HUMAN RIGHTS

HUMAN RIGHTS AND
THE 2030 AGENDA
FOR SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT



At the Danish Institute for Human Rights, we develop analysis, tools and guidance on the links between human rights and sustainable development.

We have developed a Human Rights Guide to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that uncovers the human rights anchorage of the 17 goals and 169 targets. The Guide reaffirms that the SDGs are underpinned by human rights, and will only be achieved if principles of participation, accountability and non-discrimination are respected.

This guidance paper explains how the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs are anchored in human rights, and how a Human Rights-Based Approach to development can guide its implementation.



Human Rights

THE ROAD TO THE SDGS

In September 2015, the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The summit marked the end of several years of debate in a process that was unprecedented in length, complexity and inclusiveness in terms of multilateral diplomacy and multi-stakeholder participation.

The 2030 Agenda provides a comprehensive and universal framework, uniting the environmental, social and economic dimensions of sustainable development. The Agenda comprises three main elements:

- The **17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** and 169 targets to be achieved by all countries by 2030.
- The **Means of Implementation (MOI)**, which specify the resources and partnerships that are necessary to reach the agreed goals and targets.
- The **Follow-Up and Review (FUR)** processes and mechanisms that will monitor and guide the implementation, including the global indicators framework.

The 2030 Agenda builds upon and captures key elements of key international agreements and frameworks developed over the last 25 years.

On the one hand, it reflects the outcomes originating from the 1992 **Earth Summit**, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification, as well as Agenda 21, which provides a framework for global partnerships for sustainable development.

On the other, it builds upon the achievements of the **8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)**, which until 2015 constituted the single most important initiative to promote human development and reduce poverty. The MDGs set concrete and time-bound targets to be reached by developing countries by 2015 and led to a number of key achievements such as a decline in extreme poverty and undernourishment, greater gender parity in primary education and improved access to drinking water.

However, the MDGs also left a number of **challenges and gaps**:

- They were defined without public consultations, or engagement of civil society;
- Their emphasis was more on economic growth than on environmental sustainability and social equity;
- They did not address the development trends and structural causes of poverty;
- They were only focused on developing countries, thus ignoring the situation of inequality and discrimination, unsustainable patterns of consumption and production etc. in developed countries

- In many countries, the development, implementation and follow-up of activities related to the MDGs were not participatory and inclusive; and
- Overall, human rights, democracy and good governance were not a well-integrated part of the MDGs.



THE 2030 AGENDA: LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

The shortfalls of the MDGs have left a number of lessons learned, which the 2030 Agenda builds on.

- The uneven progress under the MDGs has been taken into account by the 2030 Agenda through the inclusion of the cross-cutting principle of non-discrimination and the pledge to “leave no one behind” and to “reach those furthest behind first”.
- Whereas the MDGs were defined without public consultations, the consultation process for the 2030 Agenda was characterised by broad participation from Major Groups and other civil society.
- The absence of goals related to institutions and governance was identified as a major shortfall of the MDGs. In contrast, SDG 16 (“Peace, justice and strong institutions”) offers significant transformative potential to improve human rights through institutional, justice and security reform.
- The SDGs are universal, meaning they are equally applicable to all countries, although each country of course faces unique challenges and opportunities with regards to sustainable development



HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE 2030 AGENDA – MUTUALLY REINFORCING

The SDGs “seek to realize the human rights of all”


UN General Assembly

Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is explicitly grounded in human rights. Consequently, the SDGs reflect key international human rights and labour standards and affirm that they “seek to realize the human rights of all”.

More than 90% of SDG targets are linked to international human rights and labour standards, and the pledge of the 2030 Agenda to “leave no one behind” reflects the fundamental human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality. The Agenda also stipulates that Follow-up and Review (FUR) processes to reach the SDGs should be inclusive, transparent, respect human rights, enhance accountability and have a particular focus on those furthest behind.

The 2030 Agenda and human rights are thereby **tied together in a mutually reinforcing way**. Human rights offer guidance for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as it is underpinned by legally binding human rights instruments. Likewise, the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs can contribute substantially to the realisation of human rights.



The high degree of convergence between human rights and the 2030 Agenda implies that existing human rights mechanisms can directly assess and guide the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Moreover, drawing on existing human rights mechanisms will ease the reporting burden of states, and enhance coherence, efficiency and accountability.

THE HUMAN RIGHTS GUIDE TO THE SDGS – A SEARCHABLE DATABASE

The Human Rights Guide to the SDGs is a basic tool to operationalise a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to sustainable development. The Guide identifies the linkages between the SDGs and human rights instruments, labour standards and environmental instruments, and thereby illustrates how human rights and sustainable development are tied together in a mutually reinforcing way.

The Guide is the essential tool to:

- Understand the linkages between human rights and the SDGs; and
- Develop a HRBA to sustainable development programming and implementation, as well as follow-up and review (monitoring, evaluation and reporting).

The Guide is constructed as a **searchable database** in 7 languages (Arabic, English, French, Russian, Spanish, Chinese and Danish) with multiple search functions. It allows the user to actively explore the convergence of human rights and the SDGs in planning, programming, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. It can, inter alia:

- Identify the human rights implications of a given goal and target;
- Show how specific human rights and labour standards link to the goals and targets; and
- Identify the implications for specific rights-holders such as women, children, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, and migrant workers.

[HTTP://SDG.HUMANRIGHTS.DK/](http://sdg.humanrights.dk/)

“The Human Rights Guide to the SDGs will help anchor your work in human rights obligations”

Eva Grambye

International Director, the Danish Institute for Human Rights

THE HUMAN RIGHTS GUIDE TO THE SDGS – A SEARCHABLE DATABASE

Direction of search

- Right to goal
- Goal to right

Goal

Choose some options

Target

Format: 16.4

Rights instrument

Choose some options

Rights article

Format: 24.2.c

Term (full-text search)

Search by instrument, target or article title/description

Items: **100**

-
-
-
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Choose a goal or a target to see linkage to human rights.



A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO THE 2030 AGENDA

The reflection of human rights in the 2030 Agenda lends the implementation of the Agenda to a **Human Rights-Based Approach** (HRBA) to development and programming.

The entitlements and obligations under international human rights law define the roles of **rights-holders** (individuals and groups to which the rights in question apply) and **duty-bearers** (state and non-state actors with corresponding obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights).

The HRBA stipulates that:

- Development should further the realisation of human rights;
- Human rights standards should guide development cooperation and programming; and
- Development cooperation contributes to the development of capacities of duty-bearers to meet their obligations and of rights-holders to claim their rights.



Human Rights

The principles of **accountability, participation** and **non-discrimination** are at the core of the HRBA. These principles are especially emphasised in **the Follow-up and Review (FUR) mechanisms** of the 2030 Agenda with its emphasis on:

- Promoting **accountability** to citizens;
- Respect for **human rights** and a **particular focus on vulnerable groups and those furthest behind**;
- Ensuring **inclusive, participatory, transparent** FUR mechanisms; and
- Collecting data, which is high-quality, accessible, timely, reliable, and **disaggregated** by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability and geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

The above reflects the principles of the HRBA to development, which should guide both the design and the operationalisation of FUR mechanisms for implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda.

OPERATIONALISING HUMAN RIGHTS IN SDG IMPLEMENTATION

DUTY-BEARER PERSPECTIVE

When a government is preparing its action plan on the national implementation of the SDGs, it will need to mainstream gender in the plan, in order to follow a HRBA and ensure that women are not left behind. The Human Rights Guide to the SDGs will help establish the links between the SDGs and core human rights instruments on gender, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). By mapping the gender-related aspects of each SDG, the government has a 'roadmap' for integrating a gender perspective into its action plan aligned with legally-binding human rights instruments.

RIGHTS-HOLDER PERSPECTIVE


An NGO working with, for example, the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of education can look into the Human Rights Guide to the SDGs, and find the specific provisions pertaining to this group of rights-holders. For example, SDG target 4.5 aims to ensure equal access to education for vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities. By identifying the linkages between the specific target and specific human rights instruments - in this case the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) - the NGO can see which standards states have committed to. Consequently, it can use the recommendations and data from existing human rights mechanisms, such as the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to support its work with achieving SDG target 4.5.

USE EXISTING HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS TO ENHANCE EFFICIENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The high degree of convergence between human rights and the 2030 Agenda points to the potential of using national, regional and international human rights mechanisms to assess and guide implementation of the Agenda. The human rights system can provide:

- Systematised qualitative analysis and data through institutionalised reporting and monitoring mechanisms;
- Recommendations and guidance; and
- Facilitation of access to justice, redress and remedy.

By building on the synergies between human rights and the 2030 Agenda, states and other actors can ease their reporting burden and find guidance by looking to existing human rights mechanisms to feed into the Follow-up and Review (FUR) of the 2030 Agenda. In this regard, it will be important to seek operational alignment between states' SDG reporting and human rights reporting. This will **enhance coherence, efficiency and accountability**, and **ensure national anchorage of FUR**.



As independent state bodies, **National Human Rights Institutions** (NHRIs) monitor and analyse the national human rights situation against international standards. NHRIs often prepare annual status reports on the general human rights situation, and undertake analysis and research on specific topics. NHRIs can play a significant role in the operationalisation of the mutually reinforcing aspects of human rights and the 2030 Agenda, and contribute to ensuring accountability into the implementation and review of the Agenda, by:

- Developing tools, guidance and knowledge on promoting a HRBA to the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda;
- Assisting in the shaping of national indicators and sound data collection systems, including by building on existing international and regional human rights reporting and monitoring mechanisms;
- Monitoring progress at the local, national, regional and international levels and revealing patterns of inequality and discrimination, including through innovative and participatory approaches to data-collection, and;
- Promoting transparent and inclusive processes for participation and consultation in the development of national strategies to achieve the SDGs, including by reaching out to those who are furthest behind.

The importance of NHRIs for the 2030 Agenda was reaffirmed with the selection of the “**existence of independent National Human Rights Institutions in compliance with the Paris Principles**” as one of the global indicators for measuring progress under SDG 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions.



MORE ON A HRBA TO THE 2030 AGENDA

Read more on a HRBA to the 2030 Agenda in the series of DIHR guidance papers:

Danish Institute for Human Rights, **Guidance Paper on Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, June 2017.

Danish Institute for Human Rights, **Guidance Paper on Human rights and the Follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, June 2017.

Further reading:

Human Rights in Follow-up and Review of the 2030 Agenda:

bit.ly/follow-review

Human Rights and Data: bit.ly/humanrights-data

For more information, visit

<https://www.humanrights.dk/our-work/sustainable-development>