INTEGRATED REVIEW AND REPORTING ON SDGs AND HUMAN RIGHTS

A KEY TO EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT AND ACCOUNTABLE IMPLEMENTATION
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Authors: Francesca Thornberry and Adrian Hassler

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© 2019 The Danish Institute for Human Rights
Wilders Plads 8K
DK-1403 Copenhagen K
Phone +45 3269 8888
www.humanrights.dk

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INTEGRATED REVIEW AND REPORTING ON SDGS AND HUMAN RIGHTS: A KEY TO EFFECTIVE, EFFICIENT AND ACCOUNTABLE IMPLEMENTATION

Human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are inextricably linked. The 2030 Agenda is explicitly grounded in international human rights.

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) “seek to realize the human rights of all”, and more than 90% of the targets directly reflect elements of international human rights and labour standards.

The pledge to “leave no one behind” mirrors the fundamental human rights principles of non-discrimination and equality.

The strong links between human rights and sustainable development offer enormous potential to make their follow-up better aligned and thus more effective, efficient and accountable. This can be achieved through joined-up reporting and monitoring related to both human rights and the SDGs.

Human rights standards and the lessons learned from their implementation can inform and guide SDG implementation.

• Human rights set standards for good governance, accountability, rule of law, transparency, participation, inclusion, equality and other key principles that are essential for the successful achievement of the SDGs.

• The legally-binding nature of human rights standards, and the systems set up for their supervision can help to fill accountability gaps in SDG implementation and monitoring.

• Conversely, the SDG framework is an important vehicle through which human rights can be realised.

Both human rights and the SDGs have specific mechanisms for review and monitoring which are designed to track progress and identify challenges, lessons learned and good practices, and provide guidance on improving their implementation.
A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

“A human rights-based approach is a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting human rights. It seeks to analyse inequalities which lie at the heart of development problems and redress discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede development progress.”

OHCHR, FAQ on HRBA to Development, pp15-16

A human rights-based approach (HRBA) to sustainable development can lead to better, more equitable and more sustainable development outcomes, and ensures coherence of government policies and programmes. According to this approach:

- The objective of development should be to further the realisation of human rights as enshrined in international human rights instruments;

- Human rights standards and the recommendations of human rights oversight mechanisms should guide programming in all sectors and in all phases of the programming process; and

- Development processes should contribute to developing the capacities of ‘duty-bearers’ to meet their obligations and of ‘rights-holders’ to claim their rights

A human rights-based approach to sustainable development means that national SDG strategies and plans are built on human rights standards and informed by recommendations from human rights monitoring mechanisms. In turn, the SDGs can serve as a powerful framework to mobilise resources and partnerships for follow-up to human rights recommendations. By aligning reporting to review mechanisms under the human rights system and sustainable development frameworks, states, stakeholders and rights-holders can avoid duplication of efforts to save scarce resources for implementation.
This section provides an overview of the key workings of the international human rights monitoring system whose recommendations are fundamental for integrated SDG – human rights reporting and review.

International human rights monitoring is undertaken through a range of mechanisms. The human rights monitoring mechanisms of the United Nations are:
• the Treaty Monitoring Bodies;
• the Universal Periodic Review (UPR); and
• the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council.

These mechanisms play a key role in monitoring, investigating and making recommendations on the implementation of human rights standards or on key human rights issues. Given the integrated nature of human rights and sustainable development, there is a significant potential to align these reporting and follow-up procedures to boost efficiency and accountability.

TRETY BODIES
The nine core UN human rights treaties have committees or ‘Treaty Bodies’ composed of independent human rights experts that monitor implementation of these treaties and provide guidance on their implementation. These treaties are legally-binding and address the full range of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, as well as specific categories of persons, such as children, women, persons with disabilities and indigenous peoples which may be at risk of being left behind in SDG implementation.

States parties to these treaties periodically report on their implementation to the associated Treaty Body in cycles of three to six years. In addition to state reports, Treaty Bodies consider a wide range of information on implementation of treaties in a given country, including from UN and regional inter-governmental bodies. Civil society and national human rights institutions (NHRIs) can supplement the state report through parallel or ‘shadow’ reports.

The links between international and regional human rights standards and SDG targets can be explored in the Human Rights Guide to the SDGs – an online database available in 7 languages, which is the essential tool to:

• Understand the linkages between the SDGs and human rights, labour standards and environmental treaties and instruments
• Develop a human rights-based approach to sustainable development programming, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting
• Understand the linkages between regional and international human rights instruments and environmental treaties

Guide available at: sdg.humanrights.dk
UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW
The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a peer review procedure under the UN Human Rights Council that examines the human rights record of all UN Member States in a recurring cycle of four-and-a-half years. States under review have the opportunity to declare what actions they have taken to improve their human rights situation and fulfil their relevant obligations. Reviews take place through an interactive discussion between the state under review and all other Member States, who can raise questions or comments and make recommendations, which are either ‘accepted’ or simply ‘noted’ by the state in question. States are required to report prior to review, and many choose to provide a mid-term report halfway through the follow-up period. At both stages, civil society and NHRI’s can submit parallel reports. Moreover, civil society and NHRI’s can participate in national consultations, the informal UPR pre-sessions hosted by UPR Info, and not least by engaging states to make recommendations on specific issues of concern.

SPECIAL PROCEDURES OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL
The Human Rights Council has established a wide range of Special Procedures in the form of Independent Experts, Special Rapporteurs and Working Groups. These bodies focus on thematic human rights areas, specific group of rights-holders, or individual countries with ongoing human rights situations. Aside from other activities, the Special Procedures may undertake country visits to examine issues of concern.

The Special Procedures issue reports with observations and recommendations pursuant to country visits, or in connection with their thematic reports.

For more information on how the UN human rights supervisory system works, see: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/Pages/HumanRightsBodies.aspx

Similar to the UN human rights system, the International Labour Organization’s supervisory system monitors the implementation of international labour standards. Many of the ILO’s 190 legally-binding Conventions are immediately relevant to the implementation of the SDGs; most notably its 8 core Conventions on forced labour, child labour, equality of opportunity and treatment, and the right to organise and collective bargaining, which are all liked to SDG 8. There are also numerous other ILO Conventions that are of direct relevance to the SDGs including on specific aspects of work and employment, and on specific groups including migrant workers and indigenous peoples.

States report regularly to the ILO’s Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) in cycles of two to five years. Country-specific Observations and Recommendations can be found in the ILO’s Normlex database: http://bit.ly/ilo-normlex
REPORTING AND FOLLOW-UP IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM

Reporting and review of progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda happens at international, regional and national levels.

The main global and regional platforms for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda are the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), and the Regional Forums for Sustainable Development (RFSDs). At the global level, the HLPF meets for two weeks annually in New York under the auspices of either the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) or the UN General Assembly. Each year, the HLPF reviews global progress on 5 or 6 SDGs, as well as the cross-cutting Goal 17 on the Means of Implementation.

Between 40 and 50 states can sign up to present a Voluntary National Review (VNR) typically consisting of a 15-minute presentation, followed by a 15-minute discussion. The process for preparing the VNR is a critical element of SDG review. VNRs should build on a national process of follow-up and review that involves all relevant societal stakeholders and has a focus on those at risk of being left behind. At the national level, inclusive and accountable Follow-up and Review (FuR) processes constitute the backbone of the FuR architecture.

From a human rights perspective, it is also at national level that the connection between rights-holders and duty-bearers is most direct, and where states are directly accountable to their citizens.

The 2030 Agenda specifies that national FUR processes should be country-led and tailored to the national context.

For more information on the preparation of Voluntary National Reviews, see: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20872VNR_hanbook_2019_Edition_v4.pdf
MAKING THE LINK BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:

THE SDG – HUMAN RIGHTS DATA EXPLORER

The SDG – Human Rights Data Explorer, is a new instrument to make the connection between human rights recommendations and the SDGs easy to operationalise in reporting and follow-up. The information in the database can directly support the operationalisation of a human rights-based approach to the SDGs.

The database lets users explore observations and recommendations made by international human rights mechanisms to their country through the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda. The data can be further broken down by concerned rights-holder groups, issuing mechanism, and more. The tool helps identify specific areas where reporting and follow-up to human rights and sustainable development can be pursued jointly.

The tool is available to use free of charge in all UN languages: English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese. It is an essential tool for state actors, civil society, academia and anyone with an interest in the links between human rights and the SDGs.

The SDG – Human Rights Data Explorer tool builds on an experimental data-mining methodology, where an algorithm has been trained to automatically identify links between more than 150,000 recommendations and observations by international human rights mechanisms, and the 169 SDG targets. The tool was developed in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the social enterprise Specialisterne.

The searchable database holds a complete record of recommendations and observations issued by the Universal Periodic Review, the Treaty Bodies, and Special Procedures. The database indicates the most salient links to SDG targets of each individual recommendation. The ‘Explore All’ option allows users to search for targeted recommendations to use in their specific area of work. Through links to the source document reference, the data can easily be matched up with existing tracking systems.
The database can also be used to analyse the distribution of recommendations per country, population group, across specific Goals and targets or by human rights body. These graphs can demonstrate where there may be particular human rights concerns that need to be addressed in a systemic manner.

Conversely, the graphs also highlight the gaps in the availability of guidance from human rights bodies, and therefore help identify areas where human rights institutions may need to expand their efforts to close those gaps.

There are, for example, comparatively few recommendations relating to Goal 7, although unequal access to electricity and expansion of land-based renewable energy projects are issues that have clear human rights impacts.
TOWARDS INTEGRATED REPORTING AND FOLLOW-UP

The potential to bridge the accountability and implementation gap through aligning SDG and human rights reporting and follow-up offers itself to SDG and human rights reporting and follow-up at national as well as regional and international levels. SDG and human rights reporting is done by a broad range of actors including governments, civil society organisations, NHRIs and others.

This section explores different ways in which human rights recommendations – found through the SDG - Human Rights Data Explorer – can be used in different processes and at different levels in order to pursue a human rights-based approach to sustainable development.

NATIONAL LEVEL

BUILDING ON HUMAN RIGHTS RECOMMENDATIONS IN NATIONAL SDG AND DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

One of the main objectives of a HRBA is to design and build strategies and programming on the basis of human rights standards and recommendations from human rights bodies.

Recommendations issued by human rights bodies can therefore guide national follow-up to the SDGs including strategies, programmes and budgets in a number of ways and by different stakeholders. Among other things, the human rights system provides quality information in order to identify:

- priority issues from a human rights perspective;
- Data and information required to fully understand the issues at stake and address them adequately;
- gaps in law and practice necessary to fulfil human rights obligations, and measures to overcome them;
- societal groups most at risk of being left behind;
- concrete measures to abolish discrimination and promote equality, including legal reforms; and
- resources needed to ensure human rights realisation.
Recommendations from international human rights bodies can also serve to identify areas where additional resources may be needed in order to fulfil human rights obligations which are aligned with specific SDGs.

Budgets linked to national SDG or development planning can also be aligned with the implementation of human rights recommendations.

Recommendations can equally be used for development programming by UN Country Teams and development assistance partners. This approach has already been applied with a new generation of UN Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs) in the Latin American region.

Since 2017 UNDAFs in Peru, Bolivia, and Costa Rica have made the link between human rights recommendations and SDGs. See: A/HRC/38/28).

The National Planning Authority in Uganda has developed a Human Rights-Based Approach Planning Tool for Sectors and Local Governments.

The tool takes into account the various recommendations accepted by the Government of Uganda under the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). For this HRBA Planning Tool, four questions are key:

- Who has been left behind?
- Why? Which human rights are at stake?
- Who should do something about this (duty bearers)?
- What do they need to take action?

The tool is designed to provide guidance on how to integrate human rights in sector and local government planning. It highlights critical human rights issues in the sectors; presents the international instruments and national framework that form the legal basis for addressing the identified human rights issues; and can identify appropriate interventions and indicators for both sectors and the local government. See: http://npa.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/HRBA-Tool.pdf

→ Use the SDG – Human Rights Data Explorer to identify which human rights recommendations are relevant for the implementation of a specific SDG target, sector, or country or for a specific group at risk of being left behind.

→ Use the recommendations to identify actions required to close the gaps in knowledge or data that need filling to achieve targets in question.

→ Use the recommendations to identify specific groups that may have been left out of stakeholder analysis, consultations or planning, and on whose situation further research or actions may be necessary.

→ Use the recommendations to complement existing knowledge about the issues being addressed and integrate them into national, sectoral or local development planning and budgeting processes.
Alignment or effective coordination of the work of the different mechanisms with responsibility at national level for reporting and follow-up on human rights recommendations and the SDGs has several clear advantages:

- Ensuring that gaps in SDG implementation or human rights realisation can be filled through joined-up actions and strategic interventions;
- Avoiding parallel processes which effectively have the same aim, thus eliminating duplication; and
- Improving coordination mechanisms and efficiency in terms of use of staffing and financial resources.

1. NATIONAL MECHANISMS FOR REPORTING AND FOLLOW-UP AND THE SDGS

To cope with the increasing volume and complexity of reporting on human rights and following up on human rights recommendations, a number of states are currently working to establish a so-called National Mechanism for Reporting and Follow-up (NMRF).

NMRFs are governmental structures that facilitate timely and high-quality reporting to international human rights mechanisms through streamlined information management, organisation of follow-up tasks and data-gathering; all in coordination with relevant line ministries and the public administration.

While these mechanisms vary in accordance with the national institutional set-up, the majority of them constitute standing bodies that are either attached to a single ministry (typically the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Justice) or operate at the inter-ministerial level.

The work of NMRFs in many ways resembles that of governmental SDG follow-up structures that have been put in place in many countries in the form of inter-ministerial coordinating bodies and sustainable development councils or task forces.

Given the significant linkages between the two agendas, there is a clear benefit of aligning the work of these bodies more closely to boost efficiency and reduce duplication. Resources that are freed up in the process can be used to improve systematic monitoring of progress and stakeholder engagement, hence enhancing accountability.

→ Improved coordination between NMRFs for human rights and mechanisms for reporting on SDGs can improve efficiency, save on human and financial resources and contribute to ensuring that human rights and SDGs are implemented in a coordinated manner.
2. NATIONAL RECOMMENDATION TRACKING TOOLS

To fulfil their coordinating role, many NMRFs are supported by technical tools ranging from simple spreadsheets to comprehensive databases including so-called "National Recommendation Tracking Databases" (NRTDs). The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is currently rolling out an NRTD platform which supports integrated follow-up between human rights obligations and the SDGs, building on DIHR analysis of the links between recommendations and SDG targets.

Similar platforms have been developed by civil society actors and National Human Rights Institutions.

Paraguay’s online NRTD, “SIMORE” is maintained by the national Human Rights Secretariat and has been lauded as a successful prototype of a follow-up database. It was recently expanded to SIMORE Plus, which integrates follow-up to the SDGs.

In addition, an online dialogue space was created where civil society can provide comments and observations to the ongoing implementation process. A detailed description of Paraguay’s joint follow-up to human rights and the SDGs can be found in its 2018 VNR report.1

The open source software Impact OSS was developed through a joint effort of Samoa’s NMRF and the New Zealand Human Rights Commission.2 The Impact OSS system is equipped to monitor human rights commitments as well as follow-up to the SDGs. For more information, see: https://impactoss.org/

Some civil society organisations have also developed key tools for simultaneously tracking states’ human rights obligations and SDG commitments, informed by the comments and recommendations of some of these international human rights mechanisms.

The CEDAW-SDGs tool, developed by International Women’s Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAW-AP), has been developed to ensure that the implementation of the sustainable development goals is centred on human rights and does not widen existing inequalities. The tool enables its users to undertake a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the corresponding parts of the 2030 Agenda to identify key gaps and make recommendations for different actors to address these gaps. See http://bit.ly/cedaw-sdgs for further information.

→ Use the SDG – Human Rights Data Explorer to download sets of recommendations or to organise them by issue, human rights body, specific group or SDG target – to ensure organised and coordinated gathering of data.

→ Combine tracking of implementation of recommendations from human rights bodies with tracking of relevant actions to achieve the SDGs to identify gaps and make recommendations to improve alignment and efficiency.

1 See VNR of Paraguay 2018, esp. section 4.4. Available at: https://bit.ly/2NuQPoy
REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

INTEGRATING SDGS INTO REPORTING TO INTERNATIONAL AND REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES

Through making recommendations on states’ human rights obligations, human rights bodies are a critical source of guidance for SDG reporting and implementation due to the inextricable links between the 2030 Agenda and human rights.

States, civil society, NHRIs and other UN bodies all provide information to international and regional human rights bodies. The quality of information provided to these bodies is crucial for their consideration when they are examining states’ compliance with their human rights obligations or undertaking research into thematic areas.

Many civil society organisations and NHRIs alike have referenced the SDGs in their parallel or shadow reporting to international and regional human rights bodies with a view to ensuring that these bodies are able to examine the application of states’ human rights obligations and their impact in the SDG context.

In a parallel report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2017, Plan International made specific reference to the SDGs in connection with the issues of violence against women, harmful traditional practices, and gender disparities in education in Burkina Faso. In the same year, the Committee issued multiple recommendations in its concluding observations which also drew attention to relevant SDG targets under Goals 3, 4 and 5.

This emerging practice can serve to foster understanding of the mutually-reinforcing connection between human rights and the SDGs, and the value of pursuing joint follow-up.

→ Link information and evidence in reports to UN human rights bodies to SDGs in order to highlight its relevance for national SDG implementation.

“DRAW ON EXISTING REPORTS. USE EXISTING NATIONAL PLATFORMS AND PROCESSES THAT COULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE VNR WRITING AND ANALYSIS PROCESS. EXAMPLES INCLUDE: [...] REPORTS SUBMITTED TO INTERNATIONAL BODIES, INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS, SUCH AS THE UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW (UPR) AND INTERNATIONAL TREATIES […]”
- HANDBOOK FOR PREPARATION OF VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS, 2019

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3 Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2017), Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Burkina Faso (CEDAW/C/BFA/CO/7). Available at: http://undocs.org/CEDAW/C/BFA/CO/7
USING INFORMATION FROM HUMAN RIGHTS MECHANISMS TO COMPLEMENT VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEWS

Reports submitted to human rights mechanisms, as well as the recommendations received in return, offer a source of valuable information for reporting to the High-Level Political Forum for Sustainable Development (HLPF). With its focus on marginalised population groups, this material is particularly valuable to inform SDG reporting with a view to “leaving no one behind”.

In 2017 and 2018, more than a dozen VNRs made reference to the work of relevant human rights mechanisms. This represents a significant increase from the first two years following the adoption of the 2030 Agenda.

When Brazil presented its VNR to the HLPF in 2017\(^4\), there were only two brief references to indigenous peoples and indigenous women, respectively, in this 76-page report. This document covered all SDGs under review that year – all of which are highly pertinent to the living conditions of indigenous individuals and communities in the country.

However, with the help of the SDG-Human Rights Data Explorer, it is possible to find a wealth of information relevant to the situation of indigenous peoples and sustainable development in Brazil. For example, there are ninety-six observations and recommendations from UN human rights mechanisms that have been addressed to Brazil and are related to SDG 4. Of these, more than one quarter (25) directly refer to indigenous peoples.

On SDG 16, the database shows more than 300 results for Brazil, of which 65 are related to indigenous peoples. Access to justice, human rights defenders, and participation in decision-making are some of the issues highlighted in these recommendations and observations. A number of them refer specifically to the need to “ensure the protection of human rights defenders, notably the leaders of indigenous communities fighting for their rights”.\(^5\)

The VNR of Laos (2018) makes reference to the most recent examination by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in a chapter on “leaving no one behind”. Subsequent follow-up actions include the establishment of a National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and the Elderly, and a National Strategy and Plan of Action on Inclusive Education.\(^6\)

\(\rightarrow\) Use the SDG - Human Rights Data Explorer to highlight issues, challenges and gaps that need to be addressed in the VNR consultation and drafting process at national level and groups that require specific attention.

\(\rightarrow\) Use the SDG – Human Rights Data Explorer to support the identification of solutions to the challenges identified in the VNR.


\(^5\) UPR recommendation from Switzerland (2012), supported by Brazil. See A/HRC/21/11, para. 119.82. Available at http://undocs.org/A/HRC/21/11
