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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RELATION WITH HUMAN RIGHTS AND ITS AGENDA 2030

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ABSTRACT

Human rights are fundamental to all three of sustainable development's dimensions—social, environmental, and economic—and are necessary to achieve development that leaves no one behind. This research paper provides an in-depth analysis of the interconnectedness between human rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It emphasizes the role that human rights play in achieving the three pillars of sustainable development—social, environmental, and economic—and their centrality in the overarching goal of "leaving no one behind." The paper illustrates how the 169 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are deeply aligned with international human rights norms, with over 90% of the SDG targets being in harmony with fundamental labour and human rights principles. A key argument in the paper is that the SDG framework and human rights principles reinforce each other, especially with regard to equality, non-discrimination, and the inclusion of marginalized groups. The paper highlights the explicit connections between specific SDG targets and key human rights provisions, underscoring the role of human rights frameworks in shaping the achievement of the SDGs. The paper also stresses the importance of accountability in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, particularly through Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). It advocates for integrating human rights reporting into the VNR process and provides guidance on how states can reuse their existing human rights reports to meet the SDG monitoring requirements. This approach is particularly relevant for ensuring transparent, participatory, and inclusive processes in the monitoring and reporting of progress towards the SDGs. Disaggregated data is presented as a critical tool for understanding the specific challenges faced by excluded and vulnerable groups. The research advocates for a human rights-based approach to the 2030 Agenda, which requires addressing the needs of those most behind and ensuring that data collection and analysis reflect the realities of marginalized communities. Finally, the paper highlights the role of the United Nations (UN) system, especially the Human Rights Council (HRC), UNDP, OHCHR, and UN Country Teams, in supporting the integration of human rights into the implementation of the SDGs. The paper concludes by urging the institutionalization of human rights-based approaches within the UN's development activities, emphasizing that the achievement of the SDGs depends on robust, rights-oriented governance and accountability mechanisms. In essence, this research paper provides a comprehensive framework for integrating human rights into the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda, calling for greater collaboration among governments, international institutions, and the private sector to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of sustainable development.

Keywords: Human Rights, Agenda 2030, SDG Targets, Human Rights Council, Voluntary National Review

1. INTRODUCTION

The world is facing serious challenges due to slow economic growth, inequality, and environmental damage.

We can no longer keep using the same ways of producing, using energy, and consuming resources. It's clear that we need to change how we develop, focusing on sustainability and including everyone in the process. We need a new approach for the future that is fair, sustainable, and works for the long term. It emphasizes the need for a transformative shift in the current development paradigm, focusing on sustainable growth that balances economic, social, and environmental considerations. The core message is about transitioning from outdated patterns of production, energy, and consumption to a model that supports long-term, inclusive, and environmentally responsible development.

The adoption of the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** by the United Nations in 2015 is central to this transformation. This Agenda includes the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets, which serve as a global blueprint for achieving sustainability across all nations. The passage stresses the holistic nature of these goals, covering aspects such as poverty eradication, climate action, quality education, and gender equality, while placing equality and human dignity at the forefront.

In addition to the 2030 Agenda, the **Addis Ababa Action Agenda** (focused on financing for development) and the **Paris Agreement** (on climate change) form a comprehensive framework for addressing global challenges. Together, these agreements provide a foundation for the international community to work together on tackling issues like climate change, social inequality, and economic stagnation, ensuring that development occurs in a way that respects the environment and promotes shared prosperity. It highlights the necessity of global partnerships and the commitment of both developed and

developing countries to implement the SDGs, with particular emphasis on ensuring that development is inclusive, equitable, and sustainable for all people and ecosystems. The 2030 Agenda represents a critical shift towards long-term sustainable development that acknowledges the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental well-being, aiming to create a more equitable and resilient global future. [11]

For the 2030 Agenda to truly "**leave no one behind**," [5] human rights must be at the forefront of its implementation. This means that all UN member States need to uphold, protect, and promote their human rights obligations. The full enjoyment of human rights is linked directly to the success of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the goal to eradicate poverty in all its forms. As the UN Secretary-General highlighted, human rights, including the right to development, are central to the 2030 Agenda. The Agenda also provides a platform for countries to show their commitment to all human rights. This is a key issue because, without strengthening human rights globally and ensuring their enjoyment on the ground, it will be impossible to meet the SDGs' promise of inclusivity and equity.

2. MEANING OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND AGENDA 2030

2.1 **HUMAN RIGHTS:** It refers to the basic freedoms and protections that every person is entitled to, simply because they are human. These rights are universal, meaning they apply to all people, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, gender, or any other status. They are fundamental to ensuring dignity, equality, and fairness in society. [13]

Some key aspects of human rights include:

- ✓ **Civil and Political Rights:** These include the right to life, freedom of speech, the right to vote, and protection from torture or unfair imprisonment.

- ✓ **Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights:** These encompass the right to education, healthcare, decent work, and a standard of living that supports human dignity.
- ✓ **Equality and Non-Discrimination:** All individuals have the right to be treated equally, without discrimination based on race, sex, ethnicity, religion, or other characteristics.

Human rights are protected and promoted by international law, such as the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UDHR) adopted by the United Nations in 1948. These rights aim to ensure that everyone can live with dignity, freedom, and justice.

2.2 **AGENDA 2030:** [2] The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is a global framework adopted by all 193 United Nations member states in September 2015. It lays out a plan for achieving sustainable development in a balanced way, addressing economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. The agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), each with specific targets and indicators, and is intended to be achieved by 2030. [4]

Countries are expected to set national targets based on their own priorities and capacities. The 2030 Agenda is a voluntary framework, but governments are encouraged to develop their own national action plans, report on progress, and work together through international partnerships to meet the goals. In essence, the 2030 Agenda calls for a transformation in how we approach development, with a focus on sustainability, equality, and shared prosperity for all people and the planet.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is deeply rooted in human rights principles, drawing explicitly from the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and other international human rights instruments, such

as the Declaration on the Right to Development. This connection underscores the importance of human rights in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs, as outlined in the 2030 Agenda, aim to realize the human rights of all people, ensuring that these rights are protected and promoted globally. The 2030 Agenda is not just a development framework but a human rights framework. By embedding human rights at the core of the SDGs, it underscores the indivisibility of human rights and sustainable development. The Agenda calls for inclusive development that leaves no one behind, ensuring that all people, in all countries, can enjoy their fundamental rights while pursuing sustainable prosperity.

3. HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE AGENDA 2030 ARE INTERVOWEN

3.1 WHY ARE HUMAN RIGHTS IMPORTANT FOR THE 2030 AGENDA? [6]

The SDGs according to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, "seek to realize the human rights of all," and the great majority of the goals are based on international human rights instruments. Therefore, there is a mutually reinforcing relationship between the 2030 Agenda and human rights. Operationally, this creates several opportunities: because the 2030 Agenda is supported by legally enforceable human rights treaties, human rights standards and processes provide guidance for its implementation. Human rights standards and organizations, for instance, can guarantee accountability in the SDGs' implementation and act as a safeguard against inconsistent and unfair progress.

3.2 WHY IS THE 2030 AGENDA IMPORTANT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides an operational framework for realizing human rights, but it does so without subordinating the human rights agenda to the SDGs. Instead, the SDGs serve as a practical action plan for advancing human rights across various domains, while simultaneously

addressing critical global challenges, such as climate change and pollution. These issues, which significantly affect human rights, are often addressed outside the traditional human rights system—through environmental treaties, climate accords, and other global frameworks. For example, climate change can threaten access to food, water, and shelter, which are fundamental human rights, but the global response to climate issues is typically framed through environmental rather than human rights instruments.

As widely expressed by the President of the Human Rights Council:

*"I believe that the question of how States can respect, protect and fulfil human rights within their implementation efforts towards the 2030 Agenda can also be inverted in the sense that the fulfilment of the Sustainable Development Goals has a positive impact on human rights. That is to say, greater levels of development can lead towards greater levels of achievement of human rights."*³

H.E. Mr Joaquín Alexander Maza Martelli, 11th President of the Human Rights Council Satigny, June 2017

In other words, as noted by the President of the Human Rights Council, the 2030 Agenda is not just about pursuing development goals; it is also a response to urgent global issues—such as the environmental crisis—that demand a cross-cutting, integrated approach that goes beyond conventional human rights processes. While the human rights framework is indispensable for ensuring the equitable and inclusive realization of the SDGs, addressing these broader challenges requires coordinated action across multiple sectors, including human rights, environmental policy, and economic development.

4. INTEGRATED APPROACHES

4.1 In order to guide the implementation of integrated approaches to human rights and sustainable development, it is essential to provide clear operational

guidance that can help various stakeholders, such as government institutions, UN agencies, national human rights institutions, civil society, and businesses, develop effective strategies. [7] These integrated approaches offer several benefits, including enhanced prioritization, coherence, efficiency, participation, inclusion, and accountability. In order to guide the implementation, three main questions need to be answered:

- What are the concrete linkages between human rights and the 2030 Agenda?
- What are the next steps for human rights institutions and mechanisms to contribute to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda?
- How can the 2030 Agenda most effectively contribute to the realisation of human rights?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is indeed deeply grounded in human rights, and this interconnection is evident in multiple ways throughout its structure and implementation framework. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets are not just development objectives but are also aligned with international human rights standards, making them mutually reinforcing. Here are key ways in which the 2030 Agenda is tied to human rights:

1. Explicit References to Human Rights Instruments:
 - a. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and other foundational human rights treaties are referenced directly throughout the 2030 Agenda, emphasizing that the SDGs are designed to uphold and without discrimination promote the rights of all people..
 - b. The Declaration on the Right to Development and other

human rights instruments influence the Agenda's vision, guiding the realization of the SDGs within a rights-based framework.

2. SDGs as Realizing Human Rights: [1]

- a. The 2030 Agenda clearly states that the SDGs "seek to realize the human rights of all," linking each goal to the realization of basic rights such as the right to health, education, food, work, and equality.
- b. This ensures that progress in these areas is not only measured by economic or environmental outcomes but by their impact on human dignity and rights.

3. Human Rights in the 169 Targets:

The vast majority of the 169 targets under the SDGs reflect core human rights principles and labour standards. These include:

- a. Right to health (SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being)
- b. Right to education (SDG 4: Quality Education) [14]
- c. Right to adequate housing (SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities)
- d. Labour rights and decent work (SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth)
- e. Non-discrimination and gender equality (SDG 5: Gender Equality)

These targets ensure that sustainable development is not just about economic growth but also about creating an inclusive society where everyone's rights are respected.

4. Human Rights as a Guiding Principle:

Human rights provide a normative framework for implementing the SDGs. They ensure that

the Agenda focuses on the most vulnerable populations, such as marginalized groups, indigenous peoples, women, children, and those living in extreme poverty. By focusing on the human rights of all, the SDGs aim to ensure no one is left behind. [10]

5. International Human Rights and Labour Standards:

- a. The SDGs are not just aspirational goals—they are anchored in international human rights law and labour standards. For example, the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s conventions on decent work and social protection are reflected in SDG 8, which focuses on promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all. Other SDGs like SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) also align with core international treaties on non-discrimination and equal access to justice.

4.2 LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

The 2030 Agenda also puts the principles of equality and non-discrimination at its heart, with a commitment to "reach those furthest behind first" and "leave no one behind", a very special attention must be given to the marginalized groups, and two very important goals on combatting discrimination and inequalities (SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 10 on inequalities within and between countries), as well as a cross-cutting commitment to data disaggregation, inclusive participatory approaches (all of society and all of Government approaches), and accountability for the 2030 Agenda follow-up and review indicate that the entire Agenda was developed using a human rights-based approach, which is also crucial for its effective implementation.[9]

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is deeply committed to equality and non-discrimination, emphasizing the need to leave no one behind and to reach those furthest behind first. This commitment is at the core of the Agenda's design, ensuring that marginalized groups, who often face the greatest challenges, are given special attention. The Agenda places a strong focus on combatting discrimination and reducing inequalities, with dedicated goals aimed at addressing these issues.

4.3 KEY PRINCIPLES AND FEATURES OF THE 2030 AGENDA:

- a. **Equality and Non-Discrimination:** The 2030 Agenda ensures that equality and non-discrimination are foundational principles, guiding the implementation of all SDGs. The idea is to ensure that all people, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to benefit from sustainable development.
- b. **SDGs Focused on Reducing Inequalities:** SDG 5 (Gender Equality): This goal aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by addressing discrimination, violence, and unequal opportunities in education, work, and decision-making. SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities): This goal focuses on reducing inequalities within and between countries, promoting policies that ensure equitable distribution of resources, opportunities, and wealth.
- c. **Data Disaggregation:** A critical element of the 2030 Agenda is the commitment to data disaggregation. This means collecting and analysing data by key factors like gender, age, income, disability, and other characteristics to better understand disparities and track progress in reaching marginalized groups. Disaggregated data helps ensure that no group is overlooked and that policies are tailored to the needs of

those most in need.

d. **Inclusive and Participatory Approaches:**

The 2030 Agenda emphasizes inclusive, participatory approaches that involve all of society and all levels of government in the process of achieving the SDGs. This means engaging not only governments but also civil society, private sector, local communities, and marginalized groups in decision-making and implementation. It encourages an approach that ensures everyone's voice is heard, especially those who have historically been excluded or disadvantaged.

e. **Accountability and Follow-up:**

Accountability is a core element of the 2030 Agenda, with clear commitments to follow-up and review mechanisms to track progress. Governments are held accountable for their commitments to achieving the SDGs, and transparent systems for monitoring and reporting progress ensure that the agenda remains on track.

5. THE NEW AGENDA 2030

5.1 VISION: [12]

The Agenda 2030 outlines a vision for a better world, focusing on the achievement of global well-being, sustainability, justice, and equality. In essence, it outlines a transformative and holistic vision for a world based on sustainability, equality, justice, and the well-being of all people and the planet. It stresses interconnectedness of these issues and the need for global cooperation to achieve them. It aims at envisaging the following:

- a. **A World Free of Poverty and Suffering:** The vision aims for a future where poverty, hunger, disease, and lack are eliminated. This includes universal access to education, healthcare, social protection, and a world where

everyone's physical, mental, and social well-being are guaranteed.

- b. **Human Rights and Safety:** It envisions a world where human rights are universally respected, where people live without fear and violence. This includes equal opportunities for all, respect for cultural diversity, and ensuring that children grow up free from violence and exploitation. [8]
- c. **Gender Equality and Empowerment:** The vision emphasizes full gender equality, particularly for women and girls, ensuring the removal of all legal, social, and economic barriers to their empowerment.
- d. **Sustainable Development:** The vision envisions sustainable economic growth that benefits all people and societies, balanced with sustainable patterns of consumption and production. It also advocates for protecting natural resources, including air, land, water, and biodiversity, while mitigating climate change.
- e. **Good Governance and Justice:** It highlights the importance of democracy, the rule of law, and good governance, which are essential for sustainable development. Both the principles must be applied at both the national as well as international levels.
- f. **Harmony with Nature:** Lastly, the vision emphasizes the need for humanity to live in harmony with nature, protecting wildlife and ensuring that natural ecosystems are preserved for future generations.

5.2 MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The new Agenda for Sustainable Development requires a strong global partnership to ensure its success. This partnership will bring together governments, the private sector, civil society, the UN, and other actors to mobilize resources and work together to achieve the SDGs. Global

Solidarity: The partnership will focus on helping the poorest and most vulnerable people. It will encourage worldwide cooperation to support the implementation of the SDGs, using all available resources. **Means of Implementation:** The financial and technical support required to achieve the SDGs is just as important as the goals themselves. This includes funding, capacity-building, and technology transfer to developing countries, often on favourable terms.

Responsibility of Countries: Every country is responsible for its own development, but global cooperation will help. Financial resources, such as public finance (both domestic and international), will be crucial for providing services and supporting development.

- a. **Support for Developing Countries:** There are specific strategies to help developing countries, such as programs for small island states and landlocked countries. The African Union's Agenda 2063 and NEPAD are also key frameworks within the SDGs.
- b. **Voice of Developing Countries:** It's important that developing countries, including those in Africa, small islands, and least developed nations, have a bigger say in global decision-making, particularly on economic policies.
- c. **Role of National Parliaments:** National parliaments play an important role in implementing the SDGs by making laws, setting budgets, and ensuring accountability for progress. Governments must also work with regional, local authorities, and other organizations to make sure the SDGs are achieved.
- d. **Role of the UN:** The United Nations will support the SDGs, ensuring efficient and effective action at a

global level. The UN will work closely with national governments, while supporting their leadership in implementing the SDGs.

In short, achieving the SDGs requires global teamwork, financial support, and strong leadership from governments, international institutions, and the private sector. The partnership is about working together to make sustainable development a reality for everyone.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and human rights are fundamentally intertwined, with the SDGs serving as a practical framework for the realization of human rights worldwide. The Agenda explicitly recognizes the importance of human dignity, equality, and justice, ensuring that no one is left behind in the pursuit of sustainable development. By aligning the SDGs with international human rights standards, the Agenda guarantees that progress in areas such as health, education, gender equality, and social inclusion is pursued in a rights-respecting manner.

The 2030 Agenda provides a holistic, inclusive, and participatory approach to development, where the human rights of all individuals are upheld at every stage of implementation, from policy-making to monitoring. Human rights norms offer essential guidance, ensuring accountability, reducing inequalities, and addressing the root causes of poverty, discrimination, and marginalization. As such, human rights are not only the foundation of the SDGs but are the means through which they can be fully realized. In this way, the 2030 Agenda represents a comprehensive vision for a world where sustainable development and human rights are mutually reinforcing, paving the way for a fairer, more just, and peaceful future for all.

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