

Governance

HUMAN RIGHTS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

GLOBAL CONTEXT

COVID-19 has presented and continues to present key human rights challenges in the socio-economic impact, response and recovery. The pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities. Over 60% of countries have regressed on basic human rights in 2020 as a result of measures to tackle the pandemic.³ A significant number of countries, including some established democracies, implemented emergency measures that limited rights in a way that did not meet legal standards. Without due regard to safeguards there is a concern that these approaches will be the ‘new normal’.⁴ The pandemic has eroded public trust in government and its institutions as the threat of the pandemic has prompted many countries to limit human rights. Some 90 countries worldwide have passed laws or taken actions to restrict freedom of expression during the pandemic.

Rising authoritarianism, ethno-nationalism, and regionalism are noted trends. The acceleration of digital service delivery creates immense opportunities to deliver development differently but must do so whilst safeguarding human rights including rights to privacy, freedom of expression, opinion and assembly. Increasing inequality, shrinking civic space, discrimination and systemic barriers and power imbalances particularly affect women, girls, persons with disabilities and minorities. Increases in reprisals against human rights defenders are alarming trends that require human rights-based approaches to be at the centre of the strategies to address them. Meanwhile, climate change impacts are displacing millions, posing, “*the greatest challenge to human rights of our era,*” according to the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michele Bachelet.

“UNDP is supporting countries to fulfil their human rights obligations – not only because it is the right thing to do but also because it is fundamental to achieving the SDGs.”

Achim Steiner, UNDP Administrator

Statement on Human Rights Day
2021.

Human rights are a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Human rights are central to UNDP support to countries to implement and achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals as well as other commitments agreed by Member States. Over 90 percent of SDG targets overlap with human rights obligations in the normative framework and Agenda 2030 envisions a world ‘*of universal respect for human rights and human dignity*’ where using a human rights-based approach no one is left behind in development progress.

The Dec 2020 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system recognizes the UN contribution to the promotion of human rights for sustainable development and, for the first

time, ‘calls upon all entities of the UN development system in accordance with their respective mandates, to assist governments upon their request and in consultation with them, in their efforts to respect and fulfil their human rights obligations and commitments under international law, as a critical tool to operationalize the pledge to leave no one behind’¹. Important UN system-wide initiatives, including the [Secretary-General’s Call to Action for Human Rights](#) (C2A) and the [Common Agenda](#), are focusing attention on how human rights are central to the achievement of sustainable development.

Addressing the root causes of human rights violations, including discriminatory laws, practices and social norms is a vital investment to promote peace, justice and inclusive institutions and governance approaches throughout the spectrum of UNDP development assistance. It is critical in crisis and fragile contexts where multi-dimensional risks including deteriorating human rights contexts correlate with deteriorating security contexts and a rising risk of conflict.

UNDP’S COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

UNDP has worked in over 100 countries strengthening national human rights systems and spearheads important platforms and partnerships to further UNDP programming and upstream and downstream policy on human rights both internally and across the UN system. UNDP is a thought-leader on the interface of human rights and development and leading several UN system wide partnerships and areas of work including engaging strategically at key human rights and development fora such as the UN Human Rights Council. (See below Partnerships)

UNDP’s human rights strategy (2022-2025) – forthcoming - will outline the specific role that UNDP will have in supporting the realization of human rights through assisting countries to meet their human rights obligations and working in partnership with UN entities, and national human rights actors including through our coordinating and convening role in bringing together multiple partners and resources at national and local levels and as the ‘integrator’ in the UN system.

It aims to provide a road map to elevate and integrate human rights into all aspects of UNDP’s work to support sustainable human development and the 2030 Agenda, and an inclusive long-term socio-economic recovery to COVID-19. The strategy, reflecting recent trends in sustainable development and the updated architecture to support policy and programming in UNDP, will focus on **5 pathways for human rights action**: evidence-based policy; development programming; human rights leadership and capacity; partnerships, and; operations.

The strategy will accompany the UNDP [2022-2025 Strategic Plan](#) which is an ambitious framework which identifies **bedrock human rights principles as key enablers of transformative change**. Under each of UNDP’s six signature solutions—poverty and inequality, governance, resilience, environment, energy, and gender equality—the Strategic Plan calls for inclusive approaches, enhanced accountability, non-discrimination, amplified voice, and empowerment of vulnerable groups.

Importantly, the Strategic Plan recommitments UNDP to a rights-based approach, centered on human agency and human development, to ensure we Leave No One Behind. The Strategic Plan emphasizes the human rights-based approach as an engagement principle for UNDP’s work.

In 2015, UNDP adopted the first mandatory Social and Environmental Standards (SES) for a UN entity mandating a human rights-based approach to our development programming and this was followed by integrated tools and guidance including mainstreaming human rights in our quality assurance processes for project formulation and programme delivery. Internal policy on UNDP’s application of the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) for working with the non-UN security sector was put in place in 2017 and human rights is maintained as a key-criteria for UNDP’s engagement with the private sector.

UNDP'S SERVICE LINES

UNDP's traditional human rights work is being expanded to include important new areas of mainstreaming and direct programming across thematic priorities in our development mandate:

Key priorities include:

- Support to national human rights systems including national human rights institutions
- Human rights in crisis and for prevention
- Human rights and SDG systems integration including follow-up to human rights mechanism recommendations such as the Universal Periodic Review process.
- Supporting member states and businesses to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

In addition, UNDP has significant portfolios:

- Working to mainstream human rights across the organization
- Providing support to application of human rights policy including the HRDDP particularly in crisis settings which enables UNDP to actively manage and monitor risks
- Supporting the finalization of the UNDP Human Rights Strategy (2022-2025)
- Positioning UNDP strategically on human rights for development issues at key fora including the Human Rights Council.

Much of UNDP's programming support is supported by the Global Programme for Strengthening the Rule of Law, Human Rights, Justice and Security for Sustainable Peace and Development where UNDP adopts a multidisciplinary systems approach to addressing structural inequality and discrimination that complements the strengthening of institutional rule of law and human rights capacity, along with proven expertise for promoting the rule of law, justice, security and human rights at the country, regional and global levels, and across the UN system. See Offer on Blueprint for [Transformative Change through the Rule of Law and Human Rights](#).

KEY DELIVERABLES / SUCCESSES OF THE CURRENT PORTFOLIO

Whilst UNDP has supported over 100 countries strengthen their national human rights systems there has been an upward trend in recent years. From 2014-2019 there has been a **240% increase in UNDP country offices reporting on human rights work** with over 60 directly reporting on strengthening national human rights systems in 2019.

The relevant output in the 2018-2021 Strategic Plan supporting strong rule of law and *human rights institutions and systems* was the **third highest output** that countries linked to as measured through Country Programme Documents in the last Strategic Plan cycle. It was also the **second highest output** in relation to programme expenditure across UNDP. Joint programming and UNDP's convening role working with other system actors has also increased with **joint programming in over 25 countries** in 2020 and increasing demand.

UNDP continues to engage strategically at relevant policy fora including the Human Rights Council where UNDP's evidence-based development research and perspectives continue to be sought after: During 2020, **58 Human Rights Council reports referenced UNDP work / research**.

DEMAND-ANALYSIS

UNDP has spent over \$ 1.053 billion in 2018/2019 to enhance capacities, functions and financing of rule of law and national human rights institutions to expand access to justice and combat discrimination, with a focus on women and other marginalised groups.

In phase III of the Global Programme, over \$114 million was provided directly to country offices for implementation of ROLSHR work, with close to 80% allocated to conflict, crisis, and fragile settings.

Ensuring access to justice, people-centred security services, and mechanisms for human rights protection and promotion is essential for not only meeting people's immediate needs but for reducing vulnerabilities to future shocks and crises. While the demand for such support is contextual and shaped by the specific situations in each region, universal challenges should be acknowledged and considered: triple planetary crisis, rising poverty, deepening inequalities, protracted conflicts, refugee and migrant crisis, shrinking civic space, increased violations of women's rights, including mounting levels of sexual and gender-based violence.

PARTNERSHIPS

UNDP's human rights efforts are anchored in strategic partnerships, recognizing the need for coherent approaches Inter-agency collaboration on system-wide priorities

Flagship partnerships include:

- **The United Nations Secretary General's [Call to Action for human rights](#)** is a transformative vision to take action to advance human rights. It recognizes human rights as central to our most pressing issues, including the urgent achievement of sustainable development; the protection of all people regardless of their circumstances, tackling gender inequality; ensuring robust civic space; creating a healthy environment for future generations; and ensuring a safe digital world. UNDP co-leads the work on 2 of the 7 pillars of the C2A and actively engages in all thematic priorities.
- **The Tri-Partite Partnership to Support National Human Rights Institutions (TPP)** consists of UNDP, the UN Human Rights Office (OHCHR), and the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI). It is a platform of collaboration for the UN system to support NHRIs and their networks. Through a partnership approach, the TPP increases efficiency and effectiveness of international support for NHRIs and streamlines communication for NHRIs with international actors. UNDP has increased joint programming through the TPP to over 15 countries from 2019-2021.
- **UNDP, OHCHR and the UN Development Coordination Office partnership to support UN systemwide strategic engagement with human rights mechanisms to achieve the SDGs.** Jointly providing dedicated technical support to UNCTs on collaborative platforms for data collection, reporting, and planning for human rights and SDG systems integration at the country level. There is also a focus on integrating human rights into voluntary national reviews, reprisals and good practices on UPR engagement.
- **UN Human Rights focal points network:** UNDP continues to strongly support human rights mainstreaming in the UN development system actively engaging with the intra-UN mainstreaming work convened by the UN Sustainable Development Group and leading in key areas.

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For more information please visit: <https://www.rolhr.undp.org/>