

Integrating human rights with sustainable human development

A UNDP policy document

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Foreword

Following one of the most destructive conflicts of all time, the international community came together 50 years ago to reaffirm its commitment to human rights. Now, as we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is appropriate for all the organizations of the United Nations system to assess our work, our accomplishments and our setbacks. Secretary-General Kofi Annan's reform of the United Nations emphasizes the centrality of human rights to all activities of the system. By stressing the cross-cutting nature of human rights, he has enjoined us all to take into account human rights as a crucial aspect of our work. Whether we are working for peace and security, for humanitarian relief, or for a common development approach and common development operations, we are all concerned with ensuring the inherent dignity of the human person, with the enjoyment of human rights.

One of this document's goals is to promote cooperation between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Human rights are indivisible, inalienable and universal. The emphasis on one aspect of human rights cannot be used to detract from the promotion of any other aspect. UNDP approaches this commitment to human rights at three levels.

First, UNDP works for the full realization of the right to development. UNDP's mandate for the eradication of poverty can be understood in this light. Poverty is a brutal denial of human rights. Thus by working to eradicate poverty, by supporting the antipoverty capacity of governments and civil society organizations, and by ensuring that United Nations operational activities for development are fully coordinated for the eradication of poverty, UNDP is fostering the implementation of the right to development.

Second, UNDP advocates the realization of human rights as part of sustainable human development, an approach that places people at the centre of all development activities. The central purpose is to create an enabling environment in which all human beings lead secure and creative lives. Sustainable human development is thus directed towards the promotion of human dignity—and the realization of all human rights, economic, social, cultural, civil and political.

Third, UNDP is devoting more of its programming activities to good governance. At the request of governments, UNDP is implementing programmes aimed at reforming legislatures, increasing the efficiency of the executive and strengthening the judiciary. These activities promote the quality of governance and the rule of law. They also promote transparency, accountability and decentralization. In addition, UNDP governance programmes strengthen participation in decision-making at the national and local levels. In many of these activities, UNDP works with national authorities and civil society organizations to promote civil and political rights. Nearly a third of our programming at UNDP is now in governance—directly supportive of human rights, and owned and supported by governments.

These three levels of support for human rights are described in this policy document. It is offered, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to promote wide discussion and broad awareness of the links between human rights and development. To the extent that this dialogue on an important dimension of sustainable human development takes place, the aims of this policy document will have been realized.

James Gustave Speth
Administrator
United Nations Development Programme

Message from the High Commissioner for Human Rights

This document launches an encouraging initiative at a time when the international community begins commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaimed on 10 December 1948 the rights and freedoms essential to human dignity as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. In adopting *Integrating Human Rights with Sustainable Human Development*, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) promotes international standards established to protect the human rights of every individual. I welcome this approach by which human rights has acquired a powerful new advocate.

We are all custodians of human rights, the birthright of all human beings. Human rights bring to the development discussion a unifying set of standards—a common reference for setting objectives and assessing the value of action. The rights approach will enhance the human dimension of UNDP strategies that, among others, focus on eliminating poverty, helping groups that require special protection, and strengthening institutions of governance and democracy.

We must understand the role of human rights as empowering of individuals and communities. By protecting these rights, we can help prevent the many conflicts based on poverty, discrimination and exclusion (social, economic and political) that continue to plague humanity and destroy decades of development efforts. The vicious circle of human rights violations that lead to conflicts—which in turn lead to more violations—must be broken. I believe we can break it only by ensuring respect for all human rights.

The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights and the 1995 World Summit for Social Development highlighted the importance of an integrated approach to social advancement. Lasting progress depends on respect for human rights and effective participation of citizens in public affairs. Nevertheless, we also know that democracy and human rights will prove elusive without social justice and sustainable development. Poverty deprives millions of their fundamental rights. Societies, in turn, are deprived of these people's contributions. Achieving sustainable progress requires recognizing the interdependence between respect for human rights, sustainable development and democracy.

The right to development is all-encompassing. It demands the realization of all human rights: civil, cultural, economic, political and social. Based on this premise, this policy document promises meaningful work to promote people's well-being based on their active participation in the life of society and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting from it.

As one of the great visions and goals of our time, human rights requires the ceaseless efforts of thousands of dedicated human rights advocates, including international civil servants. Their work, particularly at the country level, is essential. I have witnessed the role that UNDP Resident Representatives can play in helping governments and civil society to establish systems through which human rights become ingrained in the life of the community.

Daunting challenges must be overcome for the full realization of all human rights for all people. Yet I am convinced that, working together, we will achieve it. My office is committed to cooperating with UNDP and other partners in implementing this well-timed policy document. We hope to learn from your valuable expertise and share ours with you. Let us join our efforts with a view to making human rights a reality for the benefit of people everywhere.

Mary Robinson
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Preface

Since the early 1990s human rights have played a prominent role in international development cooperation. United Nations (UN) global conferences—from Rio in 1992 to Rome in 1996—have highlighted the crucial links between the three key goals of the UN Charter: peace, development and human rights. At the same time, increased importance has been given to linking development and human rights. Development is a comprehensive process directed towards the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. Moreover, as the UN global conferences have reaffirmed, development is an inalienable human right and an integral part of fundamental human freedoms.

The sustainable human development paradigm is a holistic strategy for development that embraces all human rights—economic, social, cultural, civil and political. Drawing on the relationship between human rights and the sustainable human development paradigm, this policy document outlines three areas for United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) action. The first is providing support for institutions of governance, with an emphasis on building the human rights capacity of these institutions and providing direct support to human rights institutions. The second is developing a human rights approach to sustainable human development. The third is contributing to the human rights policy dialogue and UN conference followup.

This paper is the result of wide consultation and collaboration led by the Management Development and Governance Division of the Bureau for Development Policy, in cooperation with the Regional Bureaux, the Human Development Report Office and the Emergency Response Division of UNDP. Preliminary papers by UNDP Resident Representatives, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and human rights policy experts and organizations served as a basis for discussion by staff at headquarters. The valuable comments received helped shape this paper's content and direction.

Because this document will be periodically reviewed and updated, feedback and comments are welcome, particularly on programme country experiences. They should be addressed to G. Shabbir Cheema, Director, Management Development and Governance Division, Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP, One UN Plaza, New York, NY, 10017.