



Key messages and recommendations from the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI)¹ to the sixth session of the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD), on the People, Prosperity, Planet, Peace and Partnerships.

A Regional Exchange Workshop on African National Human Rights Institutions' Engagement in Sustainable Development Processes was held on 22-23 February 2020 prior to the sixth session of the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD 2020), Victoria Falls Town, Zimbabwe. The Workshop, which was attended by focal points on SDGs from African National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), involved an exchange of experiences on: adoption of a Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) to Sustainable Development processes at national level; methods, techniques and tools for monitoring and reporting; data and indicators in monitoring of SDGs implementation; and regional mechanisms for SDG oversight and the role of NHRIs.

Following the exchange of experiences, participants of the Workshop made the following recommendations/ key messages to the 6th session of the ARFSD:

1. People

All issues addressed in the 'People' cluster can be linked to human rights standards, which can therefore guide the implementation of the concerned Goals. A human rights-based approach can support the achievement of all goals in this cluster through ensuring accountability, transparency, participation and non-discrimination in the process of achieving sustainable development. Therefore duty-bearers should seek to safeguard active and meaningful public participatory process with rights-holders, and in particular with vulnerable groups in these processes, to ensure that no one is left behind.

Encourage Parliaments to exercise effective oversight over government departments and involve National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) during such processes to ensure that there is an added level of accountability.

Education for sustainable development is a critical component of ensuring sustainability and longevity of impact. Build national capacity to conduct human rights education in relation to the SDGs across all government departments and state actors to ensure that their policies, actions and activities are couched in human rights and encourage a human rights-based approach in their work.

¹ NANHRI is the continental network of National Human Rights (NHRIs) in Africa. NHRIs are independent state bodies established with broad mandates to promote and protect human rights in their countries.

2. Prosperity

The responsibility of African states is to promote, protect and fulfil all human rights in line with their international and regional human rights obligations. In doing so, states should seek to ensure that prosperity of all people is achieved through the use of a human rights-based approach to the implementation of the SDGs. In this regard, National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) through their advisory role, provide essential technical support and advice to government ministries, departments and agencies in ensuring decent work for all without discrimination. They also play an important role in promoting equitable distribution of national resources, and basic human rights such as access to clean water and sanitation thereby ensuring that no one is left behind, particularly vulnerable groups.

3. Planet

A safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of a wide range of human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation. A human rights-based approach can therefore be used to guide efforts to combat environmental degradation or climate change, as well as ensure adequate, effective and meaningful participation of affected and potentially affected communities to ensure their needs are adequately responded to. The UN Framework Principles on Human Rights and the Environment highlight the role of States in establishing and maintaining substantive environmental standards that are non-discriminatory, non-retrogressive and otherwise respect, protect and fulfil human rights. National Human Rights Institutions should be supported, consulted and given the opportunity to advise on environmental and climate change laws and policies in order to ensure that there are in line with human rights standards.

4. Peace

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) play a vital role in the protection and promotion of human rights and good governance and in providing critical oversight, accountability and data that is in line with the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. Further, they are an indicator of SDG 16 as well as being reflected in Agenda 2063. However, their critical role has not been properly reflected in national, regional and international SDG processes.

Therefore, there is a need to invest in NHRIs to strengthen their capacity to guarantee the protection of individuals from violence, and promote the rule of law, access to justice, good governance and accountability for SDG and Agenda 2063 implementation in line with human rights standards and principles. There is also a need to engage NHRIs to use the valuable data they have on human rights, justice and rule of law, as well as to advise on disaggregation of data and development of tools to collect such data.

Also, given their role as a bridge between Governments and civil society, there is a need to create space for NHRIs to submit alternative reports in the Voluntary National Review process. This would help address the data gaps that currently exist and, support a human rights-based approach to the achievement of the Goals.

5. Partnerships

By investing in and implementing the SDGs, states can also contribute to fulfilling many of their legally-binding human rights commitments. Focusing on and investing in the Means of Implementation is therefore imperative for governments that are seeking to achieve targets of the SDGs. Potential risks of inadequate consideration of human rights and their implications for the means of implementation, may undermine efforts to achieve the SDGs. However, effective use of human rights standards and principles to guide the Means of Implementation can inform and support more equitable outcomes and effective partnerships.

Whilst recognising the crucial contribution that financial institutions and the private sector can make to financing the implementation of the SDGs, and the critical role of public-private partnerships, we emphasise the importance of the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) in ensuring business respect for human rights in this context. National Human Rights Institutions should be empowered as accountability mechanisms to monitor and provide guidance on efforts to ensure business respect for human rights as well as to facilitate access to an effective remedy for those negatively affected by any development projects.

A human rights-based approach to data can inform better strategies to leave no one behind. There is a need to enhance and capitalise on the key role of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and international and regional human rights mechanisms as data providers and key technical partners in data collection and disaggregation. Collaboration between national statistical offices and NHRIs should be enhanced with a view to make sure human rights principles are applied in data collection processes and efforts to capture the situation of vulnerable groups.

Done on 23 February 2020 in Victoria Falls Town (Zimbabwe).