

# Leverage human rights to rescue the SDGs

UN Human Rights key messages for the 2023 SDG Summit



Build a  
human rights  
economy

## What is a human rights economy?

A human rights economy seeks to address and redress root causes and structural barriers to equality, justice and sustainability by integrating human rights principles and obligations, and SDG commitments, into economic decision-making to yield better outcomes for people and planet. In a human rights economy, economic policies, investment decisions, consumer choices and business models are guided by human rights, resulting in measurably enhanced outcomes for all.

A human rights economy introduces guardrails for fiscal and monetary policies, including budget decisions, tax policies, debt servicing, and related anti-corruption efforts. It also calls for human rights-enhancing industrial and trade policies, promoting consumption and production patterns, investment decisions, and business models that contribute sustainable development, to a clean, healthy, and sustainable environment, and an adequate standard of living for all. It requires transparency and accountability, expands space for social dialogue, scrutiny, and participation, especially for affected individuals, groups, and communities.

## Key messages

**Invest in delivering human rights:** Rallying behind the concept of human rights economy, investing in delivering human rights and improved economic policy-making is a game-changer which can help rescue the 2030 Agenda and correct the current development trajectory.

**Human rights are legal obligations – use them as such to counter inequalities:** Recognize that human rights obligations are an integral part of the national legal framework and use them as essential directives on how to invest in sustainable development and human rights, avoid economic policy missteps, and develop policies that intentionally counter discrimination and inequalities.

**Center all people in economic policymaking:** Adopting economic policies, investments decisions, and business models grounded in human rights generates more inclusive economies, which can boost progress on the 2030 Agenda without leaving anyone behind.

**Increase investment in economic, social and cultural rights:** Invest in human rights by repositioning public expenditure, greater fiscal transparency, progressive taxation, fighting tax avoidance and evasion and enhanced international cooperation. Aligning budgets and public revenue generation strategies with human rights obligations, addressing environmental harms, unsustainable consumption and production, and prioritizing establishment of comprehensive human rights-based social protection systems are key components of the human rights economy.

**Avoid additional fiscal austerity:** Prioritize identifying alternatives to additional fiscal austerity measures. Ring-fencing social spending and increased investment in public services will safeguard and expand fiscal space for progress on the 2030 Agenda while also fulfilling the duty to channel maximum available resources into progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights.

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Place human rights at the heart of care and support systems

## Why are care and support systems a matter of human rights?

Socially unrecognized unpaid or underpaid care work reinforces exclusion and discrimination faced by women and girls throughout their lives, with a significant impact on net income of households with members with support needs as they must resign to engage on an economic activity to support them. The deficiencies in care and support systems affected particularly those facing discrimination, such as migrants, racial, ethnic and other minorities, indigenous peoples, those living in rural areas, and those working in informal sector, among others. We need to reshape our understanding of support and care systems and recognize the economic and social value of care and support work.

Unpaid or informal care and support work should be reduced in a way to support autonomy of care receivers (e.g., by providing support, accessible transports, adequate housing or assistive devices) while keeping healthy community support structures through a co-responsibility. Roles and responsibilities for support and care must be redistributed between men and women, families, communities and States and based on human rights.

## Key messages

**Develop human rights-based support and care systems:** Transformation of care economy should result in an economy that enables support and care systems that are human rights-based as well as gender, disability and age-responsive, with focus on those most left behind.

**Care and support agenda is a key lever for sustainable development:** The SDG Summit should seek to ensure that the support and care agenda is understood in both social and economic terms and is clearly established as a key lever to achieving sustainable development and leaving no one behind.

**Recognize, reduce, and redistribute care and support work:** SDG Summit should recognize and reward the economic and social value of support and care work, reduce unpaid or informal support and care work while ensuring autonomy of support and care receivers and quality of support and care. Further, it should highlight the need to redistribute care and support work as co-responsibility of men and women, families, communities, the private sector and States.

**Those giving and receiving care and support must have a say:** Voices of those giving and receiving support and care, especially older people, persons with disabilities, children or the sick, and in particular women and girls among them, need to be heard and included in transforming care and support systems.

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## Why do we need a new and more equitable international financial architecture?

Because this is a key lever for redressing inequalities within and between nations which requires transforming governance arrangements at all levels, including through reforming global economic governance, creating lasting solutions to debt issues, and reshaping international public finance. Advancing effective multilateralism through people-centered international cooperation and global partnership to constantly improve the well-being of all individuals and peoples in all countries, amplifying the voice and strengthening policy space and representation of developing countries, and securing the allocation of sufficient resources (including debt relief) for sustainable development and climate action are all vital elements of the solution 'and are integral to fulfilling the right to development.

The right to development provides the overarching normative framework for everyone to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy the benefits of development in an inclusive, equitable and sustainable manner, meeting the developmental, and environmental needs of present and future generations, and UN Human Rights is asking States to powerfully strengthen efforts to realize it.

## Key messages

**Create an enabling environment for realizing the right to development:** All States and stakeholders should enhance individual and collective efforts to operationalize the right to development at all levels, including by committing to new international economic, financial and debt architecture in support of sustainable, equitable, and inclusive development.

**Current system impedes sustainable development - change it:** Without equitable international economic relations and a just global economic and financial landscape, underlined by international solidarity and cooperation, even the most groundbreaking efforts at the national level will have limited transformative potential. Developing countries should have policy space and representation in global financial institutions, and countries in need of international financial support should be at the center of decision-making.

**Prioritize SDG Stimulus to deliver on the 2030 Agenda:** Member States should act on the SDG Stimulus, including by placing emphasis on SDG achievement and measurably enhanced enjoyment of human rights as key priorities when redesigning lending and borrowing policy and practice.

**A convention on the right to development is long overdue:** Adopt a legally binding instrument on the right to development, ensuring that relevant work on the convention informs the global community's Plan for the Future.

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Enhance environmental action, in particular climate action

## How is environment connected to human rights?

A clean, healthy and sustainable environment is a universal human right. Our planet – and our future – is in crisis. We have heard repeated calls to take concrete and tangible action to protect the environment and address the triple planetary crisis of climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss before it is too late.

All States have obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights. This extends to protecting people from foreseeable and preventable human rights harms caused by all forms of environmental degradation. All human rights depend on a healthy environment. We cannot be healthy, eat adequate and nutritious food, drink clean water and breathe clear air without it.

Recognition of this fact, and of the right to a healthy environment, strengthens existing systems that are already in place to protect people from environmental degradation and its human rights impacts.

## Key messages

**Phase out all fossil fuels:** SDG Summit should reinforce the need for committing to an equitable phase out of all fossil fuels aligned with a sustainable pathway to limit global heating to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius and to support the inclusion of a phase out in UNFCCC COP outcomes.

**We need a just transition:** To boost implementation of the 2030 Agenda, take immediate steps to ensure that the transition from fossil fuels towards a zero carbon economy benefits people, particularly those in vulnerable situations, and is aligned with efforts to preserve biodiversity and eliminate pollution.

**Clean, healthy, and sustainable environment for all:** We need tangible action to protect the environment before it is too late. Commitments for the SDG Summit should include concrete steps to make the right to a healthy environment a reality for all people, with a particular focus on the needs of countries disproportionately affected by environmental degradation including climate change and the mobilization of resources for rights-based environmental action.

**Environmental matters concern everyone:** We all have the right to be able to participate in, access information and access justice in environmental matters. Guaranteeing this and employing a rights-based approach to environmental action leads to more effective action advancing environmental and social dimensions critical to achieving truly sustainable development, and orienting economies accordingly.

# Leverage human rights to rescue the SDGs

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Anchor LNOB  
in equality  
and non-  
discrimination

Are we delivering on the pledge to leave no one behind?

Leave no one behind is the central promise of the 2030 Agenda. It represents the unequivocal commitment to eradicate poverty in all its forms, end discrimination and exclusion, and reduce the inequalities and vulnerabilities that leave people behind and undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole. The promise also directs that those furthest behind need to be prioritized.

However, LNOB is still often used as an empty but popular phrase rather than a policy imperative that leads to concrete transformative action. To deliver, we need to start with investing in more reliable disaggregated data, followed by an analysis that leaves no one behind, leading to recommendations on transformative action that focus on uplifting those who are worst off.

If we are to leave no one behind, we need to ensure the inclusivity of everyone and strengthen our efforts to prioritize those furthest behind.

## Key messages

**'Leave no one behind' requires uplifting everyone at risk:** Ensure that any assessment of who is marginalized or at risk of being left behind takes a comprehensive look at all population groups and considers the impact of possible multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, based on international standards of equality and non-discrimination.

**Those furthest behind come first:** Commit to prioritize and maximize investment in people and countries furthest behind. 2030 Agenda is definitive on prioritizing the situation of the most marginalized, yet this has not been sufficiently translated into concrete policy instruction. This is critical to addressing persistent root and structural causes of inequity and discrimination, and to accelerate progress for those who have benefited the least from sustainable development.

**Granular, detailed data leads to effective and responsible solutions:** Prioritize investing in capacity for data collection and data-driven advocacy for better mobilization and allocation of resources to deliver on the promise to leave no one behind. Wherever possible, seek to contextualize data by first-hand narratives from affected communities.



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Are we delivering on gender equality and women's empowerment?

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is not optional. It is a key game changer and integral to each of the 17 SDGs goals and the 2030 Agenda itself. This has been recognized in the 2030 Agenda as well as the UN Secretary-General's Our Common Agenda and his priorities for 2030.

Yet, the promise to achieve gender equality is under threat as it is facing a persistent pushback due to the rise of conservative narratives relegating women's role to the family and procreation, and emerging challenges such as the COVID-19 which have reversed gains obtained in the last decades, such as with respect to maternal health.

Only by ensuring the full range of human rights of women and girls across the sustainable development goals and across any accelerated actions to that end, we will be achieving justice and inclusion, economies that work for all and a sustainable environment for us and for future generations.

## Key messages

**Return SDG 5 back on track by concrete law and policy reform:** With clear indication of timelines, commit to commence and advance law or policy reforms to eliminate gender discriminatory legislation/policies, or enact legislation/policy necessary for substantive gender equality, in relation to SDG 5 targets.

**Fully integrate gender equality across all SDGs:** Reconfirm the commitment made in the 2030 Agenda and ensure all areas identified as key "game-changers" or "high-impact initiatives" and all commitments for the attainment of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs at the Summit include at least one gender-transformative action.

**Invest in preventing gender-based violence in public and private spaces:** Address in the gap in existing responses to gender-based violence through dismantling harmful gender stereotypes and enhancing accountability.

**Universal health coverage means advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights:** Reconfirm the commitment to meeting sexual and reproductive health interventions and needs of women and girls (SDG 3.7) and the fulfilment of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SDG 5.6) and recognize these as a precondition to achieve universal health coverage.

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Empower people as active agents of sustainable development

## Why is meaningful and inclusive participation important?

Meaningful and inclusive participation is a game-changer for SDG implementation.

Delivering on the 2030 Agenda while leaving no one behind requires investment in as well as expansion, systematization and diversification of engagement with civil society at all levels, from local to global, around all issues.

A particular focus should be given to reaching out to those most at risk and those furthest behind as they are still too often not heard, left without a seat at the table, or subject to tokenism. This includes persons discriminated because of age, gender, disability or any other diversity dimension. Meaningful participation should be at the heart of development, human rights, and peace efforts.

Participatory approaches make the voices of diverse and often marginalized constituencies heard, which can make all the difference, and the SDG Summit can lead by example by celebrating and acknowledging contributions of civil society to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

## Key messages

**SDG Summit - a safe and inclusive meeting:** Declare zero tolerance for intimidation and reprisals in all SDG Summit processes and issue a call to States to adhere to ensure those contributing have a safe space to do so.

**SDG Summit - platform for diverse voices:** Ensure that the full diversity of voices, including people of all ages and backgrounds, and women and girls among them in particular, can make their voices heard in the run-up to, during, and after the SDG Summit as a way of anchoring the discussion and its outcomes in the real needs on the ground.

**Meaningful participation yields high returns:** Empowering people as active agents of sustainable development, taking their views into account leads to increased development gains across the board, especially if concerted effort is made to include those routinely excluded from decision-making processes and corridors of power.

**To build back better, we need more participation – not less:** Everyone and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development and have a say in decisions that affect them at all levels, from local to global. At the SDG Summit, champion civic space and increased participation as a key accelerator for delivering on the transformative power of the 2030 Agenda.

**Transitional justice catalyzes empowerment and development:** Participatory and context-specific transitional justice processes empower victims and communities in societies tackling legacies of serious human rights violations. They help reverse negative developmental effects of such legacies, building trust and transforming conditions that push people further behind. Improve development interventions through continuous assessments of progress made.