Carnegie Mellon University
HeinzCollege
INFORMATION SYSTEMS • PUBLIC POLICY • MANAGEMENT

Carnegie Mellon University
Sustainability Initiative

Synthesis Document—Toward a Paradigm Shift: Creating a Community of Practice on Human Rights and the Sustainable Development Goals

Convening held at the Bellagio Center, Bellagio, Italy, **May 23-27, 2023**

FINAL DRAFT: **June 22, 2023**; Updated July 20, 2023 **Drafted by Sarah Mendelson with input from all CoP members (and reinforced by ChatGPT)**

Problem and Opportunity Statement

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), now in its 75th year, continues to be *the* framing document on rights relevant for the 21st century. Many aspects of the UDHR have, however, been unevenly adopted. The United States, despite its role as a global leader on human rights, for example, has downplayed the socioeconomic elements of the UDHR for decades. This hands off approach, at times intentional, has exacerbated the extreme inequalities and inequities plaguing this country as well as other high-income countries. The result is that democracies are not delivering for large swaths of their populations. At the same time, a downbeat, pessimistic cottage industry has developed to minimize the power, legacy, and continued relevance of human rights.

With the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), we have an additional 21st century way of understanding the full range of rights encompassed in the UDHR. As the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, has noted, the SDGs come from the human rights treaty bodies and mechanisms that have existed for 75 years. Speaking in April 2023 in Washington, D.C., he observed that "95% of SDGs are anchored in human rights obligations." The SDGs are policy commitments presciently built to address the challenges that have emerged as urgent in many communities—from inequality and inequity to the climate crisis, from the global health pandemic to declines in life expectancy, from an increase in violence and conflict to the enabling of corruption.

Indeed, many of the SDGs address and elevate socioeconomic rights, which in turn, when implemented, can engage local communities and community leaders, make human rights more relevant for people, and improve lives. Awareness of and uptake of the SDGs has, however, been uneven. Some national and international policy makers have been slow to recognize that local communities, not national governments, are often the front lines for developing rights-based approaches to socioeconomic challenges. Moreover, data gaps and time lags are profound and the lack of disaggregated subnational data in the context of achieving the SDGs emerges as a human rights issue in and of itself, negatively impacting the effort to achieve the SDG watchwords to "leave no one behind."

Theory of Change/What Can Be Done

We posit that we can help elevate the relevance and effectiveness of the SDGs to solve public policy problems and promote human rights results. Key to doing this is fostering collaboration, innovation, and multistakeholder engagement with communities to harness data and craft participatory approaches to achieving the SDGs. Accelerating action at this midpoint to 2030 is critical. In localities in which we will work (cities and other subnational localities in the United States and elsewhere in the world, to be determined), we propose to develop models of community engagement, close data gaps, and share information in real time with policy makers to generate rights-based policy responses. We theorize that these actions will lead to significantly better outcomes for people.

Universities are important entities to advance the SDGs through education about policy responses grounded in human rights. Building on that fact, a Community of Practice (CoP), that draws together university partners who work with local stakeholders such as local NGOs, faith-based groups, and community foundations, can harness the power to connect people, information, and policies. Ideally, the CoP functions as the hub of the wheel, with spokes extending through centers of innovation and stable institutions dedicated to the education of new generations and the creation of local solutions to a given community's relevant problems. Members of the CoP are a combination of rights experts, public policy advocates, and data scientists, who together can advance a discipline that listens, responds to people, and empowers communities, using disaggregated data to identify structural drivers of discrimination and inequalities as well as social justice needs and then shape demand-driven policy responses in politically persuasive ways.

Main Actions

Launch a Community of Practice (CoP): With university partners dedicated to growing the next generation of human rights experts fluent in the SDGs and actively creating, gathering and storing success stories, we seek to illuminate how the SDGs can advance human rights, particularly socioeconomic rights.[1] The collective work of the CoP would amount to a paradigm shift in how we advance human rights research and education.

Develop Solutions: Our aim is to design and create people-centered justice data, including open source data portals and case studies, collaboratively with members of local communities in order to generate innovative solutions to SDG/rights related challenges.[2] Our focus would be driven by local community needs, covering issues such as access to justice and impacts on health and housing as well as life expectancy and maternal mortality in order to highlight policy areas that need urgent attention. We would also generate solutions together with community members, share information with policy makers and advocate for specific interventions. Central to this work would be reframing and expanding what are considered "hard" or "wicked" human rights issues, e.g. viewing the 20+ year gap in life expectancy between demographic groups in an American city as a hard human rights case. The intention would be to both share models of collaboration between universities and communities while elevating specific types of policy interventions that have measurably improved outcomes in communities historically left behind on a number of socioeconomic metrics. Collectively, we would use the data to make the case for further investment in these types of solutions. We

---

[1] This document distinguishes between the micro Community of Practice convened at Bellagio in May 2023 which we hope to grow but is currently mainly limited to university and relevant civil society partners, and the larger Communities of Practice and partnerships that exist within cities (e.g. Los Angeles) that link universities, local communities, city government and others, as well as other micro Communities of Practice working on the SDGs, for example, with mayors' offices (e.g. Brookings).

[2] The community generated data would draw on the Civic Data Library of Context for metadata CARE (https://www/gida-global.org/care) and FAIR (https://www.go-fair.org/fair-principles/) guidance as well as feedback from local community members and researchers.

would highlight the context in which the data deserts and SDG/rights issues are occurring, localizing the work in cities and communities. Data would capture not only perceptions of issues but also lived experiences.

Surface Solutions: We will catalogue and capture good practices and solutions relating to the SDGs and human rights by taking stock of the over two hundred Voluntary Local Reviews generated by cities and regions around the world. This mapping and data mining will enable us to elevate such practices as well as create case studies, tell stories, and build toolkits that demonstrate effective solutions. Where possible, we will also consult other communities of practice and cross check our results with human rights cities coalitions where relevant.

Engage Students: The CoP will share creative examples of engaging the next generation on the SDGs inside and beyond the classroom. These include sharing syllabi; engaging in capstone/systems/clinic projects; creating massive open online courses (MOOCs); hosting hackathons, developing content and skills through gamification, holding moot courts, generating shadow VLRs, and through strengthening the engagement of UN Associations with the SDGs (for example, through Model UN simulations). Additionally, the CoP will experiment with creating SDG advisors at universities to help students select SDG-related courses, develop SDG concentrations, engage in SDG-related research opportunities, and identify relevant job openings.

Create a Repository: The CoP will house case studies, disaggregated data sets, new and creative solutions as well as those that have been identified through the mapping of the VLRs. The CoP will in this way foster collaboration around access to and the transparency of open data ecosystems. The information will be housed and accessible to the public at a curated website currently under construction

Desired Outcomes

Establish a Center for Sustainable Futures at Carnegie Mellon University that, among other work streams, is a base for the CoP and a site for managing the repository/data hub. A longer term outcome is to establish multiple Centers for Sustainable Futures in different parts of the world to form a global SDG consortium that works together and drives field building for a sustainable future where the full range of human rights are realized.

Build evidence that helps support the narrative on the interlinked and mutually reinforcing nature of human rights and the SDGs. This entails creating and highlighting positive examples concerning the impact of the SDGs on rights in publications and presentations. Build on the work of the OHCHR and others, to leverage the CoP in the context of upcoming convenings including the UN summits in 2023 and 2024, the Third Summit for Democracy and the 75th anniversary of the UDHR. Integrate the CoP and our collaboratively generated findings into additional professional gatherings (e.g. OGP, WJF, SDSN, UNF/Brookings, ACU,) as well as through deep-dive exchanges between faculty and students engaged in relevant work in different localities by sharing findings and best practices.

Create collaborations that generate open-source data portals with a focus on disaggregated data to counter discrimination and inequalities that are scalable and show case positive shifts in progress toward achieving the SDGs and democracies delivering human rights.

Generate fluency and skills among [Cohort 2030](), the younger generation that has the most to gain from the achievement of the Global Goals' framework. Create strategic communications on how data, the SDGs, and human rights intersect to ensure and invest in sustainable futures.

This document reflects discussions held at the Bellagio Center at a strategic convening with the following participants (organizations are listed for identification purposes only):

Convener: Sarah Mendelson, Distinguished Service Professor of Public Policy, Head of Heinz College in DC, Co-Chair of CMU's Sustainability Initiative, Carnegie Mellon University; Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Center for Sustainable Development, Brookings Institution

Elizabeth Andersen, President, World Justice Project and convener of the World Justice Forum

Daniel Armanios, BT Professor of Major Programme Management, Said Business School, University of Oxford, (by Zoom)

Ariel Armony, Vice Provost, Global Affairs, University of Pittsburgh

Anthony Tirado Chase, Professor, Diplomacy and World Affairs, Occidental College

Sayeed Choudhury, Director, Open Source Programs Office, Carnegie Mellon University

Martha Davis, University Distinguished Professor of Law, Co-Director, Program on Human Rights and the Global Economy, Northeastern University

Marcella Favretto, Chief of the Sustainable Development Section, Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, United Nations

Sofia Gruskin, Professor and Director of USC's Institute of Inequalities in Global Health, University of Southern California

Jeanne Holm, Deputy Mayor for Budget and Innovation, City of Los Angeles

Shareen Hertel, Professor, University of Connecticut, Editor of *Journal of Human Rights*

Alvaro Herrero, Executive Director, International Open Justice Network, and Fulbright Visiting Researcher, Georgetown University

Gaea Morales, PhD student, Political Science and International Relations, USC

Elisa Massimino, Executive Director, Human Rights Institute, Georgetown University Law Center

Beate Knight, Head of Programme, Association of Commonwealth Universities

Borislav Petranov, Special Advisor, Office of the Vice-President for Global Programs, OSF

Thomas Probert, Head of Research, Institute for International and Comparative Law in Africa, University of Pretoria, and Research Associate, Center of Governance and Human Rights, University of Cambridge

Jack Snyder, Robert and Renee Belfer Professor of International Relations, Columbia University

Keith Webster, Dean of University Libraries and Co-Chair of CMU's Sustainability Initiative, Carnegie Mellon University