

# **High-Level UN Regional Seminar on the Contribution of Development to the Enjoyment of all Human Rights**

*Bangkok, Thailand*

*UNESCAP conference room 4*

*13-14 February 2023*

**Tuesday, 14 February, 15:00-16:30 – Panel 6:**

**The contribution of regional development strategies to the enjoyment of all human rights with a focus on concrete policies, practices and commitments at the regional level**

*How can development strategies contribute to better enjoyment of human rights in countries in Asia and the Pacific? Please use actual policies, practices and commitments to illustrate how regional development strategies have been relevant in the work of your organisations and contribute to the enjoyment of human rights?*

**Heike Alefsen, OHCHR Pacific Regional Representative**

*UN Pacific Strategy and joint programmes: Partnership for people*

Excellencies, participants, Madam moderator,

**The Pacific has not been immune to many of the threats that were articulated in previous sessions of this seminar** - multilateralism and democratic governance are under pressure, and so is long-term sustainable development financing vis-à-vis a focus on short- to medium-term responses to various disasters – Covid-19, the triple planetary crisis, the impact of the war in Ukraine on food, fuel and finance.

**Hence we need renewed efforts at all levels to ensure that human rights continue to be the means as well as the objective of sustainable development planning, programming and monitoring, in line with the Human Rights Based Approach to Sustainable Development.**

**Regional development strategies can play a role in bringing more human rights impact, especially in a region that is as tightly interconnected as the Pacific and where interdependence and collaboration among the countries is the only way forward.**

**The UN development system reform has led to greater attention to how we ensure that our work programmes not only align to the needs of countries, but that they ensure the efficient and effective use of our limited resources and for the right objectives.**

**Coherent and efficient delivery across multiple UN agencies, regional organisations (CROP agencies) and development partners that are spread out over a vast region is not easy, but it should not be impossible either.**

These were some of the challenges we set out to address when we developed our new **Pacific Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (UNSDCF) 2023-2027** and its predecessor, the **UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2018-2022**.

I will also briefly analyse a selected joint UN programme example (the **Pacific Climate Change, Migration and Human Security** Programme) to showcase how sustainable development interventions and partnerships in the Pacific can lead to greater human rights protection.

(The Pacific Regional Office of UN Human Rights (OHCHR) is a member of the Pacific UN Country Team (UNCT) and has developed the new UNSDCF alongside governments, civil society and more than 20 other UN agencies in the UNCT.)

**A combined HRBA/LNOB and GEWE approach has been the vehicle that we have sought to use in our new and just concluded regional UNSDCF that involves 14 countries, many of which are small islands developing states – though many prefer the term large ocean states - across the vast region.**

The UN has made an effort to mainstream the LNOB concept, human rights and gender equality considerations throughout the UNSDCF, from its **vision and theory of change, through monitoring outcomes and indicators, commitments to track and report on progress under CIPs, and an implementation and coordination infrastructure that allows for a focus on human rights and gender; as well as joint and UN entity-specific programmes.**

## **ANALYSIS**

We started with 15 common country analyses, including a regional analysis. Overall, the Pacific subregion is **not on track to reach any of the SDG though it has made progress in some areas; in fact, in line with global trends, there is a perceived regression of some development gains following the Covid-19 pandemic. Data availability is a challenge, but even within these limitations, there is a decline in some critical areas such as combating inequalities (SDG 10), decent work (SDG8). Although there has been some advancement in gender equality, the cultural, social and economic barriers leading to a level of violence against women and girls (2/3 experiencing VAWG) that is higher than the world average continue to hamper progress.**

Many of the challenges that the Pacific is facing in terms of human rights and sustainable development are due to endogenous challenges, including remote and isolated locations, geographic vulnerability to climate impacts, governance systems with weak separation of powers.

Many are transboundary or occur similarly in a number of PICs – climate change and environmental degradation, health system challenges with non-communicable diseases due to lack of nutrition and food security, education, housing, sustainable transport, energy and waste management.

**At the same time, we acknowledge that engagement with the international human rights system has steadily advanced and there has been demonstrated Pacific leadership in human rights at the global level, e.g. at the Human Rights Council, and in advocating for a new Special Rapporteur on climate change.**

**There is increased awareness and organization of human rights defenders and civil society, investment in human rights education and apart from the traditionally strong women's rights organisations that focus more broadly on human rights of all, there are new groups of**

people advocating for human rights e.g. [in key areas such as climate change and the environment, disability inclusion and the rights of gender diverse people.

**However, the region faces patchy application of the core human rights instruments, and limited progress with the establishment of national human rights institutions and other protection systems. Fundamental civil rights and freedoms need to be further enhanced i.e. the rights to freedom of association, information and expression. There is a special vulnerability of groups or individuals who are at risk of discrimination and inequality due to structural challenges and more recently the impact of Covid-19.**

(Globally, in sustainable development programming, the UN has been pursuing an approach that features a human rights specific results orientation as well as mainstreaming: the human rights- based approach to sustainable development that was first conceptualized more than 20 years ago. HRBA imperatives are as important as before - that development is only sustainable and successful when it achieves greater human rights protection and that human rights standards underpin sustainable development. The outcome is greater human rights capacity. This approach is complemented by gender integration and a renewed focus on ‘leaving no one behind’, a key concept of the 2050 Agenda (on Sustainable Development) – these are three key principles in UN sustainable development programming with its focus on achievement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).)

## **VISION and THEORY OF CHANGE**

Our new UNSDCF has set itself the ambitious **vision** of contributing to a Pacific where “All people, leaving no place behind, are equal and free to exercise their fundamental rights, enjoying gender equality and peace, resilient to the existential threats and living in harmony with the blue continent.”

The theory of change for the CF articulates specific changes required under four key pillars (**Planet, People, Prosperity and Peace**). **The UN is committed to help enhance the economies of the PICTs, access to and quality of social services, climate-change adaptation and mitigation, and democratic and inclusive governance systems and processes.**

The expected results are people-centered, while taking into account the endogenous vulnerabilities and external threats; it places the well-being of current and future generations at the core of sustainable development and works towards poverty eradication and equality.

## **ALIGNMENT:**

In this sense, there is significant **alignment with the new 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent** of the Pacific Islands Forum and also with the Pacific Community (SPC) Strategic Plan 2022-2030.

Adopted by its leaders in 2022 and building on the earlier SAMOA Pathway, the 2050 Strategy features a specific Leaders’ Commitment (no. IV): ‘To secure the well-being of our people’ [...] we will place emphasis on learning from each other, drawing on scientifically-based research and traditional knowledge as well as promoting **human rights, gender equality and the empowerment** of people.

**The four UNSCF outcomes directly contribute to all seven areas identified by the 2050 Strategy including resilience and inclusion.** There is though no discussion of human rights protection in the 2050 Strategy whereas it is outlined in our UNSDCF that all 14 PIC governments have recently signed.

## **PARTICIPATION:**

To get to our new UNSDCF, the UN Country Team and its partners undertook an **external Evaluation of its previous UN Development Assistance Framework (2018-2022)**. While it was found that while there was a strong “Leaving No One Behind” focus and achievements in human rights notably in raising awareness and increasing commitments, moving forward, the **UNCT must ensure that more evidence is built at the country level with respect to the benefits that the UNSCF creates concretely for those further behind and that human rights are upheld at all levels of the society while increased participation, especially of women, is achieved.**

**The UNSDF theory of change asserts that promotion and protection of fundamental rights are considered a pre-condition for the continuing social and economic progress, and there is a new emphasis on economic transformation and resilience through social cohesion. Empowering women and girls to enjoy equal rights is considered indispensable to the region’s ability to leverage its full potential.**

Among the important avenues for action on human rights in the Pacific are **partnerships**. The evaluation of our previous UNDAF called upon the UNCT to continue consultations in programming and joint implementation of the CF 2023-2027 in Joint Steering Committees at country level that will include relevant **civil society organisations**. Other partnerships will be sought and nurtured at both joint programme and individual agency project levels.

**For example, the governance structure of the CF will include regional CSOs such as the Pacific Disability Forum (PDF) to consult on results, joint programming and emerging priorities<sup>1</sup>.**

**More broadly, the thematic priority groups for gender and human rights have larger Coordination Groups composed of human rights and gender equality-focused CSOs, and they also include regional organizations who are important stakeholders in the Pacific due to their mandate and reach (e.g. having embedded staff capacity in the governments of the region.)**

## **APPROPRIATE USE OF STRATEGIES and TOOLS**

**Importantly, given the proximity of most organisations and people to key issues in their communities, it is not sufficient to limit the UN’s action to policy work only. There must be investment in change at national and community level, and complementarity of upstream policy reforms and downstream, practical interventions at the grassroots that have a real impact on people’s daily lives and their ability to claim their rights.**

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<sup>1</sup> Collectively, as the UN in the Pacific, we have a memorandum of understanding with PDF (‘Principles of Engagement’) and the organization is already a member of the Disability Inclusion Working Group under the Human Rights Theme Group that engages with the UN Country Team to support, encourage and monitor its action on disability rights.

The UNSDCF asserts that peace and inclusive institutions can be achieved through more accountable, inclusive and just systems that nurture a political, social and economic systems where people can safely participate in decision-making.

As such, the theory of change focuses on fundamental rights of association, expression and information to address human security needs, including in the area of climate change, and promoting social dialogue and the participation of women and young people to strengthen civic space and access to justice and the rule of law incl. in labour standards.

## **MONITORING**

Both of the high-level strategies are to be accompanied by more detailed **implementation plans that will feature specific monitoring towards results**. In the case of our UNCT, we are seeking to do this i.a. through the instrument of dedicated biennial Country Implementation Plans, the specific contents of which we are currently negotiating with all 14 countries.

In the case of the the UNSDCF, **six human rights indicators** will be monitored, focusing on a number of SDG 16 indicators:

1. Existence of NHRIs, 2. Experience of discrimination 3. Human rights violations against defenders, lawyers, unionists, as well as three specific indicators that will measure 1. laws or policies for disability inclusion, 3. plans on business and human rights 3. Ratification of human rights instruments.

**To be clear, whether and how our high-level UNSDCF will produce tangible human rights results for Pacific people at the end of its four-year lifespan will depend very much on the kind of programmes that are being implemented within its framework.** It is at this level that the most direct action and engagement with communities and individuals takes place.

## **NEEDS and SUGGESTIONS FOR NEW PROGRAMMES**

Where we currently see **gaps is in sustainable development programming and financing** is with specific action towards achieving specific **civil and political rights objectives - such as the establishment and functioning of National Human Rights Institutions, the prevention of torture and ill-treatment through capacity building and accountability mechanisms by police forces across the PICs, reforms to capacitate and increase the independence of the judiciary, enhancing separation of powers by strengthening parliaments in PICs, legal reforms to enhance freedom of expression, assembly and association and to protect human rights defenders; accountability for business practices to ensure they uphold human rights; and enhanced human rights data collection and analysis – broadly speaking areas of our new UNSDCF that support the achievement of SDG 16 and come under the ‘Peace’ and governance/sustainable institutions pillar.**

**It would be good to see more investments by governments, development partners and others in this area. Some of our regular partners, including human rights defenders in the women’s rights, youth, gender diversity/LGBTI and PWD movements in the Pacific keep reminding the development community that action in these areas is vital, as it directly touches the rights and lives of Pacific islanders – alongside other important areas**

**of sustainable development cooperation such as improved social protection access to critical services and action to combat climate change.**

#### **PROGRAMME EXAMPLE**

One of the programmes that we have been running jointly with other partners and that we believe has had and will continue to have a direct impact on Pacific islanders is the **Pacific Climate Change Migration and Human Security Programme**.

In a nutshell, it is a joint programme led by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), ESCAP, ILO and OHCHR together with PIFS and the Platform for Disaster Displacement (PDD). Since 2019 and now in a new phase II since this year, the PCCMHS has sought to support PIFS with the development of a regional framework for climate mobility.

**While this is a high-level policy forum, we have sought to prepare with grassroots engagement with the communities in PICs.** Collectively, we have held many rounds of engagements/consultations with people in areas affected by climate change, have undertaken research and analysed labour mobility pathways, undertaken advocacy for the ratification of the ICMW, and OHCHR specifically has worked to support a Technical Advisory Group of mainly civil society and academic experts who have been advising the programme.

That the regional framework is now being chaperoned by PIF with a view to eventually being presented to and adopted by the Leaders' Summit, we hope, will lead to Pacific ownership at the highest level and put the efforts on a good basis as the framework and the related actions are to be rights-based and rights-focused.

Ultimately, we hope that by the end of the programme, we will have made a contribution to help people who migrate in the context of climate change to have rights and a dignified experience.

Thank you for your attention.