



Seven Rights-based Imperatives to Accelerate Action on the UN Sustainable Development Goals towards COVID-19 Recovery & Resilience

#SDGs2EndCOVID19 – Global Call-to-Action



A joint initiative of



A Partnership for the Goals



Manifesto of the Call-to-Action:

## Seven Rights-based Imperatives to Accelerate Action on the UN SDGs towards COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience

### HIGHLIGHTS

▶ COVID-19 has significantly challenged the implementation of United Nations 2030 Agenda including the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals by adversely impacting on each and every Goal. Nevertheless, as the 2030 Agenda constitutes a human rights-based operational framework to advance the three dimensions of sustainable development - economic, social and environmental, a sustainable solution to COVID-19 recovery and resilience lies in the Agenda itself.

▶ Therefore accelerating each and every SDG by adopting a human rights-based approach is vital for COVID-19 recovery and resilience towards achieving to greater economic, environmental and social sustainability and inclusivity.

▶ #SDGs2EndCOVID19 is a Global Call-to-Action that puts forward Seven Rights-based Imperatives for UN Member States to accelerate action on the SDGs towards COVID-19 Recovery & Resilience. It is based on the [SDG Acceleration Action](#) submitted by LEEG-net to the UN SDG Summit/ High Level Political Forum 2019 which is even more relevant in the post-COVID-19 context.

▶ The '[SDG Temple of Justice](#)' is a blueprint that seeks to accelerate the SDGs by operationalizing the human rights foundation of the 2030 Agenda through legal, economic and technological empowerment of people including the poor and disadvantaged groups.

The Seven Rights-based Imperatives put forward in this Global Call-to-Action are based on this blueprint.

Those imperatives are to:

1. Expedite the creation and implementation of social protection floors for the extension of social security guided by the ILO's Social Protection Floors Recommendation No.202 of 2012.

2. Mainstream the promotion and protection of the following eightfold rights into international, regional and national policies and action plans for implementing the SDGs: [Gender Equality](#), [Property Rights](#), [Contract Rights](#), [Business Rights](#), [Labour Rights](#), [Right to an Effective Remedy](#), [Right to Information](#), and the [Right to Development](#).

3. Prioritize programs and processes that promote legal, economic and technological empowerment of people including the poor and disadvantaged groups in international, regional and national action plans for implementing the SDGs.

4. Promote the rights of businesses as an effective means of eradicating poverty.

5. Develop a rights-based National Legal Roadmap (NLR) for each country or state to effectively operationalize the human rights foundation of the 2030 Agenda towards accelerating the SDGs.

6. Take action to realize human rights obligations and sustainable development commitments simultaneously by identifying linkages between the recommendations of international human rights system and SDG targets at the national level.

7. Establish and maintain lean organizational structures for national SDG policymaking and/or implementing institutions so as to fulfill the criteria of (a) full transparency and accountability with all stakeholders (b) operational effectiveness, and (c) carbon neutrality.

## ABOUT

**LEEG-net (Legal and Economic Empowerment Global Network - <https://www.leeg-net.org/>)** is a *pro bono* initiative launched in January 2017 by a multidisciplinary network of lawyers, economists and consultants in business and technology. It is a [partnership](#) for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and managed by [LexEcon Legal Innovation Hub](#).

LEEG-net's mission is to play a catalytic role in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including the SDGs by promoting legal innovation and empowerment of people including the poor and disadvantaged groups.

After carefully studying the challenges facing most Member States (especially developing countries) that keep them out of track to achieve the SDGs by 2030, the LEEG-net team has developed an outline of a blueprint -- the *SDG Temple of Justice*. This blueprint provides a rights-based guide to accelerate the SDGs by operationalizing the human rights foundation of the 2030 Agenda towards COVID-19 recovery and resilience. An infographic of this blueprint that visualizes the proposed process of adopting a business-friendly, human rights-based holistic approach to accelerate the SDGs can be viewed at: <https://www.leeg-net.org/sdg-temple-of-justice>.

**Creative Resolution (<https://www.creative-resolution.org>)** is a rights-based global initiative grounded on the willingness to be creative and innovative when tackling cross-cutting issues related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by fostering smart partnerships, dialogues, a multidisciplinary approach and strategic advising.

Creative Resolution's mission is to be a catalyst and actor of change in tackling global challenges of a political, economic, social, legal and cultural character in line with the 2030 Agenda.

## BACKGROUND

### Pre-COVID-19 state of the 2030 Agenda

- **Slow progress:** The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018 published by the United Nations states that "... *the rate of global progress is not keeping pace with the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda, necessitating immediate and accelerated action by countries and stakeholders at all levels*"<sup>1</sup>
- **The need to be on track to achieve all 17 Goals:** According to the Sustainable Development Report 2019 published by Bertelsmann Stiftung and the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), "*No country is on track for achieving all 17 goals with major performance gaps even in the top countries on SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Life below Water) and SDG 15 (Life on Land). Income and wealth inequalities, as well as gaps in health and education outcomes by population groups also remain important policy challenges in developing and developed countries alike*"<sup>2</sup>.

### Some factors can explain the deceleration of the SDGs prior to COVID-19:

- The scarcity of resources (financial, expertise, etc.)
- The lack of political leadership, political instability and conflicts
- The administrative impediments including, but are not limited to the inefficient procedures generated through the establishment of large organizational structures with considerable carbon footprints for the purpose of planning and implementing the SDGs.

**A more significant stumbling block is the failure of national SDG policymakers and/or implementers of most Member States to adopt the proper rights-based approach<sup>3</sup> when precisely the 2030 Agenda is grounded on two unifying threads - human rights<sup>4</sup> and the commitment to end poverty<sup>5</sup> by 'leaving no one behind'<sup>6</sup> - that run through all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.**

## Post COVID-19: the need for inclusive and sustainable recovery and resilience by operationalizing the 'human rights foundation' of the 2030 Agenda

COVID-19 has significantly challenged the 2030 Agenda by adversely affecting each and every one of the seventeen SDGs. Research shows that Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) is being severely affected along with Goals 1, 2, 6, 8, 9 and 10 (No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Clean Water and Sanitation, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure and Reduced Inequalities respectively), among other SDGs.

Developing countries and most vulnerable populations have been dramatically impacted to the point that there are strong fears that the pandemic might risk going backwards on certain areas of development for certain clusters (e.g. women, elders, children, migrant workers).

Though the 2030 Agenda is not legally binding on the Member States, it is grounded in legally binding human rights treaties and international conventions and protocols (paragraph 10). Of the 169 SDG targets:

- 156 are linked with International Human Rights instruments and labour standards;
- 132 are linked with Inter-American regional Human Rights instruments;
- 135 are linked with African regional Human Rights instruments;
- 68 are linked with European regional Human Rights instruments; and
- 79 are linked with international environmental and climate change instruments<sup>7</sup>.

Accordingly, the 2030 Agenda can be considered as a goal-based operational framework for advancing sustainable development guided by international and regional human rights treaties and labour standards spanning the social, environmental and economic dimensions.

This 'human rights foundation' of the 2030 Agenda can be considered to have justified the adoption of a human rights-based approach to implement the SDGs. Because each SDG is vital for a COVID-19 recovery action plan that leads to greener, more inclusive economies, and stronger, more resilient societies, implementing the 2030 Agenda's operational framework for human rights should be expedited to the greatest extent possible.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Seven (07) Rights-based Imperatives

**1. Expedite the creation and implementation of social protection floors for the extension of social security guided by the ILO's Social Protection Floors Recommendation No.202 of 2012 that progressively ensures higher levels of social security to as many people as possible.**

**Rationale:** Social protection<sup>8</sup> can be considered as the springboard for achieving economic empowerment of the poor and disadvantaged groups. Social protection is a universal human right recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 22) and several other international Human Rights treaties, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 9 and 10.2), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Article 5), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (Article 11), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Articles 26, 18.2, and 20).

In addition, the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s Social Protection Floors Recommendation No. 202 of 2012 calls for reducing the gaps in social protection practices at national, regional and global levels through nationally defined floors to suit national circumstances and levels of development that are based on a set of Human Rights standards<sup>9</sup>.

Social protection measures are a necessary part of any adequate crisis response because they:

- Ensure that people can effectively access health care.
- Support job and income security for those affected by the crisis.
- Contribute to preventing poverty, unemployment and informality
- Bolster economic and social stability and peace.
- Are powerful economic and social stabilizers<sup>10</sup>.

**2. Mainstream the promotion and protection of the following eightfold rights into international, regional and national policies and action plans for implementing the SDGs: [Gender Equality](#), [Property Rights](#), [Contract Rights](#), [Business Rights](#), [Labour Rights](#), [Right to an Effective Remedy](#), [Right to Information](#), and the [Right to Development](#).**

**3. Prioritize programs and processes that promote legal, economic and technological empowerment of people including the poor and disadvantaged groups in international, regional and national action plans for implementing the SDGs.**

**Rationale for imperatives 2 and 3:** The rights-based blueprint [SDG Temple of Justice](#) developed by LEEG-net seeks to advance the 2030 Agenda by operationalizing the human rights foundation of the SDGs through legal, economic and technological empowerment of people including the poor and disadvantaged groups. The eight pillars of the infographic of *SDG Temple of Justice* symbolize the eightfold rights referred to in the imperative - 2, the promotion of which leads to legal empowerment of people.

The empowerment<sup>11</sup> of people is a human rights-based multi-disciplinary approach to development and referred to in Goals 5 and 10.2 of the 2030 Agenda:

- **Legal Empowerment** fosters development through empowering and strengthening the voices of individuals and communities, starting at the grassroots and from within<sup>12</sup>. It is considered as a necessary condition for fulfilling the other forms of empowerment (economic, technological, etc).
- **Economic Empowerment** is ‘the capacity of poor women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes on terms which recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible for them to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth<sup>13</sup>.
- **Technological Empowerment** is the actions or process of strengthening the capacity of all people either individually or collectively to use technology, including Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), to advance their rights and interests, to improve their lives and livelihoods, and to alleviate or escape poverty.

The 2030 Agenda itself, the SDGs and targets including the means of implementation, are universal, indivisible and interlinked<sup>14</sup>. In this context, the multidimensional role of empowerment can be reasonably considered as a universal means of implementing the SDGs, especially Goals 1, 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 16 and 17.

**4. Promote the rights of businesses as an effective means of eradicating poverty**

**Rationale:** “*Private business activity, investment and innovation are major drivers of productivity, inclusive economic growth and job creation*”<sup>15</sup> as is trade<sup>16</sup>. Economies with better business regulation have lower levels of poverty on average (Doing Business -2018, World Bank).

LEEg-net considers the *Ease of Doing Business* (EODB) score as an effective indicator for measuring the “SDG-readiness” of national business regulatory frameworks. The EODB score has been developed by the [World Bank’s Doing Business](#) annual report team to indicate an economy’s position to the best regulatory practice in relation to 10 indicator sets – the best score is set at 100, and the worst performance is set at 0.

Based on empirical evidence, LEEG-net believes that if countries can reach an EODB score of over 80, it will immensely help achieve the SDGs related to poverty eradication including Goals 1, 2, 5, 8 and 10 in particular.

**Suggestion:** Adopt business-friendly policy, legal and regulatory frameworks capable of promoting innovation, employment and inclusive growth. Develop national action plans to enhance efficiency of business regulations so as to reach and maintain higher scores (preferably over 80) of the *Ease of Doing Business* (EODB) index developed by [Doing Business \(World Bank\)](#).

## **5. Develop a rights-based National Legal Roadmap (NLR) for each country or state to effectively operationalize the human rights foundation of the 2030 Agenda towards accelerating the SDGs**

**Rationale:** Though the 2030 Agenda is not legally binding on the Member States, it is grounded in legally binding human rights treaties and international conventions and protocols (paragraph 10). Therefore, a national legal roadmap (NLR) developed by mapping the SDG targets with human rights provisions would serve as a 'human rights guide' to implement the SDGs. Such a roadmap could also be used as a source of legal information that helps national policy makers and implementers to comply with legal obligations at national, regional and international levels while staying on track to achieve the SDGs.

Following a legal roadmap would help accelerate the SDGs, enhances legal certainty and the human rights standing of the Member States.

**Suggestions:** The [Human Rights Guide to the Sustainable Development Goals](#) developed by the Danish Institute for Human Rights that outlines an “SDGs - Human Rights” mapping can be used along with National Constitutions and related laws as the legal basis of an NLR.

An NLR may be a stand-alone document or an integral part of a national policy document relating to the SDGs.

## **6. Take action to realize human rights obligations and sustainable development commitments simultaneously by identifying linkages between the recommendations of international human rights system and SDG targets at the national level**

**Rationale:** Preparing reports on sustainable development e.g. Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) based on existing national human rights reporting procedures provides a constructive and resource-efficient advantage for States. A close coordination between these two report making procedures would help operationalize the human rights foundation of the 2030 Agenda towards accelerating the SDG implementation.

The existing national human rights reports include those submitted to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) under the Human Rights Council; the Human Rights Committee; the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; and the International Labour Organization’s supervisory mechanisms on the application of International Labour Standards.

### **Suggestions:**

> Refer to the actions taken on those inter-linkages when the follow-up and review is carried out in terms of paragraphs 72 -90 of the 2030 Agenda.

> Prepare Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) and other reports on SDG implementation in close coordination with national human rights reporting procedures.

> The SDG Human Rights Data Explorer (<https://sdgdata.humanrights.dk/en/explorer>) can be used to explore the links between human rights recommendations for individual countries and specific SDG targets. Information on international human rights system including monitoring mechanisms is available at the [website](#) of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.

## 7. Establish and maintain lean organizational structures for the national SDG policymaking and/or implementing institutions so as to fulfill the criteria of (a) full transparency and accountability with all stakeholders (b) operational effectiveness, and (c) carbon neutrality

**Rationale:** In relation to certain countries with slow SDG progress, the LEEG-net's research team has found that ineffective organizational structures with cloudy lines of authority and responsibility would continue to impede advancing the SDGs at the pace required to face the challenges posed by COVID-19.

**Suggestion:** Based on a study of national SDG implementing frameworks of well performing countries, LEEG-net suggests setting up a mechanism headed by the Head of the State/President/Prime Minister with the participation of all/relevant Ministers and a panel of experts to serve as the central body to implement, monitor and review the efforts of the Government to implement the 2030 Agenda. The active contribution of all stakeholders – Government, Local Government, private sector and the civil society including young persons and students – is of paramount importance in formulating policies, action plans, and the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the SDGs.

### ENDNOTES

1. UN DESA (2018), *The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018*, UN, New York, <https://doi.org/10.18356/7d014b41-en>, p 4
2. Sachs, J., Schmidt-Traub, G., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. (2019): *Sustainable Development Report 2019*. New York: Bertelsmann Stiftung and Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), Executive Summary, p X
3. A Human Rights-based approach is a conceptual framework that is normatively based on international Human Rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting Human Rights. It seeks to analyze obligations, inequalities and vulnerabilities, and to tackle discriminatory practices and unjust distributions of power that impede and undercut Human Rights. Under a Human Rights-based approach, plans, policies and programs are anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations established by international law. This helps to promote sustainability, empowering people themselves (rights holders)—especially the most marginalized—to participate in policy formulation and hold accountable those who have a duty to act (duty bearers). ([Social Protection and Human Rights Platform, UNRISD](#)).
4. United Nations (2015). General Assembly, *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1, paragraph 10
5. Ibid, preamble and paragraph 2
6. Ibid, preamble and paragraphs 4, 26, 48 and 72)
7. The Danish Institute for Human Rights. *The Human Rights Guide to the Sustainable Development Goals*, Accessible: <http://sdg.humanrights.dk/en>; *The methodology behind the database*, Accessible: [https://sdg.humanrights.dk/sites/sdg.humanrights.2019.omega07.oitudv.dk/files/SDG%20database%20methodology\\_0.pdf](https://sdg.humanrights.dk/sites/sdg.humanrights.2019.omega07.oitudv.dk/files/SDG%20database%20methodology_0.pdf) [accessed on 11 August, 2020]
8. 'Social protection, or social security, is a set of policies and programs designed to reduce and prevent poverty and vulnerability across the life cycle'. (ILO, [World Social Protection Report 2017–19](#), p.2).
9. International Labour Organisation, ILO (2012). *Social Protection Floors Recommendation # 202, 2012*, Accessible: [http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_ILO\\_CODE:R202](http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:R202) [accessed on 11 August 2020]
10. Ibid, (2020). *Social protection responses to the Covid-19 crisis. Country responses in Asia and the Pacific*. Accessible: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/briefingnote/wcms\\_739587.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/briefingnote/wcms_739587.pdf) [accessed on 11 August 2020]
11. 'Empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and then transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes'. *World Development Report 2000-2001. Attacking Poverty*. World Bank, Washington, DC.
12. Report of the Secretary General of United Nations (2009) prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 63/142 on the legal empowerment of the poor and eradication of poverty.

13. R. Eyben et al, Conceptualizing empowerment and the implications for pro poor growth. A paper for the DAC Poverty Network Sep, 2008.

14. United Nations (2015). General Assembly, Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1, paragraph 71

15. Ibid, paragraph 67

16. Ibid, paragraph 68

## CONTACT US

Email:

[info@lexecongroup.com](mailto:info@lexecongroup.com)

or

[contact@creative-resolution.org](mailto:contact@creative-resolution.org)

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*The SDG Temple of Justice - mobile app*

