HUMAN RIGHTS-POWERED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

People-centred justice helps deliver **sustainable development for all**

People-centred justice and human rights are drivers of sustainable development, peace, inclusion and resilience. To advance progress:

01 **Justice systems should be designed around people's needs, experiences and outcomes**, using reliable and disaggregated data to identify and address justice gaps.

02 **The share of justice financing in global aid should increase to at least two percent**, increasing a focus on lower-income countries.

03 **Investment should focus on accessible, front-line justice services** that prevent and resolve problems effectively, reach people where they are, and can be scaled sustainably.

04 **Equal access to justice requires inclusive approaches that prioritize those facing discrimination, marginalization or barriers**, including women, children, youth, persons with disabilities, migrants and other vulnerable groups.

05 **Formal, informal and customary justice actors should work within a broader justice ecosystem** that empowers users and reflects how people actually seek justice.

06 **Meaningful participation of justice users, civil society and affected communities is essential** to shaping responsive and accountable justice systems.

07 **Partnerships, innovation, evidence-based reforms and sustained financing** are key to closing the justice gap.

HUMAN RIGHTS, PEOPLE-CENTRED JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Justice is both a goal in itself and a pre-requisite for sustainable development. SDG 16 recognizes this by committing States to peaceful, just and inclusive societies, access to justice for all, and effective and accountable institutions.

More broadly, justice, like human rights, enables progress across the 2030 Agenda: reducing poverty and inequality, advancing gender equality and decent work, and achieving other development goals depend on people being able to resolve disputes, claim their rights, access services and hold institutions accountable.

People-centred justice starts from the justice needs and experiences of individuals. Drawing on the Hague Declaration on Equal Access to Justice for All by 2030, it seeks to prevent and resolve justice problems, improve pathways to remedy and deliver fair and meaningful outcomes. This requires accessible institutions, simpler procedures, evidence-based policies and empowering people to understand and use the law.

Justice systems are therefore more than mechanisms for resolving disputes. By placing people and their rights at the centre, they can help individuals secure remedies, protect livelihoods, access education and public services, and overcome discrimination and exclusion.

Yet progress remains slow and uneven. An estimated **5.1 billion people lack meaningful access to justice**, while justice receives only **1.1 per cent of international development assistance**, well below the emerging ambition of two per cent.

Equal access to justice is fundamental to **human dignity, equality and non-discrimination**. Unresolved justice problems can lead to lost income, reduced productivity, poor health, weakened trust in institutions and greater risks of conflict.

Conversely, investing in people-centred justice can generate significant social and economic returns, contributing to more peaceful, inclusive and resilient societies. **When people can understand, use and shape the law to solve everyday problems and achieve more just and democratic societies, development outcomes improve across sectors.**

> *Human rights, peace, justice, strong institutions and sustainable, inclusive development are not simply parallel ambitions – they are deeply interconnected.*
>
> **Volker Türk,**
> UN High-Commissioner for Human Rights

HUMAN RIGHTS-POWERED SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Pathways to accelerate sustainable development through people-centred justice and human rights



01 **Make access to justice as a national development accelerator**, recognizing justice as an enabler of poverty reduction, inclusion, gender equality, economic participation and peaceful societies.

02 **Collect and use people-centred justice data**, including legal needs surveys, to understand how people experience injustice and to guide policy and budgeting.

03 **Invest in community-based justice services and legal empowerment**, including paralegals and legal aid, particularly for those furthest behind.

04 **Integrate justice into national development plans**, especially on poverty, gender equality, health, education, labour rights, housing and climate action.

05 **Prioritize prevention**, addressing the root causes of disputes, violence, exclusion and discrimination before they escalate.

06 **Strengthen women's access to justice** by reforming discriminatory laws and supporting gender-responsive justice pathways.

07 **Recognize and engage diverse justice pathways**, including customary and informal mechanisms, while ensuring compliance with human rights standards.

08 **Increase financing for people-centred justice**, drawing on the Justice Financing Framework commissioned by the Justice Action Coalition.

09 **Monitor justice outcomes**, generating evidence on what works and promoting accountability.

10 **Build cross-sector partnerships and political leadership for justice**, bringing together governments, UN entities, civil society, communities, researchers and the private sector around shared development outcomes.

UN HUMAN RIGHTS:

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Supports mobile courts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo that bring justice to remote and conflict-affected communities, strengthening accountability, victim participation and access to remedies.

SOUTH SUDAN

Monitors detention facilities and provides legal assistance to vulnerable detainees in South Sudan, helping reduce arbitrary detention and strengthen due process protections.

SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC

Supports the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, documenting violations, preserving evidence and supporting accountability efforts in the Syrian Arab Republic, helping keep victims' rights and demands for justice at the forefront.

COLOMBIA

Works with victims and human rights defenders in Colombia to support investigations, accountability and the meaningful participation of affected communities in peace and justice processes.

THAILAND

Supported reforms that place victims at the centre of the justice system in Thailand, strengthening safeguards against enforced disappearance and torture and improving access to remedies.

GLOBAL

Through work on SDG 16 data and monitoring, UN Human Rights, UNDP and UNODC help strengthen evidence, accountability and people-centred approaches to justice, inclusion and human rights at the global level.