

THE ROLE OF NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS AND ADVANCING SDG 16

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WHAT IS IT?

[National Human Rights Institutions \(NHRIs\)](#) are independent state institutions established by law to promote and protect human rights and to hold governments to account for their human rights obligations. Among other tasks, NHRIs undertake systematic analysis of the human rights situation in their countries, issue reports and recommendations, and advise governments and parliament on human rights compliance.

Some NHRIs also have a mandate to handle complaints from citizens, facilitating access to justice, redress, and remedy.

As of December 2021, there were [86 “A-status”](#) NHRIs across the globe, i.e. in full compliance with the [Paris Principles](#) which set the international minimum standards for effective, credible, and independent NHRIs.

- In addition, 32 NHRIs are partially compliant with these standards (B-status).

The existence of an independent NHRI in compliance with the Paris Principles is an indicator of strong institutions under [SDG 16.a](#), but the current pace of establishment of A-status NHRIs is slow. [If not accelerated, countries will not achieve this target before 2067.](#)

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

NHRIs are crucial, institutional architecture elements necessary for the realisation of the 2030 Agenda.

Acknowledging that [more than 90 percent of the SDG targets are related to international human rights norms and standards](#), NHRIs and their networks have stepped up and leveraged their role to support SDG implementation, monitoring and review.

NHRIs are guided by the [Merida Declaration](#), which was agreed upon under the auspices of the [Global Alliance of NHRIs \(GANHRI\)](#) in 2015 and which elaborates upon the role of NHRIs in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

A REGIONAL ANGLE

As a follow-up to the Merida Declaration, in 2017, the Network of African NHRIs (NANHRI) adopted [the Kigali Declaration and Plan of Action](#) to guide NHRIs in the region in their engagement with the 2030 Agenda and the [African Union’s Agenda 2063](#).

More recently NIHRs in Europe are responding to COVID-19 – [UNESCO listed that 36 NIHRs in the region made recommendations related to the pandemic](#) with regards to access/right to information, access for persons with disabilities and multilingualism.

HOW IS IT APPROACHED?

NHRIs have contributed to national, regional, and global SDG review processes by, for example:

- Convening stakeholders and facilitating dialogue,
- Providing data on human rights-related indicators, and
- Supporting the direct implementation of certain SDG targets related to their mandates.

A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO DATA COLLECTION

NHRIs have also fostered a human-rights-based approach to the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs as a means “to leave no one behind”, using data and information from [the human rights systems](#) to guide [the development of national indicators, policies, and programmes](#).

For example, the NHRIs of Palestine, Kenya, and Uganda have established Memoranda of Understanding¹ with National Statistics Offices in their countries to collaborate on a human-rights-based approach to data collection and data disaggregation, including on issues related to access to justice, violence, fundamental rights and freedoms, and the identification of vulnerable population groups to expand on national census.

Case Study: Promoting a Human-Rights-Based Approach to SDG Implementation and Monitoring, the Palestinian Independent Commission for Human Rights

As a follow-up to its first VNR presented in 2018, the Palestinian Government established National SDG Teams composed by representatives from different stakeholders groups. Each SDG Team coordinates with relevant actors in the field to, for example, conduct monitoring and reporting, provide recommendations and policy proposals and prepare interventions to promote the implementation of its respective Goal. It is a unique process, designed to pull together the capacities and expertise of all relevant actors in the country.

The Palestinian NHRI, namely the [Independent Commission for Human Rights \(ICHR\)](#), engages in the national SDG processes promoting a human rights-based approach to the implementation and monitoring of the 2030 Agenda. Among other things, the ICHR has developed a [criterion](#) to define marginalized areas in the country from a human rights perspective, contributing to the identification of groups that are being left behind. ICHR is also an active contributor to the National SDG Teams and engages as a permanent member of the [National Team for SDG 16](#), led by the Ministry of Justice, since its launch in July 2018. In addition, ICHR is an observer in the Teams for Goals 1 (no poverty), 3 (good health and well-being), 8 (decent work) and 10 (reduced inequalities).

The SDG 16 team includes the Ministry of Justice, as well as the Ministries of Finance, Women’s Affairs, Social Development, Interior and Local Government; the police; eight human rights institutions including the NHRI; civil society academia and media representatives; the General Personnel Council (civil servants); the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics; ; and oversight bodies.. After reviewing the data collection capacities of its members, the Team agreed on compiling data and information for 75 indicators in total (including global and national indicators) to provide for a comprehensive review of the SDG 16 targets. Based on the data provided by its members, the SDG 16 Team will prepare a report to the Prime Minister’s Office to assist in the preparation of future VNRs and provide evidence for policymaking to advance SDG 16 implementation in the country.

As a member of the SDG 16 Team and due to its unique mandate to monitor the human rights situation in the country, the ICHR is able to contribute data for 25 of the agreed indicators that are relevant to monitor SDG 16. Those include issues related to violence, access to justice and human rights defenders. The ICHR is also engaged in a MoU with the Palestinian Central Bureau for Statistics in which the institutions cooperate on, among other things, conducting a survey to monitor fundamental rights and freedoms, relevant for SDG 16.10.

¹ The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights is promoting MoU between NHRIs and NSOs as part of its effort to promote a human-rights-based approach to data collection. Implementation has also been supported by the Danish Institute for Human Rights with capacity-building and trainings.

NHRIs have also been a leading voice for increased inclusion, participation and accountability for the SDG follow-up and review processes. They are [leveraging experiences from the UN human rights monitoring bodies such as the Universal Periodic Review and Treaty Bodies and proposing structural changes that would benefit from increased coordination between national mechanisms for reporting and follow-up on human rights obligations \(NMRFs\) and national SDG coordination mechanisms](#). NHRIs continued engagement post-VNR is crucial to ensure that countries uphold the human rights principles of equality, non-discrimination, transparency, participation and accountability in the SDG follow-up processes.

Case Study: An Accountability Actor, The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice, Ghana

The Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ or the Commission) is the Ghanaian NHRI. CHRAJ is a member of the multi-sectoral SDGs Implementation Coordination Committee (ICC) of Ghana, which comprises representatives of key ministries, public agencies and civil society organizations. The mandate of the ICC includes strengthening cross-sectoral coordination and multi-stakeholder partnerships in SDG implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. For the preparation of Ghana 2019 VNR, the CHRAJ was formally requested by the SDG coordinating secretariat to provide information on its activities contributing to the SDGs, including on Goal 16. The Commission was also part of the Ghana official delegation to the HLPF that year.

In the follow-up to the VNR, the CHRAJ is playing a central role in improving accountability in the country, particularly in its capacity as the coordinating body for the National Anti-Corruption Plan. In this role, the Commission is convening a number of thematic international and national dialogues with relevance to advance issues related to SDG 16, such as promoting the relevance of linking human rights in anti-corruption efforts to, for example, strengthen institutions, ensure rule of law and access to justice, and design adequate policies for asset recovery and return.

Among other initiatives, the CHRAJ organized a national Conference on Anti-Corruption and Transparency, which gathered high-level officials (including Ghana's Vice-President), key representatives from the governance and justice sectors, civil society, the UN and the private sector. Participants reviewed existing policies and strategies and agreed on measures to strengthen institutions involved in fighting corruption and ensuring transparency and accountability.

Further, in January 2020, the Commission organized a national forum involving key accountability institutions including the offices of the Attorney-General, Auditor-General and Special Prosecutor, as well as the Economic and Organized Crime Office, Narcotics Control Board, Police Service and others. The forum was meant to strengthen inter-institutional collaboration and information-sharing and led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among these actors to fulfill this purpose.

Finally, on a project funded by the World Bank and expected to start in the second half of 2020, the CHRAJ was selected as one of 16 public sector institutions to promote good governance and access to a redress or remedy through internal complaint or grievance handling mechanism within the public services. The CHRAJ, in exercising its constitutional mandate as Ghana's Ombudsman, will provide capacity-training for public officials on Client Service Charters and effective complaint handling to strengthen public services in contribution to the government's public sector reform strategy.