

Human Rights Council 46th session

Meeting on the role of poverty alleviation in promoting and protecting human rights

Statement by the International Service for Human Rights and The Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Speaker: Sarah M Brooks

Madame President, esteemed members of the Panel,

The intersection of human rights and economic inequality is a perennial concern.

Many dignitaries and delegations have noted the importance of understanding the impact of COVID-19 on poverty worldwide. We agree, and would highlight that COVID-19 has provided an opportunity to tackle inequalities and the systems and structures that reproduce them.

Yet, as the [Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights has said](#), despite this opportunity COVID continues, one year on, to have dire impacts on rights. An alarming number of policies that sought to address impacts of COVID-19 were ‘maladapted, short-term, reactive, and inattentive to the realities of people in poverty’.

In resolving our current and future challenges, there is an important role for cooperation among all stakeholders: governments, international organisations, economic actors and civil society. And there is an important need to speak in clear and well-defined terms about the ways in which this cooperation upholds human rights.

Shared commitments to abide by the VDPA require States to reinforce the important link between democracy, development and human rights, namely the rights of the human person as the ‘central subject’ of development. People need to be empowered to know and claim their rights, and – especially for those already marginalised – to participate in the design and implementation of decisions, policies and programmes that impact them directly.

There is, at the same time, a primordial need to ‘draw a distinction between the achievement of development objectives and the respect for human rights obligations’. As the [former Special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights reflected](#), ‘the two are mutually reinforcing, but they are not synonymous’. In other words, alleviation of extreme poverty does not and will not *necessarily* lead to the realization of rights.

This Council has long sought to ensure discussions on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development inform, and are informed by, the discussions that happen in this room. The objective of development cannot simply be economic growth, but rather full enjoyment of all human rights for all.

This cohesion is central to whether current approaches to development, and development cooperation, are being carried out ‘in a manner that conforms to human rights obligations and in particular [that] provides for meaningful accountability mechanisms’. This means

avenues for airing grievances without fear of attack or retaliation, and for pursuing remedy in the case of violations, through the courts or otherwise. Human rights defenders, especially of ESC rights, play a critical role – and attacks against them not only violate the right to defend rights, but also put the goal of inclusive development at risk.

To the members of the panel:

There are many examples of development initiatives or programs that have led directly to the violation of human rights, and also examples of economically developed countries where human rights are not realized. This calls into question the arguments for a causal link between development, including poverty alleviation, and the realization of human rights. **What are the key policy elements needed to ensure that a decrease in the level of extreme poverty is *positively correlated* with an increase in the protection and promotion of human rights?**