Inclusive sustainable development: a human rights perspective
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This article explores the contributions of human rights ideas and norms to the rise and content of the notion of inclusive development, with special emphasis on experiences with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and with human rights-based approaches (HRBAs) to development and to environmental issues. On the latter aspect in particular, it is striking that, even though human rights instruments still take up environmental issues only scarcely, human rights-based approaches to global challenges such as climate change have gained momentum.

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Introduction
Both in theory and in practice, in the last decades 'development' gradually came to be seen as a holistic notion, encompassing economic, social, cultural, political and environmental dimensions. More recently, the concept of inclusive development has gained prominence in general international development fora, most notably as a central element of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that are the heart of the global United Nations (UN) development agenda for the period 2016–2030. In this contribution the term inclusive development is understood along the lines of the following definition advanced by the UN Development Programme (UNDP):

Development can be inclusive – and reduce poverty – only if all groups of people contribute to creating opportunities, share the benefits of development and participate in decision-making. Inclusive development follows UNDP's human development approach and integrates the standards and principles of human rights: participation, non-discrimination and accountability [1].

In this sense inclusive development already has been a long-standing feature of HRBAs to development. For example, its core was already represented in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the UN Declaration on the Right to Development (1986). Somewhat more recent global international human rights treaties such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) provide yet more explicit guidance.

Thus the general human rights dimensions of inclusive development have been articulated fairly prominently already—in theory, policy and, to a lesser extent, in practice [2,3]. This might help to explain the relative visibility of human rights and related notions in the 'Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development' (hereafter Agenda 2030), the UN document that contains the SDGs and related targets [4•]. Agenda 2030 contains no less than forty references to the term 'inclusive', twenty-one references to 'rights' (in a meaning relevant to 'human rights'),[1] ten references to 'participation' and numerous references to particularly vulnerable groups such as children and/or youth, women, or persons with disabilities. Agenda 2030 pursues societies 'that are based on respect for human rights (including the right to development)'.

The relationship between human rights and development
The relationship between human rights and development has been long debated [5,6,7•]. The exact dynamics between them are perhaps still not fully clear [9,8]. Differences of opinion remain on whether human rights are either an integral component of development, a prerequisite for development or the end-result of development. Nevertheless, the idea that human rights matter in development efforts has gained ever more ground [10–13]. The advancement of international human rights law, the nearly universal ratification of global United Nations (UN) human rights treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against

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[1] However, none of these appear in the SDGs themselves, and only 4 of these are included in SDG targets. The remaining references to human rights are part of the Preamble, of the Declaration or of the concluding sections of Agenda 2030.

Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) with respectively 196 and 189 ratifications, and the 164 up to 177 ratifications of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disabilities, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination[2] [14] have been influential factors in the evolution of the above-mentioned idea. A human rights-based approach increasingly came to be seen as having the potential to bring about positive change. Already in 2008, the then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that "the international human rights legal framework, to which all States have subscribed, must be seen as part of the solution and the baseline commitment on development" [15]. Over time, in fact a fairly widespread human rights and development practice has emerged [16], for example in the form of HRBAs to development involving both State and non-State actors [17,18].

Evidence is mounting on development efforts failing, or at least not achieving maximum results, because of their lack of attention for inequality, discrimination, social exclusion and marginalization. These aspects are all at the heart of struggles for human rights. Evaluations of global and country-level performance on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and some other relevant assessments – such as the annual *Human Development Reports* by the UNDP and the annual *State of the World's Children* reports by UNICEF – have clearly substantiated the importance of confronting inequality (*e.g.*, based on gender [19], age [20[••]], ethnicity [21], disability [22,23], poverty [24], sexual orientation [25] or geography [21]) and pursuing inclusive development [26]. The nature of the MDGs "has encouraged many countries to focus on those that are easiest to reach" [27] which has on occasion resulted in disregard of the situation, needs and rights of especially vulnerable or marginalized groups [28] such as indigenous peoples [29], persons with disabilities [30] or people living in remote rural areas [21,31]. In fact, as reported by Stuart and Woodroffe: "[t]here is evidence that progress was made by the relatively better-off, rather than those who were the most vulnerable and marginalised (. . .). MDG indicators are consistently worse for disadvantaged groups across every region" [32].

The meaning of inclusive development from a human rights perspective, culminating in the SDGs

Three central features of human rights ideas and norms are crucial for defining the notion of 'inclusive development' from the point of view of human rights. First, international human rights law has established that

human rights are universal, inalienable and inherent to being human. This implies that human rights apply to all people, everywhere and always. At the same time international human rights standards also acknowledge that context matters, if only because the capacity of states to implement their human rights treaty obligations varies substantially. While lack of resources or technology is no justification for violating human rights, or allowing such violations to occur, these might create a legitimate claim to international assistance for strengthening one's capacity to implement human rights [33,32].

Second, human rights are indivisible and interdependent. This means that all human rights are equally important and that often the realization of one right (*e.g.*, the right to an adequate or healthy environment) is dependent on, or reinforced by, the realization of another right (*e.g.*, the right to freedom of expression to create space for articulating problems related to pollution) [34,35,11]. Extending this to the notion of development, in the form of a human rights-based approach to development, thus means that development should be seen as a multi-faceted phenomenon. This was already emphasized in the 1986 UN Declaration on the Right to Development which described the right to development as "an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development" [36]. Environmental (protection) concerns were added to this list by the 1992 Rio Declaration on Environment and Development [37].

Third, human rights are both substantive objectives in themselves, but also prescribe a certain process for achieving those objectives. This process should among others be inclusive/non-discriminatory, participatory and provide for accountability [7[•]]. Accordingly, these elements should be key characteristics of all HRBAs to development, besides having a grounding in a relevant international (*e.g.*, a UN human rights treaty) or national (*e.g.*, Constitution) normative human rights framework.

Agenda 2030 is conceptually based in human rights. This comes out strongly in the Preamble which straightforwardly articulates that the "17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets (. . .) seek to realize the human rights of all" [4[•]]. This human rights base appears much less clearly in the SDGs and the related targets themselves. However, this base definitely has translated into their universal applicability. Contrary to the earlier MDGs, which applied to the South, the SDGs apply to both 'developing' and 'developed' States [4[•]]. This is a path-breaking recognition of the fact that human rights and development challenges both exist and require action in all parts of the world. Agenda 2030 also embodies a comprehensive substantive vision of development, consisting of economic, social and environmental dimensions

that all require attention and ultimately will need to be integrated [38$^{\bullet\bullet}$]. Accordingly, Agenda 2030 introduces itself as a "plan of action for people, planet and prosperity" which "also seeks to strengthen universal peace in larger freedom" [4$^{\bullet}$].

Building on the experiences with the MDGs [39,7], the successor SDGs clearly recognize the importance of realizing inclusive development. It is thus for good reason that the slogan "leave no one behind" is increasingly being used in relation to the SDGs and translated into a priority for reaching "the furthest behind first" [40,31,32,41$^{\bullet\bullet}$]. SDG 10 focuses on reducing inequality within and between countries. According to target 10.2 this should lead, by 2030, to the "social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status". Target 10.3 requires states not only to 'ensure equal opportunity' but, interestingly, also to go a step further and "reduce inequalities of outcome" [4$^{\bullet}$].

The consequential need to address both the manifestations and structural causes of inequality has resulted in a more tangible emphasis on combating discrimination and violence than was the case before, especially as far as women and children are concerned [42,43]. In addition, greater attention emerged for governance aspects [44–47,7$^{\bullet}$] and for elements of process such as meaningful participation [48,49] and accountability [50]. The latter extends among others to evidence-based monitoring of performance in realizing the SDGs and access to justice (included in SDG 16). However, at present and overall, the monitoring and accountability mechanisms of Agenda 2030 are weak as they are entirely voluntary and country-led. In addition, according to Esquivel – who at the time was the research coordinator on gender and development at the UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) – the SDG monitoring process lacks a "historical perspective on the responsibility of powerful actors, particularly transnational corporations in causing the problems that the SDGs are trying to solve in the first place" [51]. Definitely, a lot of work is still required on the monitoring process, including on developing indicators and then on gathering data to assess success and failure in realizing the SGDs.

Inclusive development, human rights and the environment

Despite the impressive progressive development of international human rights law and the many new subjects that were covered over time, it still scarcely addresses environmental concerns. While the potential links between environmental, developmental and human rights concerns are obvious, it is also clear that there may be inherent tensions between them. Human rights, unavoidably, have an anthropocentric outlook on environmental affairs. According to Anton and Shelton, human rights and

environmental protection thus can be seen as "based on fundamental different and ultimately irreconcilable value systems". They explain that some environmental lawyers maintain:

that a human rights focus for environmental law ultimately reduces all other environmental values to an instrumental use for humanity so that the quality of life can be enhanced. This human-centered, utilitarian view reduces the nonhuman and non-living aspects of ecosystems to their economic value to humans and promotes unsustainable resource exploitation and environmental degradation as a human good. On the other hand, some human rights lawyers believe that linking human rights and the environment diminishes the importance and focus on protection of more immediate human rights concerns, such as ending genocide, extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary detention [52].

This situation is also reflected in Agenda 2030. Only very occasionally does a human rights objective appear in the environmental SDG targets, for example, in target 6.1 as regards achieving "universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water for all" [4$^{\bullet}$] (see also Obani, this Special Issue). Most of the other environmental content of Agenda 2030 totally neglects human rights dimensions, even when subjects that straightforwardly have such dimensions are addressed such as the reduction of the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities, including attention to air quality and waste; food; environmentally sound management of chemicals and wastes so as to reduce their negative effects on both human health and the environment; the adoption of a lifestyle 'in harmony with nature'; combating and adapting to climate change; conserving and sustainably using the marine environment and marine resources; forest management; or land degradation. This applies the other way around as well: the human rights related (or social) provisions of Agenda 2030 do not make connections with sustainability or environmental aspects. All in all the integrative capacity of Agenda 2030 thus does not seem to go beyond addressing economic, social and environmental development concerns in one document. This makes it all the more interesting to observe that there is an increasing practice of approaching one of the great environmental concerns of our time, climate change, from a human rights perspective. The reasons for doing so are straightforward. Both at present and in future, if continuing uncurbed, climate change has/will have a devastating impact on people's livelihoods and health. Thus it puts many human rights potentially at risk. Thus, taking climate change measures can be seen as part and parcel of what it takes for states to live up to their human rights treaty obligations. For example, the CRC prescribes, in its article 4, that states have to take 'all appropriate measures' for implementing the Convention's children's rights. If climate change jeopardizes specified children's

rights, and it does [53], then action is required under the CRC [33]. In addition, mitigation and adaptation efforts need to respect the non-discrimination and participation principles and climate change related disaster relief measures should protect vulnerable people against violence and abuse. For example, it is known that children are prone to sexual abuse or trafficking in disaster situations, especially when they have lost contact with their parents or caretakers. All of these considerations have triggered an interesting stream of studies, policy documents and practice examples on climate change and human, including children's, rights [54•,55–58]. Gradually these will shape up a genuine human rights-based approach to climate change.

Concluding remarks

This article has shown how human rights ideas and norms have been a supportive factor in relation to pushing the UN development agenda to focus more explicitly on inclusive development. Agenda 2030 is a major step ahead in this regard, at least on paper. However, the momentum around Agenda 2030 offers hope for impact on practice too.

In terms of considering the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development in an integrated manner, Agenda 2030 does not fully deliver and shows the same separations between these realms as international (economic, human rights and environmental) law still largely does. Breakthroughs in this regard might instead come from the dynamic developments in the conceptualization and practice of HRBAs to climate change.

Acknowledgements

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