

Sub-theme 1: National human rights action plans and base line studies

Against the background of the recommendation made by the World Conference for Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, some States have devised national human rights action plans for working systematically to strengthen human rights implementation. These action plans usually seek to address the full range of human rights in a country. Other states have chosen to adopt action plans addressing a specific human rights issue or area, such as gender equality, non-discrimination or the rights of the child. Still other states do both. The development and implementation of NHRAPs has been uneven so far and many different approaches have been pursued, with little learning from common experience. The process of initiating a plan can be crucial to its success. Plans will be more logically structured if there is a base-line study to identify the concrete problems that are to be addressed through measures in the plan. Monitoring and evaluation are important if progress is to be measured and problems addressed. Finally, the long-term nature of human rights promotion and protection implies the need for successor plans, as well as the need for effective interlinking of general plans with more specialised plans that may focus on a narrower range of issues.

- What steps were taken to prepare for NHRAPs in various countries in the past? Were there gaps or mistakes? What lessons can be learned for future proposals to introduce NHRAPs?
- What should be the minimum standards for baseline studies? What options are there for carrying out baseline studies? What are the strengths and weaknesses of each option? What difficulties are there in carrying out baseline studies? How can they be overcome?
- What structures have been employed to manage the implementation of NHRAPs and which have proven successful so far? What is needed in terms of political leadership, staffing and resources? How should civil society be involved in the various stages of NHRAP activity?
- What measures have been used or should be used to monitor the ongoing implementation of NHRAPs and/or to carry out evaluations at the conclusions of each plan? How could they be improved? If no monitoring/evaluation has taken place, why and what have been the obstacles?
- How should successor plans be facilitated? What should be their relationship to earlier plans? How can specialized and more general human rights plans in a country be made more mutually reinforcing?

-At which stages of the elaboration and implementation processes of base line studies and human rights action plans should civil society be involved, and how?

Sub-theme 2: Methods for mainstreaming and following up systematic work for human rights implementation

Very large – or all – policy areas include human rights issues. This also means that practically all persons with a role in policy making or public administration deal with human rights. While national legislation is concrete and elaborated for the context of a specific country, human rights standards are both important international obligations regulating central elements of human life and general, vague and often difficult to apply in a concrete national context. Methods for mainstreaming a human rights perspective into different policy areas, such as rights-based governance, human rights budgeting and human rights indicators, may provide guidance in how human rights can be concretised and better understood by public officials and the public when dealing with specific areas or issues.

- What different tools are there for increasing human rights awareness without overburdening public officials with another “perspective” that is to be mainstreamed or integrated?

- Is there a need to refer to human rights explicitly or can human rights be successfully mainstreamed without the use of the specific “human rights language”? What is the value added by the human rights perspective as such?

- What should be the balance between mainstreaming, co-ordination and specialisation – is there a risk that the human rights perspective of everyone becomes the responsibility of no one?

- How can systematic work for human rights be followed up and evaluated? Are national goals for human rights combined with indicators a useful method or have indicator systems only flooded public bodies with yet more administration?

- Which methods are there for civil society to measure and evaluate to which extent mainstreaming of human rights really means respect for human rights?

- How can different models, such as human rights action plans and human rights indicators, be combined in a useful way?

Sub-theme 3: Systematic work for human rights implementation at the local and regional level

The international obligation to respect human rights lies with the central government. However, for human rights to become a reality within the state, they need to be implemented at all levels of society. In many countries, large parts of the individual's daily life, e.g. schools, health care, social care and housing, belong within the field of responsibility of the federal state, region or local level of government. While federal states, regions and municipalities generally aim at achieving a beneficial and sustainable development and wish to avoid a bad human rights credit for their communities, methods for systematic work for human rights implementation have sometimes been thought of and developed as a tool mainly for central government.

- How can the work for safeguarding human rights be more systematically and efficiently carried out on the level of the federal state, region and municipality?
- How can different levels of government administration co-operate in order to address human rights problems constructively wherever they emerge?
- Which methods are there for identifying human rights problems at the level of the federal state, region and municipality? Should base-line studies on the human rights situation be carried out at all levels separately?
- How can geographical and personal proximity to groups and individuals be used as an advantage rather than a problem in decision-making relating to human rights issues?

Sub-theme 4: The role of civil society and national human rights institutions in systematic work for human rights implementation

It is clear that national human rights institutions and ombudsmen have a unique role in relation to both the government and the public, and they can have very concrete and valuable functions in human rights implementation, e.g. in relation to the follow up of judgements and recommendations from international and regional bodies with regard to human rights. Human rights institutions and ombudsmen can also play an important role in systematic work for human rights implementation carried out in the form of action plans, indicator systems etc. But while national human rights institutions and ombudsmen develop a knowledge about the human rights situation in their country which is key in systematic work for human rights implementation, there is a need for them to safeguard their independence in relation to the government. There is also a balance that needs to be taken into consideration within the structure of these institutions themselves between scrutinising and more supporting functions in their relation to e.g. government agencies.

- Which role can national human rights institutions and ombudsmen play in the elaboration and implementation of human rights action plans, policies and other instruments for systematic work for human rights implementation?
- Under which circumstances, or at which stages, can this role be active and co-operative, and when should national human rights institutions and ombudsmen keep a distance in order to safeguard their independence?
- How can a proper balance be struck between mainstreaming a human rights perspective for all official bodies and the special role and responsibilities of national human rights institutions and ombudsmen?
- What is the role for national human rights institutions and ombudsmen in relation to evaluations of the government's systematic work for human rights?
- How can national human rights institutions and ombudsmen raise the awareness of human rights among and mobilise civil society in systematic work for human rights implementation?