MIDWEST MODEL UNITED NATIONS

GENERAL ASSEMBLY THIRD COMMITTEE

TOPIC GUIDE

Topic Guides are prepared by MMUN volunteer staff and are meant to provide basic background information on each of the committees and the topics on their agenda. Delegates should conduct outside research in order to fully prepare for negotiations in committee.

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MIDWEST MODEL UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly Third Committee

Committee Mandate

In 1945, the *Charter of the United Nations* established the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which is the main deliberative body and one of the principal organs of the United Nations.[1] The UNGA is comprised of all 193 Member States of the United Nations and serves as a high-level platform for diplomacy. The UNGA presents an opportunity to all Member States to create and adopt non-binding resolutions which lay out policies or international norms on certain topics. The General Assembly is broken into 6 subsidiary committees.

The General Assembly Third Committee is known as the Social, Humanitarian Cultural Committee, and is currently chaired by H.E Mahmoud Saikal of Afghanistan. The Third Committee deals with topics of social, humanitarian affairs, and human rights issues. The committee discusses social development and human rights and considers issues relating to gender equality, crime prevention and criminal justice, and the protection of vulnerable populations such as children, indigenous groups, refugees, and persons with disabilities.[2]

Membership

As part of a plenary committee of the United Nations, the General Assembly Third Committee is comprised of all UN Member States. The UNGA operates on the notion of sovereign equality, which guarantees all Members a single, equal vote.[3] No states receive a special veto or a weighted vote.[4] Some Member States lack adequate staff to have representatives at every subsidiary committee sessions or during informal debates. Typically, more delegates review and vote on draft resolutions during the General Assembly Plenary sessions than during a meeting of a subsidiary General Assembly committee.[5] Due to the nature of the social- and cultural-based discussion within the committee, Third Committee is a platform for some of the most contentious debate in the UN system.

Reporting

The General Assembly has no direct subsidiary bodies, but its proceedings are often informed by other UN entities, such as the United Nations Childrens' Fund, UN-Women, and the High Commissioner for Human Rights.[6] While in session, delegates of this committee discuss and debate a topic to develop a working paper, which can then be adopted as a draft resolution by a simple majority vote of the committee. Draft resolutions from the General Assembly Third Committee and, indeed, all 6 of the General Assembly subsidiary committees, are passed on to the

[1] United Nations Conference on International Organization, *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.
[2] United Nations General Assembly, "Social, Humanitarian, & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)," n.d
[3] United Nations Conference on International Organization, *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.
[4] Ibid.
[5] United Nations General Assembly, "Social, Humanitarian, & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)," n.d
[6] Ibid.

General Assembly Plenary for a second vote and, ultimately, adoption via majority vote.[7] Any resolution adopted by the General Assembly is a representation of the will of the international community.

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[7] United Nations General Assembly, "Social, Humanitarian, & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)," n.d

MIDWEST MODEL UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly Third Committee

Topic A: The Right to Privacy

Introduction

"It is precisely in the face of massive change, that we need more human rights, not less."

- *Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*

The right to privacy is a foundational human right, protected under Article 12 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and Article 17 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*.[1] Both of these key documents explicitly prohibit arbitrary or unlawful interference with an individual's privacy, family, home, or correspondence.[2;3] However, today this right exists under a different context, reshaped by the digital transformation of economic and social life. In the contemporary era characterized by rapid technological advancement and globalization, personal data has become a currency of the digital economy.[4] This creates unprecedented risks for individuals' autonomy and their right to privacy as data actors operate across borders, exploit jurisdictional gaps, and contribute to the rise of 'data havens' where privacy protections are weak or non-existent.[5]

In order to mitigate risks, the United Nations (UN) has appointed a Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy and continues to update the Guidelines for the regulation of computerized personal data files to reflect twenty-first-century realities.[6] The mandate of Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy acknowledges such issues as increased surveillance, artificial intelligence, automated decision-making and machine-learning, tracking, and biometrics.[7] Overall, conversations concerning humans having the same rights in digital environments as they do in physical ones are increasing. Particularly as these new technologies and data practices expand, groups with a heightened vulnerability to data misuse, surveillance, and discrimination are important in the Committee's work. These issues affect personal autonomy, identity, and equal treatment under international law, therefore they are of direct consideration of the General Assembly Third Committee (GA3).[8]

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[1] UNHRC. "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights". United Nations. 1966.
[2] United Nations General Assembly. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights". United Nations. A/RES/217. 1948.
[3] United Nations General Assembly. "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights". United Nations. 1966.
[4] United Nations General Assembly. "Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms". United Nations. A/79/173. 2024.
[5] UNHRC. "International collection of personal data". United Nations. A/HRC/61/48. 2026.
[6] UNHRC. "The right to privacy in the digital age". United Nations. A/HRC/RES/28/16. 2015.
[7] UNHRC. "Mandate of Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy". United Nations. A/HRC/RES/55/3. 2024.
[8] United Nations Human Rights Council. "The right to privacy in the digital age: Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights." A/HRC/60/45. 2025.

Background

International attention to informational privacy was notably addressed by the General Assembly in 1990 in their resolution *Guidelines for the Regulation of Computerized Personal Data Files*. This document was among the first international articulations of baseline principles for the automated processing of personal data.[9]

However, as the Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy Ana Brian Nougrères has brought attention to the outdated nature of this three decade old resolution. In her 2024 report to the General Assembly, she noted that "none of these technological developments had taken place when General Assembly resolution 45/95 was adopted," pointing specifically to the rise of the internet, smartphones, cloud computing, big data, and artificial intelligence, and proposed formally amending text to the resolution.[10] Her analysis found that A/RES/45/95 does not mention several principles now standard in international data-protection instruments. These include, though are not limited to, legitimacy, transparency, demonstrated responsibility, and confidentiality. Furthermore, A/RES/45/95 does not address the right to object, the right to portability, the right not to be subject to solely automated decisions, or the right to compensation for damage.[11] As technology outpaces the international legal frameworks originally designed to protect individual privacy, the need for revising both international, national, and private frameworks on privacy in this era is time sensitive and of the utmost importance.[12]

The absence of an updated universal instrument has not stopped the proliferation of regional and sectoral data protections, but it has left them fragmented. For example, the European Union (EU) Convention 108 of 1981, and its respective amendments, urges that domestic legislation incorporate principles that protect the human rights of all in their territory in regards to personal data.[13] Similarly, the African Union's Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, or the "Malabo Convention", was adopted in 2014. However, this took nine years to enter into force, in June 2023.[14] This delayed implementation can be concerning given the speed at which technology advances and is used. Additional regional documents include, though are not limited to, The *Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum's Privacy Framework*, the *Ibero-American Data Protection Standards*, and the *Economic Co-operation and Development's Privacy Guidelines*.[15;16;17]

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[9] United Nations General Assembly. “Guidelines for the Regulation of Computerized Personal Data Files”. United Nations. A/RES/45/95. 1990.
[10] United Nations General Assembly. "Right to Privacy: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy, Ana Brian Nougrères." A/79/173. 2024.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Council of Europe. “Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data”. Council of Europe. 1981.
[14] African Union. "African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection." African Union. 2014.
[15] Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation. “APEC Privacy Framework”. APEC. 2005.
[16] Ibero-American Network for Data Protection. “STANDARDS FOR PERSONAL DATA PROTECTION FOR IBERO-AMERICAN STATES”. Ibero-American Network for Data Protection. 2017.
[17] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). “OECD GUIDELINES GOVERNING THE PROTECTION OF PRIVACY AND TRANSBORDER FLOWS OF PERSONAL DATA”. OECD. C(80)58/FINAL. 2013.

This regulatory patchwork, where policies are binding in some regions, in the works in some, and entirely absent in many, produces significant jurisdictional gaps. In turn, this can affect respective oversight, consent, and accountability that fall disproportionately on populations with the least power to negotiate the terms of their own data collection.[18]

Current Situation

Sensitive Data and Vulnerable Populations

Certain categories of personal data carry heightened risk of harm if misused, and international attention has concentrated on three populations for whom this risk is most severe: Indigenous peoples, migrants and displaced persons, and children.[19];[20];[21]

Indigenous peoples face what scholars and Indigenous data governance advocates describe as a pattern of non-consensual extraction of genetic, biometric, and cultural data by external institutions.[22] As the literature on Indigenous data sovereignty (IDSov) documents points out, the genomic data of Indigenous Peoples has been collected, used, and reused without either informed consent, or reciprocal benefits.[23] These concerns are in direct opposition to the rights outlined by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).[24] In direct response to the many documented cases of data abuse, Indigenous and allied scholars developed the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance (Collective benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility, Ethics).[25] These principles are characterized by the prioritization of individuals and communities in the realm of data accumulation and storage.

Migrants and displaced persons face a structurally similar problem in a different setting since biometric data collected at borders and in humanitarian operations. In 2021, Human Rights Watch reported that biometric and biographic data collected from Rohingya refugees in a joint UNHCR–Bangladesh registration exercise were collected. These data were then shared with the Government of Myanmar, the country which the Rohingya were fleeing, without properly informed consent of this distribution.[26] Further, refugees involved have noted that they were under the

[18] United Nations Human Rights Council. "The right to privacy in the digital age: Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights." A/HRC/60/45. 2025.
[19] UNHRC. “The right to privacy in the digital age”. United Nations. A/HRC/RES/28/16. 2015.
[20] United Nations General Assembly. “Promotion and protection of human rights: human rights questions, including alternative approaches for improving the effective enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms”. United Nations. A/79/173. 2024.
[21] United Nations General Assembly. "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." A/RES/61/295. 2007.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Halmai, Nicole, et al. "Indigenous Data Sovereignty in Genomics and Human Genetics: Genomic Equity and Justice for Indigenous Peoples." Annual Review of Genomics and Human Genetics. 2025.
[24] United Nations General Assembly. "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." A/RES/61/295. 2007.
[25] Carroll, Stephanie Russo, et al. "The CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance." Data Science Journal. 2020.
[26] Human Rights Watch. "UN Shared Rohingya Data Without Informed Consent." Human Rights Watch. 2021.

impression their “Smart Card”, which allows them to obtain aid and services, could not be obtained if they did not agree to have their information shared.[27] This is a prime concern for the bodies overseeing migrant workers' rights. The Special Rapporteur's own 2024 proposal recommends a humanitarian clause specifically for times of conflict and emergency.[28]

The Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment No. 25 (2021) recognizes that children’s personal data include information about their activities, location, communications, emotions, health and relationships, and in some cases biometric data.[29] These data are routinely collected and processed through automated means such as profiling and behavioural targeting, often in ways that children have yet to understand or meaningfully consent to.[30]

Fragmented Jurisdiction and Cross-Border Data Flows

Jurisdiction regarding data collected by entities with no physical presence in the country where the data originates is scarce. The Special Rapporteur's 2024 proposal directly addresses this international data collection. She recommends the timely adoption of measures ensuring the proper processing of personal data. Specifically, acknowledging that just because data actors are not physically established in a country, individuals rights should still be protected.[31] Member States can therefore consider internal and international policies that help avoid potential or existing data havens. As data havens come to be when the absence of jurisdiction allows entities to operate across borders with little to no accountability.[32]

That fragmentation runs deeper than geography. The Special Rapporteur’s mandate is not the only UN body to address these matters. ECOSOC’s 2022 resolution reaffirms the Statistical Commission as the primary coordinating body for the UN statistical and data-related system. It calls for modernization in response to diverse sources. These include administrative records, geospatial information, and privately held data, which may be integrated into the production of statistics after quality assurance.[33] Separately, the resolution emphasizes balancing data use, transparency, and

[27] Human Rights Watch. "UN Shared Rohingya Data Without Informed Consent." Human Rights Watch. 2021.
[28] United Nations General Assembly. "Right to Privacy: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy, Ana Brian Nougrères." A/79/173. 2024.
[29] Committee on the Rights of the Child. “General comment No. 25 (2021) on children’s rights in relation to the digital environment”. United Nations. CRC/C/GC/25. 2021.
[30] Ibid.
[31] United Nations General Assembly. "Right to Privacy: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Privacy, Ana Brian Nougrères." A/79/173. 2024.
[32] UNHRC. “International collection of personal data”. United Nations. A/HRC/61/48. 2026.
[33] ECOSOC. “Ensuring that the work in the field of statistics and data is adaptive to the changing statistical and data ecosystem”. United Nations. E/RES/2022/3. 2022.

accessibility with confidentiality and the protection of information collected for statistical purposes, as foundations of trust in statistics and data.[34]

Case Study: Consent, Corporate Data Practices, and Automated Surveillance

An internationally documented illustration of these gaps is exemplified by Clearview AI, a private U.S. company that built a facial-recognition search engine by scraping billions of photographs from the open internet without the knowledge or consent of the people pictured.[35] By 2021, a joint investigation by Canada's privacy regulators found that Clearview had amassed a database of more than three billion images of faces and their corresponding biometric identifiers worldwide.[36] The investigation found that Canadian law enforcement agencies and other organizations had created at least 48 trial or paid accounts to use the service, and that Clearview had failed to obtain consent or establish an appropriate purpose for collecting Canadians' biometric data under applicable federal and provincial privacy law.[37] Clearview voluntarily withdrew from the Canadian market during the investigation, but declined to accept the regulators' recommendation that it delete the biometric data it had already collected from individuals in Canada.[38]

Multiple national data-protection authorities found Clearview AI's processing unlawful under the EU General Data Protection Regulation.[39] Italy's Garante imposed a €20 million fine and ordered Clearview to stop processing the biometric data of people in Italy and delete data it had collected.[40] France's CNIL imposed a €20 million fine in October 2022, ordered the company to stop collecting and processing personal data relating to people in France without a legal basis, and required deletion of data already collected.[41] Greece's Hellenic Data Protection Authority imposed a €20 million fine in July 2022 for violations of the GDPR's lawfulness, transparency, information, access, and representative requirements.[42] In a decision issued in 2024, the Netherlands' Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens imposed a €30.5 million fine, finding that Clearview processed personal and biometric data of people in the Netherlands without a legal basis and failed to meet transparency and access-rights obligations.[43]

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[34] ECOSOC. "Ensuring that the work in the field of statistics and data is adaptive to the changing statistical and data ecosystem". United Nations. E/RES/2022/3. 2022.
[35] Vallance, Chris. "Face search company Clearview AI overturns UK privacy fine". BBC. 2023.
[36] Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada, et al. "Joint Investigation of Clearview AI, Inc." PIPEDA Findings #2021-001. 2021.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] European Parliament and Council of the European Union. "Regulation (EU) 2016/679 on the Protection of Natural Persons with Regard to the Processing of Personal Data and on the Free Movement of Such Data (General Data Protection Regulation)." Official Journal of the European Union. L 119/1. 2016.
[40] The Italian Data Protection Authority. "Facial recognition: Italian SA fines Clearview AI eur 20 million Bans use of biometric data and monitoring of Italian data subjects". Garante per la protezione dei dati personali. 2022.
[41] National Commission for Information Technology and Freedoms. "Délibération SAN-2022-019 du 17 octobre 2022". French Republic. SAN-2022-019. 2022.
[42] Hellenic Data Protection Authority. "Decision No. 35/2022: Imposition of Fine on Clearview AI, Inc.". 35/2022. 2022.
[43] Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens. "Decision fine Clearview AI". Autoriteit Persoonsgegevens. 2024.

These decisions illustrate the ability of national regulators to converge on the same legal conclusion. However, given the nature of cross border data actors, there is a need for international discussion and cooperation to address these occurrences at a global scale.[44]

Future Outlook

The future of privacy governance is dependent upon Member States ability to update international safeguards at a pace in line with the advancement of technology. There are many avenues in this realm that require attention. Beyond those mentioned above, progress is rapidly being made in the realms of artificial intelligence, biometric identification, neurotechnologies and neurodata.[45] The Special Rapporteur's 2024 statement points to another key aspect of centering humans in these conversations, where individuals should "… not be subject to decisions made solely by automated systems without human intervention."[46]

Considerations on how privacy protections apply in everyday digital life is warranted. This often includes online tracking and cookies, targeted advertising, paid services that continue to collect user data, consumer genetic testing, and facial-recognition cameras in public spaces. Investigating common minimum standards for meaningful consent, clear notices, purpose limitations, independent oversight, and accessible remedies, may lead to effective solutions.

[44] UNHRC. "International collection of personal data". United Nations. A/HRC/61/48. 2026.
[45] United Nations General Assembly. "Foundations and principles for the regulation of neurotechnologies and the processing of neurodata from the perspective of the right to privacy". A/HRC/58/58. 2025.
[46] Nougrères. "SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY Statement of Dr. Ana Brian Nougrères". United Nations. 2024.

Focus Questions

- How can Member States balance the benefits of data sharing and accessibility for technological innovation, research, and development with the rights of individuals and communities to control how their data are collected, used, and shared?

- What obligations should States and private companies have to obtain meaningful, informed consent before collecting, sharing, retaining, or repurposing personal data?

- How should Member States address invasive online tracking, including the use of cookies and targeted advertising on digital services?

- How can Member States prevent discriminatory uses of automated decision-making and surveillance technologies, including facial recognition and other systems used in public spaces?

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MIDWEST MODEL UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly Third Committee

Topic B: Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Introduction

"Taking the right to development seriously requires States and other actors to ensure genuine participation of people in development governance. Without people's participation, there can be no people-centred sustainable development."

- *Surya Deva, the Special Rapporteur on the right to development*

As the 2030 deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approaches, pressure is mounting on the international community to meet the targets outlined in the General Assembly's 2015 resolution A/RES/70/1.[1] Rural poverty eradication sits at the center of that gap. According to the World Bank, the number of people living in extreme poverty worldwide fell from roughly 2.3 billion in 1990 to about 831 million in 2025, but the decline has been sharply uneven.[2] Nearly three-quarters of the world's extreme poor live in rural communities, and rural poverty fell much further than urban poverty did over the last decade.[3] Poverty in this context is not a matter of income alone. On the ground, communities face restricted access to education, healthcare, nutrition, clean water, sanitation, roads, electricity, and social protection systems.[4]

The General Assembly has most recently addressed rural poverty through resolutions A/RES/79/225 and A/RES/78/165. These call for inclusive, sustainable, and environmentally sound rural-development strategies and request annual progress reports from the Secretary-General and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).[5] Climate change adds to the urgency, since rural livelihoods often are involved in the agriculture sector and other climate-sensitive activities. The World Bank

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[1] United Nations General Assembly. "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." A/RES/70/1. United Nations. 2015.
[2] World Bank. "Poverty and Inequality Update." World Bank. 2025.
[3] Ibid.
[4] United Nations General Assembly. "Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." United Nations. A/RES/78/165. 2023.
[5] United Nations General Assembly. "Eradicating rural poverty to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." United Nations. A/RES/79/225. 2024.

projects that climate impacts alone could push an additional 32 to 132 million people into extreme poverty worldwide by 2030.[6]

For the General Assembly Third Committee (GA3), the central question is less about investment in rural areas, and more about how such investments are structured, and how those function on the ground. For example, initiatives of integrating rural populations into formal economic systems and digital infrastructure can expand opportunity for some but may reinforce exclusion for others[7]. GA3 is well positioned to contribute to a deeper understanding of local contexts and cultural considerations.[8]

Background

The United Nations has identified poverty eradication as a central objective of international development for decades. This commitment was reflected in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly the goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, and was reaffirmed in 2015 through the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda)*, which established the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions as its first Sustainable Development Goal.[9] The *2030 Agenda* identifies the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions as "the greatest global challenge" and an indispensable condition for sustainable development.[10] SDG 1 calls for Member States to end extreme poverty, reduce multidimensional poverty, expand nationally appropriate social-protection systems, and support the resilience of people in vulnerable situations.[11] The *2030 Agenda* also recognizes that these objectives cannot be separated from food security, health, education, gender equality, climate action, and infrastructure. Importantly, the *2030 Agenda* affirms that implementation must respect differing national realities, capacities, policies, and development priorities; rural poverty therefore cannot be understood solely through income indicators or a single model of economic transformation.[12]

Poverty is a multidimensional condition that can encompass material deprivation, limited economic opportunity, low living standards, and social exclusion or insecurity.[13] The global disparities recognized today are not purely contemporary. At a 2022 Human Rights Council session, the Chair of the Committee on the Elimination

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[6] Jafino, B. et al. "Revised Estimates of the Impact of Climate Change on Extreme Poverty by 2030." World Bank. Policy Research Working Paper 9417. 2020.
[7] Hernandez, K., Flynn, J., He, J. & Alsahi, H. "Towards digital inclusion in rural transformation". FAO. 2024.
[8] United Nations General Assembly. "Social, Humanitarian & Cultural Issues (Third Committee)." 2024.
[9] United Nations General Assembly. "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." A/RES/70/1. United Nations. 2015.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] IPCC. "IPCC 5th Assessment Report, WG II Glossary". UNTERM. 2015.

of Racial Discrimination stated that former colonies' enjoyment of socio-economic rights "had been hampered by the lingering legacies of colonialism".[14] As this legacy has continued to manifest the Acting High Commissioner for Human Rights added that no State had yet "comprehensively accounted for the past" in this regard.[15] This topic is situated in the legacy of promoting development across the globe. For the purposes of this paper, this theme can be traced back to the post World War 2 Bretton Woods Conference of 1944. At the conclusion of the conference attendees produced the Articles of Agreement for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).[16] In their founding purpose, the two institutions divided responsibility for the new order. The IMF was charged with maintaining monetary stability and orderly exchange rates.[17] The IBRD, now a branch of the World Bank, was tasked with financing reconstruction and long-term economic development.[18]

The development paradigm that coalesced around these institutions in the following decades treated economic development largely as a process of modernization. This model is centered on the idea that countries are expected to progress along a broadly linear path toward the modern industrial society of the west.[19] A highly influential articulation of this view was economist Walt Rostow's model of five stages of economic growth.[20] Rostow's model described development as a sequential transition from traditional society through preconditions for takeoff, takeoff itself, and a drive to maturity, ending in an age of high mass consumption. This framework assumed capitalist growth would, on its own, generate poverty reduction and eventual convergence between poorer and wealthier economies.[21] In practice, this model has had a nuanced and diverse ripple effect on our globalized economic system, as well as the daily lives of communities across the world. Member states may probe how such a model has both supported and hindered the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

For the Third Committee, this history is part of what frames the tension embedded in this topic: how such mechanisms are formed and implemented, and by whom, matters as much as whether they exist. The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to development, Surya Deva, has noted that development policies, programmes, and projects should be built through the "active, free and meaningful participation" of

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[14] United Nations Office at Geneva. "Acting High Commissioner: Addressing the Legacies of Colonialism Can Contribute to Overcoming Inequalities Within and Among States and Sustainable Development Challenges of the Twenty-First Century." Meeting Summary, 51st session of the Human Rights Council. 2022.
[15] Ibid.
[16] World Bank Group Archives. “Bretton Woods and the Birth of the World Bank”. World Bank.
[17] International Monetary Fund. “ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT”. IMF Library. (republished) 2020.
[18] World Bank Group. “International Bank for Reconstruction and Development”. World Bank. n.d.
[19] Saad-Filho, Alfredo. "Growth, Poverty and Inequality: From Washington Consensus to Inclusive Growth." United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. ST/ESA/2010/DWP/100. 2010.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

the people they affect, with communities recognized as agents in setting their own priorities rather than recipients of a plan designed for them.[22]

Current Situation

The achievement of SDG 1 requires attention beyond household income and market access. The right to secure and equitable access to productive resources and the ability of rural people to influence policies affecting their livelihoods is essential here.[23] Relevant groups include though are not limited to small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fishersfolk, agricultural workers, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, and people living in remote or environmentally vulnerable areas. Their circumstances differ substantially across contexts, including relations to land tenure systems, customary governance, access to public services, exposure to displacement, and participation and decision making in the agricultural realm.

Meaningful Participation: Land Tenure & Resource Governance

Rural poverty is closely connected to whether rural communities can participate meaningfully in decisions concerning land, water, forests, fisheries, seeds, and other resources on which their livelihoods depend. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) affirms that all peoples may freely dispose of their natural wealth and resources and provides that, “in no case may a people be deprived of [their] own means of subsistence.”[24] The Covenant also recognizes the right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, housing, and continuous improvement of living conditions. However, these recognitions have not been uniformly realized, creating discrepancies between development initiatives and the actualization of eradicating poverty.

The right to seeds illustrates the distance that can exist between the international recognition of rural peoples’ rights and the conditions under which those rights are exercised. Article 19 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) recognizes the right to maintain, control, protect, and develop their own seeds and traditional knowledge; to save, use, exchange, and sell farm-saved seeds; and to participate in decisions concerning seed policy.[25] These rights are not marginal to poverty eradication. For small-scale producers, access to and control over seed can shape the cost of cultivation,

[22] United Nations Office at Geneva. "Human Rights Council Discusses the Right to Development, Hears that the Time Has Come for the World Community To Give the Right to Development its Legitimate Space in the Universe of Human Rights." Meeting Summary, 54th session of the Human Rights Council. 2023.
[23] United Nations General Assembly. “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas”. United Nations. A/HRC/RES/39/12. 2018.
[24] United Nations General Assembly. "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights." United Nations. A/RES/2200A (XXI). 1966.
[25] United Nations General Assembly. “United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas”. United Nations. A/HRC/RES/39/12. 2018.

household food production, biodiversity, resilience to climate and market shocks, and the ability to sustain locally adapted farming systems.[26] Yet UN human-rights materials identify an implementation gap: restrictive seed laws, intellectual-property regimes, corporate concentration in seed markets, and policy processes that exclude peasants and Indigenous peoples can limit their ability to save, exchange, market, and govern seeds.[27] Accordingly, meaningful participation in resource governance requires more than consulting rural communities after decisions have been made. It requires their effective involvement in developing the land, agriculture, trade, biodiversity, and seed policies that structure their livelihoods.[28] GA3 and its associated Member States may be well suited to investigate how international instruments related to peasants' rights, seeds and biodiversity, including UNDROP, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture (ITPGRFA), been reflected in national laws and policies, and what concrete impacts or benefits have they had for peasant and rural communities?[29]

Rural Social Protection Systems

Access to social protection such as health coverage, income security in old age or unemployment, and protection against shocks is treated under SDG target 1.3 as a floor beneath which no one should fall.[30] Despite this, coverage in rural areas continues to lag behind urban areas by a wide margin.[31] Part of that gap traces to how postwar development ideas treated social policy.[32] Under the Washington Consensus development policy generally prioritized market liberalization, fiscal restraint, privatization, and growth-led poverty reduction, as socially focused programs were seen as hindering economic efficiency. Poverty reduction was therefore expected to occur largely through the trickle-down effects of market-led growth, rather than through directly provided social initiatives.[33]

The resulting coverage gap remains significant. This is especially apparent in rural areas where high levels of informal, seasonal, and self-employment can exclude

[26] United Nations General Assembly. "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas". United Nations. A/HRC/RES/39/12. 2018.
[27] United Nations Human Rights Council, Working Group on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. "Right to seeds: custodianship, enclosure and resistance". A/HRC/63/26. 2026.
[28] United Nations General Assembly. "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas." United Nations. A/HRC/RES/39/12. 2018.
[29] United Nations Human Rights Council, Working Group on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas. "Right to seeds: custodianship, enclosure and resistance". A/HRC/63/26. 2026.
[30] United Nations General Assembly. "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." A/RES/70/1. United Nations. 2015.
[31] United Nations. "Sustainable Development Goals Report". United Nations. 2026.
[32] Saad-Filho, Alfredo. "Growth, Poverty and Inequality: From Washington Consensus to Inclusive Growth." United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. ST/ESA/2010/DWP/100. 2010.
[33] Ibid.

workers from contributory insurance systems tied to formal wage employment.[34] Globally, 3.8 billion people, 47.6% of the world's population, remained entirely without social protection in 2023, despite the share of people covered by at least one benefit rising from 42.8% in 2015 to 52.4% in 2023.[35] There is also a large discrepancy in those receiving coverage. Only 28.2% of children received a family or child benefit, unemployment benefits reached only 16.7% of unemployed people, while old-age pensions covered 79.6 per cent of people above retirement age.[36]

Universal social protection is essential to an equitable response to climate change. 3.8 billion people are still entirely unprotected from the current and upcoming impacts of climate change.[37] Well-funded and inclusive systems can strengthen climate adaptation and mitigation efforts. This further supports transitions to sustainable economies, where disproportionate costs on poor and vulnerable communities are often imposed.[38] The closing persistent protection gaps and advancing a just transition and broader climate goals can therefore be dually addressed by relevant stakeholders.

Future Outlook

With fewer than four years remaining until 2030, the scale of the remaining gap between the commitments of the 2030 Agenda and their implementation is substantial. As the 2026 UN Sustainable Development Goals Report notes, "the gap between ambition and achievement has never been more stark".[39] This remark provides a focus point where Member States, International Orginizations, and rural communities should assess where existing approaches have succeeded and where they have not.

For SDG 1, future progress may depend on combining appropriate support for rural communities with effective access to social protection, public services, productive resources, and inclusive decision-making. Given the nature of the GA3 committee, placing attention on the social and cultural aspects of this topic is appropriate, and essential. Therefore, this committee may beneficially contribute by facilitating discussion on how initiatives affect groups on a small-scale. From these discussions, relevant parties can reflect community goals in the design, and implementation of policies and programs.

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[34] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. "Policy Brief No. 107: Social Protection in Rural Areas: Achieving Universal Access for All." 2021.
[35] United Nations. "Sustainable Development Goals Report". United Nations. 2026.
[36] Ibid.
[37] International Labour Organization. "World Social Protection Report 2024-26". ILO. 2024.
[38] Ibid.
[39] United Nations. "Sustainable Development Goals Report". United Nations. 2026.

Focus Questions

- How should Member States and other bodies define and measure concepts such as “rural,” “poverty,” and “development” in ways that recognize the complexity of particular cultures, their histories, ontologies, and traditional knowledge, not income growth alone?

- Who meaningfully participates in rural-development decision-making? Also, what institutional mechanisms can ensure that small-scale farmers, pastoralists, fishers, Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, and rural workers have real influence rather than merely being consulted after decisions are made?

- How have factors such as historical legacies, land dispossession, debt, climate vulnerability, and unequal access to productive resources contributed to contemporary rural poverty, and what responsibilities do national governments and international institutions have in addressing those structural causes?

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