SDGs, NHRIs, Non-Discrimination & Vulnerable Groups

The Sustainable Development Goal have been accepted by the U.N. General Assembly. The National Human Rights Institutions have a duty to help achieve those goals. Hence, the NHRIs, including NHRC India, have to equip themselves to discharge this duty. Change of attitude and strategy may be required.

1. **What is sustainable development?**

- "Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

- It envisages that socio-economic developmental processes would become more equitable, inclusive and just, particularly for those who were living on the margins of human existence.

- It implies:
  
  (i) Prevention of over-exploitation of natural resources.
  
  (ii) Prevention of discrimination of any kind.
  
  (iii) Special care for the vulnerable.

- It calls for a convergence of
  
  (1) Economic Development
  
  (2) Social Equity
2. **Millennium Development Goals & Sustainable Development Goals**

- SDGs are a further progress or improvement from MDGs.
- MDGs also had human rights dimensions. They could not have been fully achieved without protecting human rights.
- However, SDGs do necessarily have a human rights approach. Increased emphasis on protection of human rights is the hallmark of SDGs.
- SDGs mark an important paradigm shift towards an equitable an sustainable world which is human rights based.
- Like Ten Commandments, the Sustainable Development Goals can be summarized or condensed into two goals:-
  1. Recognize and protect the human rights of every human being.
  2. Development should be accompanied by justice to all.

3. **Means to achieve SDGs – Role of NHRI*s**

(i) Creating awareness among all stakeholders including the Legislators, the Executive Government, the law enforcing agencies and the victims.

(ii) Enquiry into possible impact on human rights and advice to the Government on policy decisions and legislations.

(iii) Investigation of complaints regarding violation of human rights and taking remedial action including recommending compensation to the victims.
(iv) Involving the Civil Society and NGOs in the enquiries and investigations conducted by NHRIIs.

(v) Effective monitoring of the implementation of Development Projects to ensure that human rights are protected and promoted.

**Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), NHRIIs, Non-Discrimination & Vulnerable Groups**

4. **Need for proper sense of justice**

   Mahatma Gandhi said: “There are enough resources in the world to satisfy the needs of all the people but not their greed.” I believe that Gandhiji’s statement is true even today. If individuals, families, societies and nations profess and practice justice, it will ensure the common good and the welfare of the whole world. It will avoid accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few and over-exploitation of the natural resources to the detriment of future generations.

   What is justice? Which is a ‘just society’?

   Justice means: “a system in which everyone gets what he needs and nobody takes more than what he deserves.”

   It is not arithmetical equality or equal distribution of poverty.

   Unless the individuals, families, societies and nations have a proper sense of justice, SDGs cannot be achieved.

5. **Need for a ‘Culture of Care’**

   In his address to the U.S. Congress, Pope Francis said:
"The right use of natural resources, the proper application of technology and the harnessing of the spirit of enterprise are essential elements of an economy which seeks to be modern, inclusive and sustainable. Business is a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving the world. It can be a fruitful source of prosperity for the area in which it operates, especially if it sees the creation of jobs as an essential part of its service to the common good. This common good also includes the earth. We need a conversion which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all. In ‘Laudato Si’ I call for a courageous and responsible effort to “redirect our steps” and to avert the most serious effects of the environmental deterioration caused by human activity...... Now is the time for courageous actions and strategies, aimed at implementing a “culture of care” and “an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature.”

The Pope’s words strongly support the Sustainable Development Goals.

Pope Francis concluded his speech with the following words:

“A nation can be considered great when it defends liberty as Lincoln did; when it fosters a culture which enables people to ‘dream’ of full rights for all their brothers and sisters, as Martin Luther King sought to do; when it strives for justice and the cause of the oppressed, as Dorothy Day did by her tireless work; the fruit of a faith which
becomes dialogue and sows peace in the contemplative style of Thomas Morton."

Referring to the refugee crisis, the Pope said:
"We need to avoid a common temptation nowadays: to discard whatever proves troublesome. Let us remember the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (Matthew 7:12)

6. **Protection and Promotion of Human Rights should not remain**
    **slogan or an employment opportunity**
    - It should become a Passion.
    - It should become a Way of Life.

7. **Human Rights should be our religion**

   Once a lawyer from Brazil told me "Brazil is a Catholic country and 95% of us are Catholics; but our religion is Football. Similarly, whether we are black or white or brown, or whether we are Asian, European, African or American, or whether we are Christians, Muslims or Hindus, our religion should be Protection of Human Rights."