



Sustainable Development Rights?

- Human rights language in development discourse

Johanne Oline Storgaard Brok

Department of Human Rights
Institute of History
Course: MRS31: 3
Term: HT 2015

Counsellors: Lena Halldenius and Emma Sundkvist
Words: 10364



Abstract

This paper deals with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals of 2015. I examine the role of human rights language in the Sustainable Development Agenda in order to uncover the relation between sustainable development discourse and human rights discourse. Considering discourse a practice I question the position of human rights internationally. I argue that human rights language is absent in the Agenda due to the reluctance of Member States to commit to legally binding obligations. Furthermore, I argue that human rights language is a moral practice itself, which frames, represents and changes the social practice of human rights as a whole. The usefulness and effectiveness of the human rights language varies with the context due to its highly politicized character and the limitations incorporated in the language and doctrine. I conclude that the Agenda and Goals could have benefitted from the use of human rights language in terms of legitimizing and distributing responsibility.

Keywords:

Sustainable Development Goals – human rights – human rights language – United Nations — international politics – post-2015 agenda

Content

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 PROBLEM STATEMENT AND PURPOSE	2
1.2 MATERIAL AND LIMITATIONS	2
1.2.1 Primary material.....	3
1.2.2 Secondary material	3
1.2.3 Sources	5
2. THEORY AND METHOD.....	6
2.1 THEORY.....	6
2.1.1 The “truth” of human rights.....	7
2.1.2 A global norm.....	8
2.1.3 The effectiveness of human rights.....	9
2.2 METHOD	11
3. RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH.....	14
4. ANALYSIS.....	17
4.1 TEXT	17
4.2 DISCURSIVE PRACTICE.....	25
4.3 SOCIAL PRACTICE	29
5. DISCUSSION.....	31
6. CONCLUSION	35
7. BIBLIOGRAPHY	37

1. Introduction

Human rights and development are fields that share a number of elements. Many human rights challenges are equivalent to those of development. The social and economic human rights are closely linked to development in their objects. The capability approach is an example of how development has approached the field of human rights further. But the utilization of rights language may also prove useful in development processes. Development can in some sense be seen as a means of human rights fulfilment, but this depends on the sort of development, the focus and the aim. One significant difference between the two disciplines is the way in which their aims are articulated and communicated. Where human rights originate from a philosophical and moral origin, development is founded in a more economic tradition.

In the wake of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has launched "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (Agenda) presenting 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's or Goals). The UNGA incorporates social, economic and environmental development in the Agenda. The 17 goals and 169 targets succeed the 8 MDG's created in 2000 for achievement in 2015. The SDG's differ from the MDG's in introducing sustainability as part of the development approach, and in applying for all countries. The MDG's were partly achieved, but some of the goals recur in the SDG's.

In the Agenda development is dealt with in relation to environmental and even climatic aspects. But where do human rights enter the scene? That is one of the questions I pose in this paper. The human rights paradigm has dominated international politics and discourses for the past decades. I look into the role of human rights within the UN discourse in order to examine the relation between international development policy and human rights. In particular I consider the use of human right as a language.

1.1 Problem statement and purpose

The purpose of this paper is to study the use of human rights language in the policies of sustainable development within the international arena. I am interested in the way human rights are applied and conveyed in relation to sustainable development. The problem statement is as follows:

- To what degree are human rights used as a framework for the international sustainable development policy?
- How is human rights language applied in the international political context of sustainable development?

In order to examine these problems I conduct a discourse analysis on a UN resolution presenting the Agenda for sustainable development. The analysis will be followed by a discussion of what purpose human rights language serves, and whether presence of such language is important in international sustainable development policies. This study contributes to the discussion of development strategies in the international arena by considering a new and relevant material. Furthermore, the theoretical perspective of a rights language relates it to the field of human rights.

1.2 Material and limitations

The study is limited in terms of context, material and method. The choice of international politics - and in particular the UN, as the arena for this paper implicates the exclusion of the actual effects of the SDG in a given society. This however is not disturbing to the purpose of the paper, as the study centres on meanings and discourses at a formal level. The scope of the paper is further limited by the choice of discourse analysis as the method and the theoretical perspective of rights language. The context of the paper is set in a current discussion of what human rights are and can be. Reference to literature within the fields of human rights and development includes contributions from earlier years, but the material will mainly be post-2000.

1.2.1 Primary material

The primary material consists of the UN resolution “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” in which the 17 SDG’s were presented in the fall of 2015. The 17 goals consist of visions for the world and have 169 targets. I have chosen this material as it represents the UN and international politics and deals with development in relation to sustainability. It is produced by the General Assembly and is the result of two years of cooperation and discussion between the Open Working Group and civil societies.¹ The scope of the Goals stretches from the ending of poverty over sustainable industrialization to the conservation of oceans. While it is not possible to measure or evaluate the degree of achievement of the Goals as they have just been launched, I choose to consider them in terms of visions and aspirations. The focus of the study is rather to consider the discourse of sustainable development with particular attention to the incorporation of human rights.

- United Nations General Assembly. 2015. *A/RES/70/1*, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”.
(http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E)

1.2.2 Secondary material

As secondary material I apply three articles concerning human rights and its language. These are intended to form a theoretical ground for my utilization of the concept of rights language in the analysis.

Henning Hahn presents a cosmopolitan perception on human rights and human dignity. He claims that the human rights regime has established a global norm of dignity. He argues that the universal language of human rights has become the main language of political critique.

¹ United Nations General Assembly. 2015. *A/RES/70/1*, “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for

- Hahn, Henning. 2013. "Human Rights as the Universal Language of Critique. A Political Approach." *Journal For Human Rights / Zeitschrift Für Menschenrechte* 7, no. 2: 42-58.

In his account of the ineffectiveness of human rights language, Stephen Hopgood points to characteristics and uses of it. He dismisses the notion of fast change with human rights as the strategy.

- Hopgood, Stephen. 2014. "Challenges to the Global Human Rights Regime: are Human Rights still an Effective Language for Social Change?." *Sur: International Journal On Human Rights* 11, no. 20: 66-75.

Zigon deals with the inherence of human rights as presented in the UDHR. He argues that the human rights language is conservative and contains performativity. Further, this state-centric human rights language limits the possibilities of politics.

- Zigon, Jarrett. 2014. "Maintaining the "Truth": Performativity, Human Rights, and the Limitations on Politics." *Theory & Event* 17, no. 3: 13.

I apply a number of articles dealing with the SDG's and human rights in international politics. These will be presented in the section concerning related literature and research. Together with the theories they function as a frame of reference in the analysis and discussion.

The method of discourse analysis is based on Norman Fairclough's *Discourse and Social Change* in which an analytical framework is presented. As the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has become a field of study in itself, an adequate account of the theoretical progress exceeds the scope of this study.

1.2.3 Sources

The Agenda is the outcome of the General Assembly Sustainable Development Summit and thereby the result of a longer political process and debate. The character of the text is formal both in message and in language. The Agenda is not to be seen as political promises by UN member states, as it does not allocate obligations and responsibilities among these. Instead, the Agenda is a declaration in which the visions of heads of state are expressed. The Agenda is cosmopolitan in the suggesting of global solutions and the mentioning of the people of the Earth as one people. Meanwhile, it is important to keep in mind the heterogeneous character of the states behind the Agenda.

The academic articles on rights language differ in terms of purpose and perception of human rights language. I consider this a strength as it forces me to take a stand in this paper and choose or create my own understanding of human rights language. The articles are published in 2013 and 2014. This was a deliberate choice as the authors operate more or less within the same context as I.

2. Theory and method

2.1 Theory

This paper is based on the assumption that realities are reflected in language and can be obtained and understood through the interpretation of language. This assumption has led to the combination of a theory of human rights language and the method of discourse analysis.

The term *human rights language* refers to the utilization of rights vocabulary or terminology. When using the word ‘right’ one automatically, yet indirectly, says duty. For me to possess a right entails that you, someone or something else has a corresponding duty to respect, protect or fulfil my right.² This relation between right-holder and duty-bearer can be interpersonal, but the duty-bearer may also be an institution, state or organization.³ The language of human rights additionally contains an element of *universality* and one of *equality*. Hence, all human beings have human rights and are equal. The universality principle also involves the duty-bearers.⁴ The premise and paradox of human rights is that humanity itself invokes rights. This is often mentioned in terms of the *inherent* dignity concept.⁵ This is of course a moral argument. The actual fulfilment of human rights is broadly recognized to involve legal codifying as well.

Furthermore, human rights are often referred to as *inalienable* and *indivisible*. The inalienability of human rights lies in the impossibility of taking away rights from the right-holder. The indivisibility of human rights entails that, “[...] two rights be indispensable

² Goodhart, Michael E. ed. 2013. *Human rights: politics and practice*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 54.

³ Ibid. p. 367.

⁴ Beitz, Charles R. 2009. *The Idea of Human Rights*. Oxford University Press. p. 45.

⁵ Zigon, Jarrett. 2014. "Maintaining the "Truth": Performativity, Human Rights, and the Limitations on Politics." *Theory & Event* 17, no. 3: 13. p.1.

to each other in a wide range of situations”.⁶ The rights are related to avoid that states select only some rights. Human rights come as a package and they are to be realized all together. James W. Nickel is critical towards this principle and states, “[] it appears likely that the United Nations statements about indivisibility are broad overstatements of more modest truths.”⁷ Within the field of human rights the relation between state and person is central. It has been argued that citizenship rather than humanity invokes human rights.⁸ It is international custom that states are primarily responsible for the human rights enjoyment of their citizens. Some doctrines such as the R2P (Responsibility to Protect) advocate responsibility of a state to protect the citizens of other states. These obligations however are seen as secondary to the protection of their own citizens.

2.1.1 The “truth” of human rights

Human rights can be understood in many ways and the principles and characteristics of these are continuously debated and challenged. To Jarrett Zigon human rights language is grounded in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and repeated afterwards in numerous conventions. His notion of human rights language is limited to a political arena. He argues that legitimate political action is restricted within the human rights doctrine.

[...] the specific and seemingly necessary repetition of the “affirming” and “reaffirming” of the inherence view of human rights acts to performatively reestablish and maintain the “truth” of human rights language, and at the same time solidify limitations for acting politically otherwise.⁹

According to Zigon, the application of human rights language is advantageous in creating awareness, but disadvantageous to the achievement of other political possibilities

⁶ Nickel, James W. 2008. “Rethinking Indivisibility: Towards A Theory of Supporting Relations between Human Rights” in *Human Rights Quarterly*. Vol. 30, no. 4. p. 991.

⁷ Ibid. p. 1001.

⁸ Arendt, Hannah. 1951. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. World Publishing Company: Cleveland. p. 299.

⁹ Zigon, Jarrett. 2014. p. 3.

outside the human rights framework. Zigon understands human rights language as a performative moral language.

*Thus, what can be called a performative dialogical relationship was established within the UDHR between the illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects of human rights language, and it was this original and necessary dialogical relationship that allowed this language to become a possible “truth” in the world, and as such, establish limitations for the enactment of this “truth.”*¹⁰

The *illocutionary* aspect of human rights language involves a speech act, which in itself constitutes an intended action. The *perlocutionary* aspect then is the speech act, whose aim is an action, but the act itself does not constitute the action. Zigon describes the truth of human rights as precarious and exemplifies this in the relationship of equivalence between dignity and human rights.¹¹

2.1.2 A global norm

According to Henning Hahn the paradigm of human rights has established a global norm of human dignity involving a legal content and an appeal to different cultures.¹² In his cosmopolitan understanding of human rights, Hahn connects human dignity to the individual's status as a global subject. By considering the dignity of the person a global matter he moves beyond the more accepted claim, that states are responsible for securing the rights of their citizens.¹³ Human rights language is expressed in many different power relations, and Hahn points to the variety of political agents that make use of it.¹⁴

¹⁰ Zigon, Jarrett. 2014. p. 6.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 9.

¹² Hahn, Henning. 2013. "Human Rights as the Universal Language of Critique. A Political Approach." *Journal For Human Rights / Zeitschrift Für Menschenrechte* 7, no. 2: p. 52.

¹³ Ibid. p. 53.

¹⁴ Ibid. p.47.

Hahn describes human rights as the “*lingua franca* of political criticism.”¹⁵ They serve as standards within the international political arena. Human rights language is or seeks to be globally legitimate and invokes claims of responsibility and attention.¹⁶

2.1.3 The effectiveness of human rights

Stephen Hopgood questions the effectiveness of human rights. Whilst recognizing the long-term potential of human rights language, he rejects the prospect of rapid social transformation in the name of this strategy.¹⁷ Hopgood stresses the importance or influence of the human rights in the creation of numerous conventions and courts, and argues that this framework increasingly is considered an integral part of legitimate governments.¹⁸

*It is here that we find the real cause of the growing ineffectiveness of human rights as a movement for social change. They are: the decline of Western influence and the emergence (or re-emergence) of new powers, the politicization of human rights language, and pushback against human rights on principle, particularly in cases of religious belief.*¹⁹

It is noteworthy that human rights, which claim to be universal, are subjects to politicization. The language of human rights is practical to many different political agents, and so it serves different purposes. Hopgood argues that human rights language is both too familiar and vague, and as a result limitless claims of justice are expressed in its name.²⁰ The hypocrisy of the Western countries, he argues, illegitimizes the human rights language. “Human rights language will be acceptable where it is diluted of all significance,

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 49.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 55.

¹⁷ Hopgood, Stephen. 2014. "Challenges to the Global Human Rights Regime: are Human Rights still an Effective Language for Social Change?." *Sur: International Journal On Human Rights* 11, no. 20: p. 67.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 68.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 69.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 70.

and resisted or ignored where it still carries weight.”²¹ This quote illustrates his view on the ineffectiveness and position of human rights language. Furthermore, he distinguishes between rights language used in local, regional and national political struggles and human rights language, which is expressed in a global arena.²²

The three theories described above all present features and characteristics of human rights language, which prove useful in the analysis of this paper. Based on these perspectives and political critiques of the use of human rights language, I construct my own understanding of what human rights language is or can be.

I consider human rights language a strategy. The performative element is central in the establishing of human rights as a language – a cohesive entity or “truth”. The politicization of human rights contributes to the perception of the language as a strategy. While human rights constitute a global norm, the uses and purposes changes relative to the agent. To declare something in the name of human rights is to invoke or activate a moral language. Along with attention and legitimacy the human rights language entail a set of principles and commonly accepted features. Its indivisibility principle renders the selective use of human rights language invalid. In sum, I consider human rights language a performative moral strategy that functions and is applied in an international political context.

²¹ Ibid. p. 71.

²² Ibid. p. 73.

2.2 Method

The analytical part of this paper consists in a discourse analysis of the UN agenda “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The concept of a discourse is widely disputed and several understandings are accepted within academia. Therefore I choose one perception of the discourse concept. I apply the critical discourse analysis (CDA) shaped by Norman Fairclough. Fairclough understands discourse as a social practice and consequently discourse is dialectically related to social structure.²³ This discourse concept encompasses action; *speech acts*. The social practice of discourse reproduces the world while changing it at the same time.

*Discourse contributes to the constitution of all those dimensions of social structure which directly or indirectly shape and constrain it: its own norms and conventions, as well as the relations, identities and institutions which lie behind them. Discourse is a practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning.*²⁴

The quote demonstrates that power relations are essential, when dealing with discourse. The application and utilization of language implies a power of definition or interpretation. How is a concept or an event understood? The power of definition is also the power to identify others. The establishing of dichotomies is common, when considering discourses. In other words, examining a text with a discursive approach makes it possible to understand and deconstruct the view of and the reality experienced by the author. Fairclough argues that discourse in terms of political practice is both the site and at stake in the power struggle.²⁵

²³ Fairclough, Norman. 1992. *Discourse and Social Change*. Polity Press: Cambridge. pp. 63, 64.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 64.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 67.

He presents a three-dimensional analytical framework for discourses:

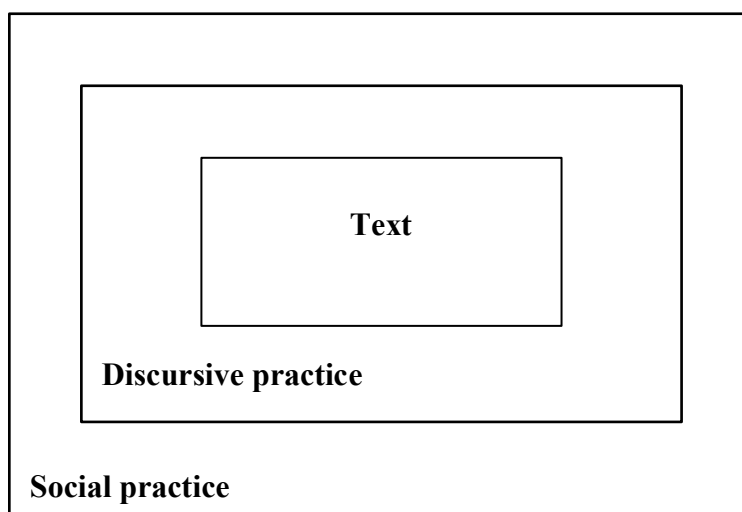


Figure 1: Fairclough's three-dimensional conception of discourse.²⁶

Text is to be understood in a wide sense including both written and spoken language. This dimension considers vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structure. The text is scrutinized in terms of specific words, connection between sentences, overall consistency and the construction and elements of the text.

The discursive practice concerns the discourse's interaction with other practices. Both the production of the discourse and its consumption are in focus. Fairclough apply the terms *addressees*, *hearers* and *overhearers* to distinguish the audience of a text. They involve respectively those directly addresses in the text, those indirectly addressed and the de facto consumers. The latter is not considered a part of the official audience.²⁷ To identify power relations, Fairclough applies the terms *intertextuality* and *interdiscursivity*. Intertextuality refers to the relation between texts. The idea is that the texts are in conversation with each other – referring and responding to each other. Fairclough argues that all texts are intertextual in their nature and contain elements from other texts. This conversation of texts provide them with an element of historicity, which in turn makes them contributors to social and cultural change.²⁸ Interdiscursivity is “the com-

²⁶ Ibid. p. 73.

²⁷ Ibid. pp. 79-80.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 102.

plex interdependent configuration of discursive formations”.²⁹ This suggests that interdiscursivity is a structure in which the relation between discourses is disclosed.

The third dimension concerning social practice includes that which is not expressed in the discourse, that which is behind or beyond the discourse. Fairclough uses *ideology* and *hegemony* as instruments in order to understand this dimension.³⁰ The social practice can be understood as the broader context – the situation that the discourse is a part of.

In my analysis I will primarily work with the first dimension of Fairclough’s discourse framework as I consider it suitable for my purpose of locating rights language within the primary material. However, I will include the discourse and the social practice in order to understand and identify the context and the power relations of the discourse. Furthermore, my utilization of the discourse framework will be visible in the use of the terms presented above in cursive script.

²⁹ Ibid. p. 68.

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 75, 78, 95, 99.

3. Related literature and research

The research and literature introduced in this section express theoretical perspectives on international politics relating to the topics of development and human rights. The authors have different scientific backgrounds and consequently their arguments and premises differ. Some of them consider specific human rights or elements of development, and others have more general approaches. The articles reflect the inter-disciplinary field of human rights and prove useful as reference for the analysis and in the discussion. Each article contributes with specific examples and focuses and is chosen on account of its relevance to the construction of my theoretical perspective on human rights language.

In “Righting Wrongs” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak expresses her critique on human rights. Taking foothold in the lexical meaning of ‘rights’ and ‘wrongs’, she argues that in addition to claiming of right, the human rights doctrine involves the righting of the wrongs. The ‘wrongs’ means those who need to be helped. In the article Spivak presents an alternative way of thinking about subaltern education. Furthermore, she argues that the colonial power structure is reproduced and visible today, and consequently the relation between the human rights worker and the subaltern is unequal.³¹ With her post-colonial critique she points to the reproduction of power relations through discourse.

In “The Human Right to Water and the Common Ownership to Earth” Mathias Risse advocates the necessity of recognizing the right to water as a human right. He points to the absence of access to water as a right in the human rights conventions. Coming from a philosophical perspective Risse argues that humanity owns the earth and its resources collectively – in a common ownership. Consequently each human being possesses natural rights as co-owners, so called membership rights in the global order. UN organs have

³¹ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (2004), ‘Righting Wrongs’. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 103, nr. 2/3. pp. 523, 549, 563.

recognized the right, but Risse requests a global water compact that ensures that resources and spaces are used in a proportionate way.³²

Jaakkoo Kuosmanen explores the right to development in relation to human rights. In “Repackaging human rights: on the justification and the function of the right to development” he argues that it is in effect the right to the fulfilment of other human rights. Asking what purpose the right to development serves, Kousmanen presents four functions; the specifying function, advocacy function, empowerment function, and deliberative function.³³ The development right can specify the demands of other rights, contribute to the work of human rights advocates, empower subjects of development programs, and help identify duty-holders. Kuosmanen concludes that the right to development can serve as a repackaging of human rights.

In the chapter “Human Rights and Politics in Development” Sakiko Fukuda-Parr gives an account of the relation between human rights and development as fields of study and political topics. She uses the MDG’s as a case study and points to the similarities between the goals and human rights. Furthermore, she presents human rights critique of the goals. The goals have been accused of being weak and unambitious, lacking human rights principles of empowerment and equality, and criticized of dominance of rich countries in their production.³⁴ The chapter is a part of the textbook *Human Rights: Politics and Practice*.

In “An International Legal Framework for SE4All: Human Rights and Sustainable Development Law Imperatives” Thoko Kaime and Robert L. Glicksman deal with the Sustainable Energy for All Initiative (SE4All). Their main argument is that legal codifying founded in human rights law and sustainable development law is imperative for the successful implementation of the initiative. Articulating the SE4All initiative within a human rights framework opens up for the possibility of binding obligations of states to

³² Risse, Mathias. 2014. "The Human Right to Water and Common Ownership of the Earth." *Journal Of Political Philosophy* 22, no. 2. pp. 191, 200.

³³ Jaakko Kuosmanen. 2015. “Repackaging human rights: on the justification and the function of the right to development” in *Journal of Global Ethics*, 11:3. p. 311.

³⁴ Fukuda-Parr, Sakiko. 2013. “Human Rights and Politics in Development” in *Human Rights: Politics and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 161-178.

ensure universal access to energy, they argue.³⁵ Both authors come from a background in law and this is reflected in the significant role they assign to legal codifying. The article relates to this paper in dealing with sustainable development and human rights within the same context.

Pogge and Sengupta are critical towards the SDG's and present 10 suggestions to strengthen these in terms of appeal and moral authority. In the article "The Sustainable Development Goals: a plan for building a better world?" they emphasize the necessity of allocating the responsibilities and obligations of achieving the goals. Additionally, they advocate a strong human rights language to increase the ambition of the Agenda and stress the responsibility of the wealthy countries.³⁶ As the article was published in January 2015 it is based on the draft text of the SDG's.

I apply the articles as a sort of background information, as some deliver accounts of contexts and progress in the fields of human rights and development. Furthermore, I find it useful to keep different critiques of human rights in mind in the production of the analysis and the discussion.

³⁵ Kaime, Thoko, and Robert L. Glicksman. 2015. "An International Legal Framework for SE4All: Human Rights and Sustainable Development Law Imperatives" in *Fordham International Law Journal*, vol. 38. p. 1406.

³⁶ Pogge, Thomas, and Mitu Sengupta. 2015. "The Sustainable Development Goals: a plan for building a better world?" *Journal Of Global Ethics* 11, no. 1. p. 58.

4. Analysis

In 2012 the UN Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) agreed to produce Sustainable Development Goals that were “limited in number, aspirational and easy to communicate.”³⁷ The Open Working Group (OWG) consisted of 5 regional groups, each counting 5-7 member states, and functioned from 2013-2015. Non-state stakeholders were also invited to contribute to the Agenda.³⁸ The OWG’s draft resolution of the Agenda was then adopted by the UNGA in September 2015. As the resolution is not legally binding the purpose of it is rather to send a signal to the population of the Earth. Along with the resolution the UNGA launched an online platform of information and exchange of experiences related to the SDG’s. The resolution “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, an official UN text in English³⁹, is subject to analysis in this chapter. In the first section I scrutinize the text with focus on the discourse and human rights language. The second section concerns the context in terms of the production and consumption of the text. In the final section I consider the relation between the discourse and the social practice.

4.1 Text

The text consists of a preamble, a declaration, a presentation of the sustainable development goals and targets, presentation of implementation processes and a final chapter on follow-up and review. Through this structure the Agenda is situated in relation to the context and past international agendas and policies; its aim and content is presented; the realization of the Agenda is addressed; and the monitoring mechanisms of the implementation is described. The importance of the text structure lies in the understanding of

³⁷ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. “Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals”. (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/owg.html>)(10.12.2015).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ As a UN document it also exists in Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish official versions.

the genre. As it is a resolution the language is official and political. The Agenda is described as three-dimensional. Sustainable development, it is argued, entails social, economic and environmental elements.⁴⁰ This trinity is visible in the combination of discourses present in the text.

The three dimensions are reflected in the 17 Goals. Goals 1-6 deal with the social aspect and resemble the MDG's. Poverty, hunger, gender equality and education and health reoccur. Added to this dimension is Goal 6 on Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Goals 7-11 concern the economic aspects of the development Agenda such as economic growth, inequality and energy. Goals 12-15 cover the environment and deals with oceans, forests and climate. The remaining two goals involve peace and justice and a global partnership. The Goals can be classified as presented above, but the dimensions are intertwined. Under Goal 12 for instance on "Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns"⁴¹, the targets range from halving food waste, over lessening the chemical impact on human health to the promotion of sustainable practices of private companies. The dimensions have specific goals, but are also integrated into all the Goals in one way or the other.

In addition to the alliteration of the headings of *people, planet, prosperity, peace* and *partnership*, the preamble contains another repetitive scheme. Each paragraph is commenced with the sentence "We are determined"⁴². These rhetorical features make the preamble convenient as a speech as rhythm is created. Linking the 'we' to 'determination' repeatedly contributes to the identification of the 'we' as someone resolute and active. Similarly, the repetition of "they will"⁴³ is found in the part regarding the follow-up and review. The 'they' refers to the follow-up and review processes, which are presented in a slightly vague manner. No specific agent is identified for the responsibility of the follow-up and review. These repetitive schemes unite the different parts of the resolution.

⁴⁰ United Nations General Assembly. 2015. *A/RES/70/I*.p. 1.

⁴¹ Ibid.p. 22.

⁴² Ibid.p. 12.

⁴³ Ibid.pp. 31-2.

Imagery is used in the preamble and declaration, for instance, “the tyranny of poverty”⁴⁴. The former quote indicates that poverty is an entity capable of action. An antagonist is identified in tyranny, and poverty is presented as an example of tyranny. Through this metaphor poverty is identified as one entity capable of action. Furthermore, the eradication of poverty is described as the “the greatest global challenge”⁴⁵. This statement is noteworthy considering Goal 13 on combatting climate change.

“We have mapped the road to sustainable development; it will be for all of us to ensure that the journey is successful and its gains irreversible.”⁴⁶ This is a classic metaphor that invokes associations of movement, action and progress. The connecting of ‘road’, ‘journey’ and ‘map’ supports the description of sustainable development as an adventure and something positive. In addition to forming pictures in the reader’s mind, the imagery in the Agenda identifies the enemies of the ‘we’. The latter quote lays the responsibility of achieving the Agenda on ‘all of us’ in cooperation, and outlines it as a challenge. The ‘we’ differs from the ‘us’ as it entails the writers of the Agenda, where the ‘us’ refers to all people. The ‘we’ is identified as, “We, the Heads of State and Government and High Representatives [...]”⁴⁷.

The character of the language in the presentation of the Goals diverges from the other sections, as it is commanding. Verbs are used in their imperative form and as a result a list of instructions is created, for instance, “Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation”⁴⁸. An effect of this language use is that attention is brought to the verb and in turn the action. This is an example of a perlocutionary speech act. Most of the Goals are presented through perlocutionary verbs as they present aims. The illocutionary elements of the agenda are found in the recognizing and affirmation of international conventions. The presentation of the Goals and targets with focus on action inspires questions in the readers mind; who is the recipient of these commands? Who is responsible for the fulfillment of the Goals?

⁴⁴ Ibid.p. 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid.p. 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid.p. 12.

⁴⁷ Ibid.p. 3.

⁴⁸ Ibid.p. 18.

*We commit to pursuing policy coherence and an enabling environment for sustainable development at all levels and by all actors, and to reinvigorating the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.*⁴⁹

Committing to ‘pursuing’ is a very vague phrase that in the end does not entail any commitment. This is in contrast to the other verbs used such as ‘eliminate’, ‘eradicate’, and ‘ensure’ that imply necessary and great actions. The UNGA gives the responsibility of achieving the SDG’s to “All countries and all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership”⁵⁰. It is noteworthy that the ‘we’ in some sense constitutes both the author and the recipient. The ‘stakeholders’ are not defined as such, but civil society is mentioned as an example at several times. In addition to ‘collaborative’ the partnership is described as ‘multi-stakeholder’, ‘new’, ‘global’ and ‘revitalized’.⁵¹ It may seem odd that the partnership is both new and revitalized, but the newness consists in the incorporation of non-state agents. The stakeholders can be both NGO’s and private firms.

The subject of the Agenda is “the human race”⁵² but in particular “all children, youth, persons with disabilities [...], people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants.”⁵³ The Agenda is presented “On behalf of the peoples we serve”⁵⁴. The authors may refer to the populations of their states, but it can also be understood as different groups with members of a particular community or ethnic group. However, in the Agenda the term ‘citizen’ is used at several occasions, and the states seek to inspire “an ethic of global citizenship”⁵⁵. The Agenda is based on the presumption that everyone is a citizen somewhere and can return this state if displaced.

⁴⁹ Ibid.p. 28.

⁵⁰ Ibid.p. 1.

⁵¹ Ibid.pp. 27; 11; 14; 28.

⁵² Ibid.p. 1.

⁵³ Ibid.p. 7.

⁵⁴ Ibid.p. 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid.p. 10.

Some states are emphasized as requiring special attention. These include “[...] States where the need is greatest, in particular least developed countries, African countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries”⁵⁶. These countries are emphasized in relation to the fulfillment of the MDG’s. In this context the SDG’s are given the purpose of achieving that which the MDG’s failed to achieve.

The Agenda is described as “people-centred”⁵⁷ and that it is “an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people”⁵⁸. This quote reveals another presumption namely that all states have democratic systems or that the people participate in the political process in some way. As 1-4 countries shared each of the 30 seats of the OWG, if present the influence of the people of each member state can only be categorized as indirect. Calling it an Agenda by the people is therefore an exaggeration. Meanwhile, a people-centred development discourse has emerged over the years challenging the conventional development perspective that focuses on production and economic growth.⁵⁹ Describing the Agenda in such terms can be seen as an attempt to fuse and unite the different branches of the development field.

The current situation and state of the world is outlined in the section “Our world today”. Here global challenges are presented. A depressing picture is painted of a world where inequality, poverty, conflict, natural disaster, terrorism, environmental degradation and climate change dominate. Pointing to the large number of people that are “denied a life of dignity”⁶⁰, the Agenda express the risk of societies and biological systems to collapse. A section that seeks to inspire hope follows this miserable description of the world. Here the current period is described as “a time of immense opportunity”.⁶¹ Progress in the field of development is emphasized, and the MDG’s are shortly evaluated. At first they are praised for their ambition and applicability as a development framework, and then used to reflect the even more ambitious SDG’s. This section fills the function of placing the Agenda in a context, both in terms of development work and the

⁵⁶ Ibid.p. 21.

⁵⁷ Ibid.p. 3.

⁵⁸ Ibid.p. 12.

⁵⁹ Goodhart, Michael E. ed. 2013. p. 162.

⁶⁰ United Nations General Assembly. 2015. *A/RES/70/1*.p. 5.

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 5.

reality experienced globally.

The terms ‘equal’ and ‘universal’ are used frequently.⁶² While universality and equality are imperative to the human rights doctrine, it cannot monopolize the terms and principles. Equality in development terminology often refers to the ensuring of economic equality among people in a given society. The use of the terms in the Agenda often is in relation to access; that is equal or universal access to something.⁶³ In this way the terms are used in contexts that are related to the scope of human rights. In addition to the reference to universality and equality, the New Agenda includes a difference in the use of ‘human right’ and ‘right’.

*The new Agenda recognizes the need to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies that provide equal access to justice and that are based on respect for human rights (including the right to development), on effective rule of law and good governance at all levels and on transparent, effective and accountable institutions.*⁶⁴

The bracketing of the right to development bears witness to the authors’ perception of its lack of importance. It was adopted in 1986 as a human right and its primary concern was poverty.⁶⁵ The right to development embody the connection between the fields of development and human rights, and has been argued to contribute to framing political development discussions in a rights-based approach.⁶⁶ In other words, the right to development opens up for the use of rights language in development policies. Development can also be seen as an instrument of human rights fulfilment.⁶⁷ It is evident that the UNGA has chosen to exclude the right to development from the Agenda, despite its capability of uniting development and human rights. It should be noted that the right to development is controversial both in academic and political contexts, and has been criticized of being too vague.⁶⁸ The exclusion of the right to development in the Agenda can

⁶² Ibid.pp. 10, 21.

⁶³ For instance: United Nations General Assembly. 2015. *A/RES/70/1*.pp. 3,6, 9, 15.

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 9.

⁶⁵ Goodhart, Michael E. ed. 2013. p. 164.

⁶⁶ Jaakko Kuosmanen. 2015. p. 313.

⁶⁷ Goodhart, Michael E. ed. 2013. p. 162.

⁶⁸ Ibid.p. 165.

therefore be seen as a result of lack of political consensus on the matter.

*This is an Agenda of unprecedented scope and significance. It is accepted by all countries and is applicable to all, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. These are universal goals and targets which involve the entire world, developed and developing countries alike.*⁶⁹

This quote illustrates that national interests confronts global solutions and cooperation. Respecting national interest in terms of policies and priorities is in opposition to the claim that the Agenda is universal. Another way of understanding the quote is in terms of a progress. The first half describes the process leading up to the adoption of the Agenda; making it applicable and acceptable to all countries. The second part can then be seen as the outcome of this process: a set of universal goals. The problem here lies in the presumption that the nations are static in some sense, and that their priorities do not change. The question is whether disagreement between national policies or priorities and the universal goals in fact will give rise to any consequence at all. The quote illustrates the power struggle behind the production of the Agenda. The language seeks to be decisive and precise, but at the same time it is vague and abstract and in turn open for interpretation.

The Agenda contains a number of references to the human rights doctrine. ‘Human rights’ are mentioned in the Agenda when referring to the doctrine of human rights as a whole. Thus, the plurality and cohesion of human rights is emphasized. ‘Right’ is applied, when a specific right is mentioned, for instance, “[...] the right of self-determination of peoples living under colonial and foreign occupation [...]”⁷⁰. This right was coined in the UN charter.⁷¹ A number of human rights recognized in the UDHR are mentioned, but without the use of human rights language, for instance, “Eliminate all

⁶⁹ United Nations General Assembly. 2015. *A/RES/70/1*.p. 3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*p. 9.

⁷¹ United Nations. 1945. *Charter of the United Nations*, art 1:2.

forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres [...]”⁷², here the right to security of person.⁷³ And “Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking”⁷⁴, concerning the prohibition of slavery in all its forms.⁷⁵

The human right to safe drinking water and sanitation is the only specific right described as a human right in the resolution.⁷⁶ It is mentioned in the section ‘Our Vision’ in the declaration, where the UNGA’s vision for the future of the world is presented. The matter of a right to and distribution of water resources is highly disputed. As late as 2010 the UNGA recognized the right to water and sanitation.⁷⁷ It is noteworthy that this particular right is named a human right in the Agenda. It can be perceived as recognition of the global water resource problem. The distinguishing in the use of human rights and rights bears witness to an understanding of human rights as something cohesive.

The declaration fills the function of paying respects to all contributors and political predecessors. Foregoing international agreements and programmes are mentioned and “recognized”⁷⁸. This is an example of how the truth of human rights, as Zigon calls it, is established through repetition and reference to existing and accepted doctrines.

*It is grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights treaties, the Millennium Declaration and the 2005 World Summit Outcome. It is informed by other instruments such as the Declaration on the Right to Development.*⁷⁹

The quote demonstrates the intertextuality of the Agenda. The UDHR is the first official international document on human rights and may be assigned great symbolic significance. Referring to it can be seen as a strategic move to link the Agenda to the UDHR,

⁷² United Nations General Assembly. 2015. *A/RES/70/I*.p. 18.

⁷³ United Nations. 1948. *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, art. 3.

⁷⁴ United Nations General Assembly. 2015. *A/RES/70/I*.p. 20.

⁷⁵ United Nations. 1948. UDHR, art. 4.

⁷⁶ United Nations General Assembly. 2015. *A/RES/70/I*.p. 3.

⁷⁷ Risse, Mathias. 2014. p. 180.

⁷⁸ United Nations General Assembly. 2015. *A/RES/70/I* p. 4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 4.

thus playing on the historicity of the declaration. Taking foothold in the declaration amongst others, the UNGA ascribes the agenda to the tradition and framework of human rights. Further, the Agenda is linked to the field of international development policy. The recognition of these past conventions and documents helps situate the Agenda in an international context. The description of the Agenda as a historical and remarkable achievement is also visible when its uniqueness is emphasized; “Never before have world leaders pledged common action and endeavour across such a broad and universal policy agenda.”⁸⁰ This give weight to the Agenda and legitimizes it as an important international document and framework.

4.2 Discursive practice

The resolution is produced in a UN context and thus it only includes the member states. When the Agenda claims universal application and the promises that “No one must be left behind”⁸¹, the existence of non-member states is ignored. In this way the resolution presents the UN as a global entity of governance of which no one is excluded. Furthermore, persons living without the protection of a state are not included in the resolution. This can be traced to the importance state sovereignty is given within the UN system and internationally in general. The recognition of the “territorial integrity and political independence of States”⁸² provides states with room for interpreting the Agenda nationally. It is evident that the discourse presented in the Agenda is an expression of the state-centered structure of the international community, where the UN is hegemonic.

Due to the genre of the text, the choice of words must be considered intentional and well contemplated. Meanwhile, it is important to note that the production of the text took place in an international forum of 193 UN member states.⁸³ This has resulted in a number of political compromises. The three-dimensional character of the Agenda can be perceived as a compromise between environmental, social and economic interests. Ac-

⁸⁰ Ibid. p. 6.

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 7.

⁸² Ibid. p. 10.

⁸³ United Nations. 2015. “Functions and powers of the General Assembly”. (<http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/background.shtml>)(08.12.2015).

cepting that discourse is both the site of and at stake in the power struggle, the resolution can be seen as an example of this. In a way the culmination of this power struggle is found in the adopted resolution. As mentioned earlier, the power struggle is evident in the language use. The resolution as an official document is meant to represent the UNGA. The struggle lies in use of language and choice of words, but also in what is included respectively excluded from the Agenda.

We saw in the previous section that the incorporation of human rights was restricted to reference to these as a foundation for the Agenda, but that the actual application of human rights language in the Goals was absent. This limited use cannot be considered arbitrary. The UNGA has avoided extensive use of human rights language despite the significance and recognition of the human rights framework within international politics.

As Zigon argues the application of the human rights framework functions to create awareness. The sustainable development agenda encompasses a variety of discourses. The “truth” of human rights is challenged by these other truths. Thus, the human rights framework is absent due to the political limitations it entails. The economy discourse present in the Agenda operates under a completely different logic than that of human rights. Human rights are morally based and find their legitimization in the normative. Development discourse might hold the potential of uniting the economy and human rights doctrines. Human rights and development share the norm of human dignity. Where the human rights doctrine involves the inherent right to human dignity, development studies deals with securing a minimum standard of living.

Based on these reflections the interdiscursivity reflected in the Agenda is one, where the development discourse is dominant. The elements of sustainability, economy and social discourses complement each other in supporting the development discourse. The human rights discourse is peripheral and not assign much importance in the structure of discourses. On the other hand, one could argue that the development discourse may encompass the other discourses or elements of these. In this sense the integration of new discursive elements in the development discourse can be seen as an example of discursive change. The truth of development is changed to involve other fields. Meanwhile, development discourse is often expressed and measured in economic terms. This indi-

cates that at least the economic aspect has been part of the development discourse from the start.

The matter of responsibilities and obligations can provide an explanation of the absence or limitation of right language in the Agenda. As mentioned earlier human rights involve rights and correlating duties; the term right requires the identification of the duty-bearer. As stated above, allocation of responsibility is unspecified and vague. The general implementation of the Agenda is presented, but specific measures and the implementation expected for each goal and target is absent. The position of the SDG's is similar to that of the SE4All and as Kaime and Glicksman argue, "the realization of the ambitious vision set out by the UNSG depends critically on articulation of the applicable international legal framework for SE4All."⁸⁴ Thus, the SDG's may be just a set of easy communicable aspirations.

The reluctance of the Member States to commit to specific obligations has resulted in an implementation form that gives room for the states to determine their own responses to the SDG's. According to Pogge and Sengupta human rights language is absent due to these national determinable targets negotiated by developing countries in order to avoid the possible shaming and blaming if they do not succeed in accomplishing the goals.⁸⁵

While this is a legitimate concern, the solution is not to dilute the SDGs by aiming for whatever is readily feasible with national resources, but to specify what wealthy countries and enterprises must do to reduce impediments and to increase assistance so that ambitious targets can be met even in the poorest countries.⁸⁶

Pogge and Sengupta accuse the UNGA of being less ambitious and settling for achievable goals. Moreover, they are critical towards the lack of responsibilities across borders. In the UN context it appears paradoxical that human rights are left out due to their uni-

⁸⁴ Kaime, Thoko, and Robert L. Glicksman. 2015. p.1430.

⁸⁵ Pogge, Thomas, and Mitu Sengupta. 2015. p. 58.

⁸⁶ Ibid. p. 58.

versal claim, and meanwhile the SDG's are declared universal, integrated and indivisible. The matter of human rights in international policies and programmes ultimately becomes a discussion of universalism versus cultural relativism. This incongruence of universality and national political independence can be seen as an expression of the complicated negotiations that constituted the production of the Agenda.

The Agenda is produced for a large audience and wide distribution. The receiving or consumption of it differs in different social contexts. The primary addressees are the UN Member States themselves, and as mentioned earlier they constitute both the author and recipient. Further, the 'stakeholders' can also be included in this category. The hearers that are indirectly addressed are the populations of the states, the people. The overhearers consist of the non-UN Member States. These are never mentioned in the resolution, but the content is distributed to these through media and informative agents.

The message rather than the text itself is subject to distribution. Forming concrete goals makes the Agenda comprehensible and opens up for the possibility of measuring, monitoring and evaluating the progress. The consumption of the Agenda at a national political level depends on the weight given to the Goals and the interpretation of responsibilities and implementation by national decision-makers. Overall, the significance of the Agenda can be called mainly symbolic. But then again, the purpose of such an agenda is to send a message and present a vision.

4.3 Social practice

In order to consider the social practice of the discourse, I discuss what is beyond or behind the Agenda. The social practice can be understood as the context, but in a wider sense than the discursive practice. Here the ‘bigger picture’ is central. In other words it is the context to which the Agenda is a part, rather than the specific context of the text.

The Agenda can be seen as a snapshot of its time. It expects events, challenges and tendencies the next 15 years to be of the more or less the same character as those of its origin. The UNGA is of course not capable predicting the future, but the form of the Agenda has a built-in static element. The starting point is the present, and that which is characteristic to the present may not be in the future. This risk of becoming out-dated is always present in long-term policies. In this sense, the use of vague and abstract wordings and language is an advantage, as it gives room for future interpretation.

As dealt with earlier the Agenda is the result of a long process of political compromises. The different interests are visible in the Agenda through its three dimensions. These three dimensions reflect the reality of 2015. The damage of the financial crisis of 2008 revealed the international community’s dependency on the financial system. The economic dimension can be seen as recognition of its importance internationally and its scope. Another global challenge is climate change, and this threat has disclosed the ineffectiveness and difficulty of states to agree upon a collective solution. This challenge is incorporated into the Agenda, though the responsibility is laid in the hands of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.⁸⁷

According to Pogge and Sengupta the Agenda is founded on a comparison between the world as it is and an imaginary alternative world history in which international agents did not improve human lives. “The world’s governments should compare the world as it is with the world as they are required to shape it: a world so structured that human rights can be fully realized in it.”⁸⁸ In addition to illustrating the unambitious approach of the

⁸⁷ United Nations General Assembly. 2015. *A/RES/70/1*. p. 23.

⁸⁸ Pogge, Thomas, and Mitu Sengupta. 2015. p. 63.

UNGA, Pogge and Sengupta put the finger on the absence on human rights. It is noteworthy that they describe human rights fulfilment as a requirement. Who requires this? It can be the people, or scholars, but it may also be interpreted as the requirement of states through conventions. Article 28 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights states: “Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.”⁸⁹ The requirement is here put on an order or a system. Placing responsibility is therefore more complicated than identifying one of two states, but may be understood more abstractly to involve efforts of all agents participating in this order.

The human rights doctrine has dominated international politics over the last decades. Its absence in the Agenda bears witness to a change in power or to its lack of applicability in the development context. The Agenda and the human rights doctrine share their highly politicized character. The Agenda is an expression of the many different interests in the international community. Similarly these different interests are present in the use of the human rights language. A language that has been used to secure education for children in one place and has legitimized the military intervention in another place.

If discourse reproduces and changes the world at the same time the limited references to human rights bears witness to the reluctance to unite human rights and development. Human rights are excluded from the particular visionary parts of the Agenda and maintained as formal element in the origin of the Agenda.

⁸⁹ United Nations. 1948. *UDHR*, art. 28.

5. Discussion

In this section I discuss the nature and use of human rights language and consider reasons for its absence in the Agenda. In addition to being a political strategy, human rights language can be perceived as a practice due to its performative character. This practice exists within a broader social practice; the human rights practice. The human rights practice includes the conversations and actions concerning the concept of human rights. This social practice stretches from the theoretical discussions to the actual work with human rights fulfilment.

When Zigon describes the performativity of human rights language as a way of maintaining and reinforce a “truth”, he points to the relation between the language and the social practice. Social conventions guide agents in their actions within this social practice, the human rights practice. An example of a convention functioning in the human rights language is the reaffirmation and recognition of previously established human rights programmes. This performative element as shown earlier is present in the Agenda. The conventions and the “truth” are thereby closely linked. In this sense, the language of human rights frames the social practice, while at the same time constituting its base. This is what Fairclough named the dialogical relationship between discourse and social structure.⁹⁰ Thus, human rights language represents, signifies, constitutes and construct that which is human rights. In addition to being a political strategy, human rights language is a practice that constitutes and constructs the social practice of human rights.

As human rights are almost exclusively referred to as a unit in the Agenda, the human rights language is not fully activated. Activating human rights language requires taking a stand within the social practice of human rights. Hopgood points to the politicization

⁹⁰ Fairclough, Norman. 1992. p. 64.

of human rights language, which results in the need to clarify one's position and interpretation of this doctrine.⁹¹ The struggle of universalism and cultural relativism, along with the dispute over prioritizing 1st generation respectively 2nd generation human rights are examples of elements that are continuously negotiated within the social practice of human rights. The mentioning of human rights in the Agenda has the character of presenting a name rather than content. The use of the term *human rights* becomes hollow and the social practice of human rights is not "properly" entered. The human rights practice encompasses the possibility of applying the human rights terminology or language as a means of legitimization.

The cohesiveness of human rights is claimed by the doctrine itself. The indivisibility and inalienability principle emphasizes this element. It may be so that the human rights language is left out of the development policy discourse due to its cohesive nature. However useful it may be as a legitimizing tool, the human rights language does not allow for 'cherry-picking'. The Agenda would therefore need to be in congruence with the human rights principles, and hence the identification of duty-bearers would be necessary.

We have now established that the human rights doctrine holds possibilities in the activation of the human rights language and in creating awareness. Additionally, as Zigon points to, it holds political limitations.⁹² His dichotomy of truth and limitation resembles that of Spivak; human rights versus human wrongs.⁹³ Both Zigon and Spivak argue that human rights constitute some kind of answer to the wrongs and offences seen in past and present. The human rights doctrine as something true, righteous and good in turn creates a dichotomous discursive world; the good and the bad. This black and white perception entails limitations to the use of human rights language. The absence of human rights language in the Agenda may be seen as an expression of the complexities in question. Development as a field is interesting in that it praises a process. Human rights in contrast involve a final end.

⁹¹ Hopgood, Stephen. 2014. p. 69.

⁹² Zigon, Jarrett. 2014. p. 9.

⁹³ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 2004. p. 523.

Considering Hopgood's arguments the ineffectiveness of human rights language lies in the shifting of powers and weakening of Western hegemony. While the genetic argument that human rights originated from Western values is invalid,⁹⁴ it may be found that mainly Western countries promote the human rights doctrine. The absence of human rights language in the Agenda could then be explained by the lack of Western dominance in the UNGA. Hahn challenges the state-centred perception of human rights, advocating a cosmopolitan interpretation.⁹⁵ That human rights constitute a global norm means that they can be seen as a social convention. In this sense, human rights language functions as a way of invoking this norm. It is not the Western countries' promotion of human rights that is relevant, but rather human rights as a social convention or norm in a global context.

As Hahn labels the human rights language a language of political criticism, he provides a reason for the absence of this language in the Agenda. Though the Agenda contains a clear vision of change in the world, applying the human rights language would form a risk of criticising the current and former political practices and global structures. As mentioned above, the context of the Agenda is described in somewhat depressing terms and a number of challenges are listed. In this sense the Agenda does already include a critique of the world. The critique however focuses on negative results and effects rather than on the practices and structures.

A critique often directed at human rights is the so-called human rights inflation. It is critical towards the amount of rights and entitlements that fall under the umbrella of human rights. This perception can make for yet another possible explanation for the absence of human rights language in the Agenda; to express the SGD's in human rights terms would weaken the legitimacy of these and in turn the Agenda. Meanwhile, as indicated in the analysis, a large amount of the Goals and targets are in some sense equivalences to existing and recognized human rights.

In addition to the reluctance of states to commit legally to the Goals, the Agenda include several matters in which responsibility is very difficult to place. Climate change and

⁹⁴ Hahn, Henning. 2013. p. 54.

⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 54.

financial crisis are examples of problems that are so complex that the identification of one responsible agent is impossible. The illocutionary element of 'claiming' is fundamental to human rights language. And this claiming involves a distribution of responsibility. The human rights language is effective in this aspect; the illocutionary aspect. Due to the history, tradition and origin of rights language, these entitlements when claimed possess strong semantic weight.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have examined the discourse of sustainable development in relation to human rights language. The aim was to evaluate the degree to and way in which human rights language is applied in the presentation of the SDG's and the post-2015 Agenda. The analysis showed that human rights were not applied as the framework for the Sustainable Development Agenda, and the use of human rights language was limited to the recognition of human rights as a whole. Where human rights language could have been used the Goals instead had the form of a long list of tasks. As a result the responsibilities of implementing the Goals were distributed in a vague and unclear manner. Furthermore, the Goals had less moral and semantic weight than if human rights language had been applied. In order to disclose explanations to the absence of human rights language I considered the relation between the discourses present in the examined resolution, and argued that the human rights discourse was challenged by economy, sustainability and in particular by development discourses. Additionally, I took into account the reluctance amongst states to legally commit to ambitious resolutions, and argued that this was decisive in the absence of human rights language.

Finally, I argued that the human rights language as a performative practice is imperative to the social practice that is human rights. The language plays an important role in establishing, maintaining and legitimizing the doctrine of human rights. The human rights language both represents and constructs human rights. In this sense the human rights practice is continuously changing through language, but the language maintains its "truth" in a performative manner.

To achieve a deeper understanding of the power relations between the discourses a more comprehensive study outlining elements of development, economy and climate change discourses and seeking to analyse different types of international documents would be reasonable. Here it would be relevant to incorporate additional literature on the emergence of the human rights and development discourses and traditions. Another angle of

further studies could be to continue with the theoretical perspective on human rights language and examine the nature and role of this language in different contexts.

7. Bibliography

- Arendt, Hannah. 1951. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. World Publishing Company: Cleveland. p. 299.
- Beitz, Charles R. 2009. *The Idea of Human Rights*. Oxford University Press.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1992. *Discourse and Social Change*. Polity Press: Cambridge.
- Goodhart, Michael E. 2013. *Human rights: politics and practice*. 2nd ed. Oxford : Oxford University Press.
- Hahn, Henning. 2013. "Human Rights as the Universal Language of Critique. A Political Approach." *Journal For Human Rights / Zeitschrift Für Menschenrechte* 7, no. 2: 42-58.
- Hopgood, Stephen. 2014. "Challenges to the Global Human Rights Regime: are Human Rights still an Effective Language for Social Change?." *Sur: International Journal On Human Rights* 11, no. 20: 66-75.
- Jaakko Kuosmanen. 2015. "Repackaging human rights: on the justification and the function of the right to development" in *Journal of Global Ethics*, 11:3, 303-320.
- Kaime, Thoko, and Robert L. Glicksman. 2015. "An International Legal Framework for SE4All: Human Rights and Sustainable Development Law Imperatives" in *Fordham International Law Journal*, vol. 38:1405.
- Nickel, James W. 2008. "Rethinking Indivisibility: Towards A Theory of Supporting Relations between Human Rights" in *Human Rights Quarterly*. Vol. 30, no. 4.
- Pogge, Thomas, and Mitu Sengupta. 2015. "The Sustainable Development Goals: a plan for building a better world?." *Journal Of Global Ethics* 11, no. 1. 56-64.
- Risse, Mathias. 2014. "The Human Right to Water and Common Ownership of the Earth." *Journal Of Political Philosophy* 22, no. 2: 178-203.

- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. 2004. 'Righting Wrongs'. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 103, nr. 2/3.
- United Nations General Assembly. 2015. *A/RES/70/1 - Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. (http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E).
- United Nations. 1945. *Charter of the United Nations*.
- United Nations. 1948. *Universal Declaration on Human Rights*.
- United Nations. 2015. "Functions and powers of the General Assembly". (<http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/background.shtml>)(08.12.2015).
- Zigon, Jarrett. 2014. "Maintaining the "Truth": Performativity, Human Rights, and the Limitations on Politics." *Theory & Event* 17, no. 3: 13.