

FORUT Human Rights Policy 2024 - 2028

FORUT – Campaign for Solidarity and Development
Revised and approved by FORUT Board August 31st, 2023

1. Introduction

This document presents FORUT's Human Rights Policy, revised in August 2023. The document is valid through the next programme period from 2024-2028. It contains an introduction to the topic, gives definitions, and states how human rights are related to our vision, mission, and policy. In addition, it describes shortly how we are working to achieve a more equal and just world in our ongoing international development cooperation with our partner organisations.

However, this is not an exhaustive strategy nor an action plan, but it outlines our common understanding and basic principles as well as presenting our common vision.

Human rights are the international legal expressions of the necessary conditions that must be met if all humans are to have their needs met and live a dignified life. These needs are not contingent upon culture, age, or sex; they are embedded in what it is to be human. Human rights are therefore universal, inalienable, and indivisible; they are both a legal framework and a philosophical value base to which FORUT subscribes. A rights-based approach to development recognises this duality and it focuses on enabling every human being ("right-holders") to hold governments and others ("duty-bearers") responsible for ensuring that rights are respected and ensured.

FORUT supports and works according to the international conventions on human rights, of which the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women are the most important for us. International law serves to legitimise our work as well as providing us with tools for empowering civil society, in general, and vulnerable groups in particular, in voicing their demands for human rights.

2. Purpose

The purpose of our Human Rights Policy is to outline how international rights standards correspond with our vision and ongoing development work and clarifies our role and plan for monitoring and compliance.

Through this policy, FORUT commits itself to ensure that human rights are fully incorporated in all our international cooperation both as an end in itself as well to achieve our vision.

3. Fundamental principles

The vision of FORUT is:

“... a peaceful, democratic and just world where everyone is secured human rights and a dignified life, and where alcohol and drugs do not jeopardise people’s safety and human potential.”

Additionally, our Policy Document states that FORUT’s goal is that people have the power to change their lives and our mission is to:

“... mobilise, organise and empower people, especially women and children, to develop their potential. They shall be able to demand their rights and combat poverty, injustice and oppression with democratic and peaceful means.”

The vision and mission define our commitment to human rights and to a rights-based approach as the basis for our work and cooperation with partner organisations.

Human rights-based approaches, such as **democracy, empowerment and solidarity** are key elements in FORUT’s Policy as expressed in the FORUT Policy Document:

*“FORUT is a democratic, rights-based solidarity organisation and we believe that communities are resilient, and that ordinary people are agents of change, capable of improving their lives. **Participatory democracy**, where people are actively involved in all important decisions concerning them, is, for us, a basic condition for the economic and social development of the nation. People power is expressed and channelled through civil society, which at its best mobilises ordinary people and channels their aspirations through democratic and peaceful action. Strengthening civil society is therefore the foundation on which we build sustainable change.*

*However, sustainable change can only happen when people are **empowered to challenge the power structures** that perpetuate and reinforce poverty, injustice, and oppression. Empowerment is thus the backbone of a rights-based approach and enabling every human being (“right-holders”) to hold governments and others (“duty-bearers”) responsible for ensuring that their rights are respected and fulfilled. This means that we are working in*

partnership with local NGOs so that marginalised groups are able to demand improvements for themselves and their communities. Strengthening civil society is a crucial element in holding governments accountable to its citizens and achieving changes that are sustained and reinforced over time.

*FORUT stands in **solidarity** with the oppressed in their struggle for dignity, justice and human rights. In addition to working with the people in our partner countries, we also want to enhance the Norwegian public's understanding of relevant global issues; how unfair the global structures are, how a world with increasing differences between the rich and the poor also contributes to a more brutal and undemocratic world, as well as how alcohol and drugs are a contributing factor to the violation of women's and children's basic human rights.*

To make a difference and change the world, we believe we must start with children and the youth, while at the same time influencing Norwegian politicians. We are using this combination of bottom-up/top-down approaches in both our partner countries and global institutions such as the WHO and the UN."

Therefore, the fundamental principles which underpin our work are:

Non-discrimination – Every individual is entitled to a life free from discrimination. All people shall be treated equally. In practice this often means that the interests of marginalised and discriminated groups are to be given priority.

Participation – Everyone must be able to make their voice heard. It is crucial to strengthen participation in democratic processes, and we start by securing broad participation in our own development projects.

Openness and transparency – One basic condition for active participation is the right to free and independent information. Openness and transparency make it possible to hold decision makers accountable.

Accountability – A rights perspective focuses on accountability as duty-bearers are held accountable for ensuring and protecting rights. Civil society plays a crucial role in holding duty bearers accountable.

4. Our Human Rights Perspective

All human beings are equally entitled to their human rights without discrimination. We base our commitment to human rights on the human rights instruments established by the UN, from the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948) to all other human rights conventions adopted since. These rights are universal, inalienable, interdependent and indivisible: they apply to everyone everywhere, and they are all

equally important and mutually reinforcing. They are rights of individuals and legal obligations for States.

Human rights represent the minimum entitlements and freedoms that should be respected by States. FORUT incorporates national legislation and regional human rights instruments in addition to these whenever relevant.

5. A Rights-Based Approach

Our commitment to a rights-based approach builds on the understanding that fulfilment of human rights is essential to combating issues of poverty and injustice. Central in this approach is empowering individuals and communities to understand and claim their rights whilst also building the capacity of governments as well as local and traditional authorities to fulfil their obligations as duty-bearers.

Civil society has a crucial role in this. We cooperate with and strengthen local civil society to promote and secure human rights. As stated in the FORUT Policy Document;

“our programmes and projects are designed with a view to broadening and deepening democracy by promoting public participation in political processes and ensuring that marginalised groups are given a voice and heard. FORUT will always work to create and strengthen mechanisms of government responsiveness to concerned citizens and empower citizens to struggle for their interests and work against marginalisation based on sex, age, nationality, religion, language, caste, disability, sexual orientation, or any other personal or collective trait used as an excuse for excluding people from the political process and social and cultural life”.

6. The Child Rights Perspective

Human rights apply to all age groups, but since children and youth under the age of 18 need special care and protection, a special Convention for the Rights of the Child was adopted in 1989. The Convention sees the child as an individual and as a member of a family and community, with rights appropriate to their age and stage of development. The Convention is guided by four fundamental principles:

Right to survival: Every child has the right to life, that considers living conditions, the quality of life and the right of every child to develop to their maximum potential. This includes the right to resources, skills and contributions necessary for the survival of the child, such as adequate food, shelter, primary health care and clean water.

Child development: The right to full development of the child, such as formal education, leisure and recreation.

Child protection: The right to safety and protection from all forms of child abuse, neglect, exploitation and cruelty, including the right to special protection in times of war and protection from abuse in the criminal justice system.

Child participation: The right to express opinions, to participate and to be heard, the right to information and freedom of association.

About 1/3 of the world's population are children (<18 years), and in FORUT's programme countries, the percentage varies from about 55% (Zambia) to about 30% (Sri Lanka). Despite significant progress made in access to education, child mortality, child labour and other important areas, the rights of millions of children are still systematically violated 35 years after the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Girl children are particularly vulnerable, as sexual abuse and trafficking, "honour killings", early marriage and female genital mutilation remain prevalent in large parts of the world, and girls are often neglected and deprived of their fundamental rights. A comprehensive strategy for the protection of children requires not only reactions against violations of their rights, but preventive measures that address the root causes of all forms of violence against them.

FORUT does not, however, see children only as potential victims in need of protection, but also as capable of articulating their needs and participating in decisions affecting themselves, their peers, and their communities. Given the chance, they can be their own change agents and problem-solvers, but they need support from adults to be able to defend their own interests and rights. Their right to take part in decisions affecting them is enshrined in the CRC and FORUT and our partner organisations work to empower children to claim and make use of this right.

7. The Gender Equality perspective

Women's rights and gender equality are equally important but are specifically addressed in our FORUT Gender Policy. This policy and the Gender Policy reinforce each other.

Gender equality cannot be achieved outside of a human rights framework, just as human rights cannot be fully realised if gender inequality still exists.

FORUT and our partner organisations fight for a world in which everyone can live in a peaceful and just society, free from the experience or threat of violence and harmful practices in all settings, including, among others, gender-based violence, neglect, exploitation, child marriage, female genital mutilation, and violence experienced in and outside the home, and in online spaces.

8. The Right to Health

The right to health enshrined in international human rights instruments is emphasised by FORUT and our partner organisations in our struggle for good physical and mental health for all and against harm from alcohol and drugs. Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights states:

“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health”.

The Sustainable Goal 3 *“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”*, emphasis in target 3.4 on the goal to *“by 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and well-being”*.

Over 800 million people suffer from mental health disorders, of whom 85% live in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC). Approximately 75% of these individuals do not have access to treatment. However, FORUT states that many mental health conditions can be effectively treated at relatively low cost, and in line with WHO recommendations ([Mental health \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/mental_health)), focuses on equipping people with the information and skills they need for supported self-care, as well as working with families and community networks.

FORUT and our partner organisations aim to support meaningful and diverse partnerships with governments, civil society and global actors to promote children's, adolescents', and women's ability to access their rights to proper mental health care, as well as adequate health and nutrition, to sexual and reproductive health and rights, to clean water and quality sanitation.

9. Alcohol and Rights

FORUT strives for an integrated approach to development which has its roots from the early establishment of the temperance movement in the 1880s, especially how alcohol/drugs have negative effects on the social and economic development of communities as well as how intoxication has severe consequences for the individuals' own health and for the fulfilment of women and children's rights. The target 3.5 of United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals states that we are committed to: *Strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse, including narcotic drug abuse and harmful use of alcohol*

People's rights are affected in many ways by the use of alcohol:

Gender Equality

- ✓ While alcohol is not a root cause of gender inequality, it can reinforce power hierarchies that already exist in societies where patriarchal norms are prevalent..
- ✓ The alcohol industry and culture that surrounds alcohol reinforces unequal power relationships by merging violent and dominant male roles.

- ✓ Drunkenness and aggression are often part of the masculine identity – an identity that is spread and reinforced by alcohol advertisements.
- ✓ Drunkenness is closely related to intimate partner violence and crimes against women and girls such as sexual abuse, child abuse, and sex trafficking.

Democratic participation and civil and political rights

- ✓ Abuse and dependency risk passivising people, impeding their participation in democratic processes and their enjoyment of political and civil rights.
- ✓ The right to information is tampered with by manipulative tactics of the alcohol industry.

Social and economic rights including health

- ✓ Alcohol imposes an enormous financial burden on societies that already lack the resources to cater for the needs of their citizens.
- ✓ People living in poverty who use alcohol are more likely to become trapped in debt and suffer social exclusion.
- ✓ Alcohol consumption is one of the main risk factors behind early death and poor health. It increases the risk of contracting HIV through exaggerated risk-taking and compromised immunity, and of non-communicable diseases such as cancer and heart disease. It also leads to early death through accidents.

Alcohol and Children's Rights

The rights of children are in different ways undermined by problems linked to alcohol, for example:

- ✓ Children are put in danger through alcohol-related birth defects, violence, abuse, neglect, exploitation and other forms of harms by their parents and/or custodians.
- ✓ Children may be neglected or deprived when drinking disturbs the everyday management, duties and functions of the family and when the emotional bonds between family members are strained and disturbed by the use of alcohol by someone else.
- ✓ Parental alcohol use is one of the main causes of child homelessness and pushes children towards alcohol use.
- ✓ The prioritisation of alcohol consumption over children's needs by parents threatens children's rights to nutrition, health, education, family, and social, cultural, and spiritual well-being.
- ✓ Alcohol use by children themselves is harmful and affects their mental, social and physical development in many ways.
- ✓ Children are vulnerable to the alcohol industry's massive direct and indirect marketing of alcohol targeting young people.

The rights of children and youth connected to protection from alcohol are not only linked to several articles in the Convention of the Rights of the Child, but also highlighted in the guiding principles of the WHO Global Strategy to Reduce the Harmful use of Alcohol. For example:

“Children, teenagers and adults who choose not to drink alcohol beverages have the right to be supported in their non-drinking behaviour and protected from pressures to drink.”

Drugs and Human Rights

Many of the same human rights issues are related to drug use as for alcohol use. Some human rights concerns are however specifically related to controlled drugs:

- ✓ The Convention on the Rights of the Child states in Article 33 that States Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislative, administrative, social and educational measures, to protect children from the illicit use of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances as defined in the relevant international treaties, and to prevent the use of children in the illicit production and trafficking of such substances.
- ✓ It is estimated that around 80 per cent of the world’s population do not have access to essential medicines for the relief of pain and suffering when in need. Providing such medicines to all in need is one of the two basic objectives of the UN drug conventions and this is an area where the world community has severely failed.
- ✓ In many countries human rights principles are systematically violated by authorities in the name of drug control and drug prevention; capital punishment, extra-judicial killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, sentencing policies out of proportion, discrimination of population groups, acts of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment etc.

10. Roles and responsibilities

FORUT’s role is supporting and strengthening civil society organisations’ work to ensure rights in the Global South by:

- ✓ **Empowering** individuals and communities to understand and claim their rights. *Rights-holders* must be able to access information, organise, participate, and advocate for policy change and obtain redress.
- ✓ **Strengthening the capacity** of the State at all levels (local, regional/federal and national) as *duty-bearers*⁵ to respect, protect and fulfil human rights.
- ✓ **Advocating** towards *duty-bearers* to adopt and implement legislation and policies which are rights-based and actively promote, protect and fulfil human rights.
- ✓ **Providing services** to protect and fulfil the rights of marginalised *rights-holders* who at present do not enjoy such protection and fulfilment from the relevant *duty-bearers*.

All FORUT staff shall work to ensure that human rights standards and principles are integrated into all stages of programme and project processes, including:

- ✓ Promoting *local ownership* of human rights issues by partner organisations: a close cooperation between FORUT and partner organisations – with the aim of strengthening their voice and impact on society – is crucial.
- ✓ *Participation of target groups*: supporting partner organisations to include women, men, adolescents and children in planning, monitoring and implementation.
- ✓ In collaboration with partner organisations, *analyse and address*:
 - Structures (which prevent people from accessing rights)
 - Attitudes (e.g., gender inequality, alcohol norms)
 - Behaviour (as above)
 - The skills, abilities, resources, responsibilities, authority, and motivation needed by rights-holders to claim their rights and duty-bearers to fulfil them.
- ✓ Partnerships with organisations that especially work with, and for, children shall be guided by a *child rights perspective*. Promoting children's participation in project design and implementation shall be a priority.
- ✓ Integrating *advocacy* as far as possible in partner projects: supporting initiatives and assisting partners in developing tools for dialogue and engagement with duty-bearers.

FORUT's management is also responsible for ensuring that FORUT staff and staff of partner organisations are adequately trained. Finally, rights-based approaches shall be promoted among partners and FORUT materials and tools shall be rights-based.

11. Monitoring and compliance

A large part of monitoring our compliance with this policy will be through FORUT's regular monitoring. It is the responsibility of the Secretary General and the International Programme Director to ensure that policy, programme planning, and implementation are rights-based.

Therefore:

1. Policies, strategies and programme planning, including results frameworks and funding applications are based on analysis of power inequalities and human rights (incl. structures, attitudes, behaviour).
2. Guidance material and tools are inclusive of a rights-based approach.
3. All partner projects in the areas of advocacy, capacity-building, empowerment, and service delivery shall be rights-based.
4. Adequate human resources are allocated for rights-based work, and there is a Child Rights focal person in the Programme Department.
5. Adequate training of office staff and partner staff must be conducted, especially in the area of child rights.

Further reading

Two publications by FORUT elaborate on our approach to addressing Child Rights and Women's Rights in the cross section with alcohol and substance use.

- ✓ *"Childhood matters"*: Alcohol and drug problems from a child rights perspective
- ✓ *"Masculinity in a Bottle"*: A manual on how to discuss masculinity and drinking habits
- ✓ *Alcohol and Global Health* (2018) – Report 2019 FORUT & SERAF. Dr Ley Muller and Prof. Thomas Clausen. Norwegian Centre for Addiction Research
- ✓ *Alcohol's impact on the rights of women and children in the Global South. A literature review* (2019). Anne-Marie Laslett and Megan Cook. La Tobe University

Booklets are available from the FORUT web site [English - FORUT](#)