

UNDROP – Key Implications for Development Cooperation

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas* has been adopted by the UN General Assembly almost two years ago, in December 2018. But what are its key implications on practicing development cooperation? How can its key points be implemented both strategically and in the field? Here we try to answer some of these questions. *By Una Hombrecher and Luc Ruffieux.*



Weeding on a vegetable field in the Niayes, Senegal © HEKS

The process, which ultimately led to the adoption of the Declaration was initially *launched by peasants' organizations*, most notably La Via Campesina. Their main goal, which is now enshrined in the UNDROP, was to protect the rights of peasants and other people working in rural areas, like fisherfolk, breeders and agricultural workers, which are especially vulnerable, and disproportionality affected by hunger and poverty. The Declaration thus represents a milestone as it adequately reflects the needs and rights of peasants. The role that Switzerland played during the negotiations towards the Declaration was key to achieving an instrument that is highly relevant to today's realities. This is not only because it is based on the needs of the people it targets, but also because *peasants are a key factor* for world food security and thus key for the transformation towards sustainable food systems. Peasants are crucial in preserving biodiversity and natural resources and thereby ensuring the resilience needed in light of the increasing impacts of climate change.

The Declaration not only recognizes a significant number of rights (see box), but also serves as a “common road map” and urges States to incorporate its principles into both *national law and international agreements*. National policies should comply with the Declaration while international agreements, like free

The UNDROP aims at protecting peasants and other people working in rural areas by urging States to implement both international agreements and national policy in a manner consistent with the rights enshrined in the Declaration. Ensuring peasant's participation in UNDROP's implementation is fundamental and emphasized in the Declaration itself.

The Declaration recognizes a significant number of rights, including access to justice (Art 12), the rights to food and food sovereignty (Art. 15), the right to land and other natural resources (Art. 17), to a safe, clean and healthy environment (Art. 18), to seeds (Art. 19) and to biological diversity (Art. 20). It also recognizes the importance of international cooperation in support of national efforts for the realization of the rights set out in the Declaration (Art. 2.6). Find the full declaration [here](#).

trade agreements or multinational agreements on intellectual property should be modified and applied in accordance with the UNDROP. These aspects, important as they are, lie beyond the direct impact of the practical aspects of SDC country offices and its partners though and therefore will not be further discussed here (for more information on these issues, see further below).

Nonetheless, a new study¹, carried out by the Geneva Academy hints at **several action points** to put the declaration into practice.

It is a fundamental prerequisite for the implementation of the Declaration, that its content is well-known. Therefore, SDC offices should **raise awareness on the UNDROP** among civil society and government representatives. The Declaration is based on international human rights treaties and thus a powerful normative framework for the rights of peasants, it provides an excellent starting point for joint reflections towards enhancing sustainable food systems and equal rights together. To successfully implement the Declaration, SDC, its partners and peasant networks all together shall **jointly develop strategies towards putting the UNDROP into practice** adapted to different contexts.

As a first step, the SDC and its partners are advised to **assess the precise direct and indirect impacts of all their activities on the rights of peasants and other people living in the rural area** by developing an **adequate assessment tool**. Peasants can be affected by activities in a wide range of areas, not just by programs relating to food security and agriculture. Activities in areas as diverse as trade, migration, water, climate change, or infrastructure have an impact on peasants and others in rural areas. For example, some value chain approaches have been found to produce unsatisfactory results for peasants due in part weak linkages between marginalized peasants and other players. The need for costly inputs may make value chains inaccessible for peasants and even less competitive and thus more marginalized. Another example could be the promotion of individual land titles. Because it is often less complex and faster, it hampers the chances of traditional collective land use. Moreover, free land markets and subsidies can increase pressure on land, which is another reason why peasants are losing their tenure rights. Especially in the **collaboration with private sector clear criteria and conditions for engagement** should be defined in a transparent manner and in conformity with the Declaration.

As the UNDROP is ultimately the result of a strong effort of peasant organizations, their participation is similarly important in implementing the Declaration, not least because the right to participation is part of the Declaration itself. Therefore, the **establishment or strengthening of inclusive and independent peasant organizations** is the foundation towards enhancing food security and sovereignty. Consequently, SDC and its partners should support the development of strong peasant associations and networks in its focus countries. Furthermore, SDC

and its partners shall also support peasant networks to bring in their needs and views and **facilitate meaningful dialogue between peasants and its governments**. On the other hand, Switzerland and its partners may **accompany and advise governments on relevant legislative revisions**, with a view to integrate the Declaration into national law. In this same context, e.g. in the field of peaceful conflict resolution concerning natural resources and land, SDC and FDFA's Human Security Division (HSD) should **maintain frequent contact with peasant networks and its land**



Negotiations of the intergovernmental working groups which led to the UN Declaration © SDC

¹ For study and policy brief see below

rights defenders and strive towards adequate **protecting processes towards putting the UNDROP into practice.**

Thematically the Declaration can serve as guidance by helping to set the emphasis on certain topics, which are directly linked to the UNDROP. Therefore, SDC offices should promote enhanced **agrobiodiversity and a competent handling of peasants' seed systems**, and the use of peasants' seeds in the countries in which they work. Furthermore, the **importance of formalizing and securing customary land tenure** – often including collective rights - should be emphasized. SDC offices should promote secure land rights for individuals and rural communities, so that even poorer members of these communities dispose of titles and collectives have an incentive to manage their natural resources sustainably and lower the rates of deforestation and soil degradation. Furthermore, they are able to maintain biodiversity and benefit from the ecosystem services their lands provide as well.

If you are looking for more information on certain issues concerning the Declaration please note the links below.

Interview conducted with Benny Müller, the Deputy Head of Human Rights Policy of the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs who took part in the process of UNDROP's adoption:



Interview with Benny Müller, Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs

You can read [the full written interview here](#)

The full study carried out by the Geneva Academy available in [French](#), with Research Briefs available in [English](#), [German](#) and [French](#).

The full United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas in [English](#), [German](#) and [French](#).

Peasant rights explained in an easy language [UNDROP Book of Illustrations by La Via Campesina](#)

[E-book "The UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants"](#)