

Participation Form  
Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights

Views are sought from all individuals and organisations who have experience or expertise that can help to shape Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights.

The Scottish Human Rights Commission will be collecting and analysing all responses received before the 29 March 2013. Early responses are appreciated.

Unless respondents request that their views remain confidential or anonymous all responses will appear online with the name of the organisation or individual. Contact details will not appear online.

- Please tick this box if you do not wish your response to appear online.
- Please tick this box if you are happy for your response to appear online but not your name or the name of your organisation.
- Please tick this box if you would prefer we did not link to your website.

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This form can be returned by post to: Dr Alison Hosie, Scottish Human Rights Commission, 4 Melville Street, Edinburgh, EH3 7NS, or sent as an electronic or scanned document to [actionplan@scottishhumanrights.com](mailto:actionplan@scottishhumanrights.com)

You can also fill out this form online at [www.scottishhumanrights.com/actionplan](http://www.scottishhumanrights.com/actionplan)

## Participation Form Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights

1. Based on the evidence presented in the report *Getting it right? Human rights in Scotland*, or your own experience, what do you consider to be the most urgent human rights issues which should be addressed in Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights?

The *Getting it Right* report identifies that while good progress is being made in the area of integrating human rights law within Scotland's legislative framework, for human rights to have a greater impact on individuals and communities human rights need to become more meaningful and relevant in the lives of all residents of Scotland especially those most marginalized.

*Indeed, in general terms, it is noted that the influence of human rights is felt most strongly on our laws and institutions and its influence decreases the closer to real life we look. The result is unacceptable outcomes for some individuals, particularly the most marginalised.*

The Scottish Community Development Network is an autonomous practitioner led group which believes that:

“the key purpose of community development work is collectively to bring about social change and justice, by working with communities to: identify their needs, opportunities, rights and responsibilities, plan, organise and take action, evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the action all in ways which challenge oppression and tackle inequalities”

Despite the many common objectives of human rights supporters & defenders and those in the field of community development looking to promote social justice and equality, there are currently few explicit links between community learning and development policy and the human rights agenda. While the Scottish Government has indicated support for a community development approach in a number of strategic documents, the reality on the ground is that community development approaches are increasingly being undermined and the skills base in the field diminished.

A key area of community development work is to empower communities to 'speak truth to power' therefore it is perhaps not surprising that effective community development work does often not sit easily within a local authority or health board setting. The same could perhaps be said of those seeking to promote a human rights approach to tackling exclusion and prejudice. These attitudes of resistance to change or even the challenging of the status quo, are one of the greatest barriers to achieving the goal of allowing human rights approaches to have an impact on 'real life'.

We currently lack a workforce whose role it is to work to the agenda of communities. Local and even National and European elected representatives claims to represent communities is becoming increasingly tenuous. Voting levels in elections are alarmingly low and even lower in poorer communities. In the last local election in Glasgow 2012 only 31.6% of the electorate voted with levels in areas such as Drumchapel and Possil being under 20%. In the report by the Jimmy Reid Foundation 'The Silent Crisis', Scotland is identified as one of the most undemocratic countries in the developed world. This flawed system of representative democracy along with no coherent or adequately resourced strategy to address and develop political literacy across and within

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communities threatens the relevance and integrity of our democracy. As democratic government is recognized as a key element in the development and observation of human rights for the SNAP not to address this significant issue would be a crucial oversight and a missed opportunity. The report recognized that:

*'Awareness and capacity building can also be an important vehicle to put human rights into practice,'*

How is this awareness and capacity building going to be achieved without people with the skills, determination and commitment to work shoulder to shoulder with communities, especially those most marginalized, to achieve it. Much of this work is currently done by third sector organisations this are under threat and the current UK Government 'austerity measures' represent a 'clear and present danger' to the ideas and ideals of human rights and community development. As one of the richest countries in the world the UK should be encouraged to resource community development work and achieve far greater recognition of human rights both civil & political and economic, social and cultural. We must get out of reverse and accelerate forward in our drive to achieve a just and equitable society. Community development approaches mean that marginalized communities whether they be thematic or geographic can be given the opportunity to savour real and permanent change for the better. The Scotland's National Action Plan for human rights must recognise that human rights can not be achieved without a representative government and an active and empowered civic society.

The pressures of global economic and environmental crisis make this a crucial time in deciding what our national priorities must be and what our international responsibilities are, and how we will fulfill them. The values and vision of community development and human rights are central to any approach that seeks to challenge the current levels of injustice, violence and inequality which threaten the world. The current version of globalization means that the financial markets have greater influence over government policy than the electorate, this situation must be recognized and remedied as a matter of urgency or the current level of poverty and injustice is likely to continue and most likely get worse.

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2. What specific and achievable actions do you consider would best address the concerns you identify in your response to question 1?

Greater recognition and investment in the support and development of community development approaches to tackling inequality, social justice and human rights. Specific actions would be to review current higher & further education provision across Scotland with a view to increasing provision and protecting and promoting areas of good practice.

Review of community development approaches and provision across all Scotland's local authorities and Health Services, with a specific view to identifying approaches and development that could benefit the integration of a Human Rights Based approach in working with communities.

Work be undertaken between the Scottish Human Rights Commission, the Community Learning and Development Standards Council for Scotland, Scottish Community Development Network, the Community Development Alliance Scotland representatives of the academic sector and the Scottish Government to identify ways in which the implementation of the Christie Commission's recommendations can be supported to promote human rights and address social inequality.

Any future government legislation relating to community development or human rights should explicitly identify and encourage the link between these areas of practice.

That serious and urgent attention be paid to the threat to our democratic system of government by the increasing lack of engagement of voters in the electoral process. That Scotland's current approach to representative and participatory democracy be scrutinized in light of the importance of a strong democratic system being identified as the best environment in which to achieve a positive human rights culture.

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*“Based on these findings, SHRC considers that Scotland needs to better promote the influence of human rights laws in areas that matter most to people e.g. where we actually lead our lives - in our homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools and other areas of day to day life. Scotland's National Action Plan for Human Rights will provide a practical roadmap to move from assumption to assurance that human rights laws and institutions, strategies and policies are informed by and consistently influence practice. Adopting such a systematic approach will demonstrate a clear commitment to making human rights real for everyone in Scotland.”*

The SCDN believe that this exciting vision can best be delivered by utilizing and developing the skills of a new generation of community development practitioners and by recognition of the fundamental need to shift our national priorities from economic growth and competition to economic sustainability and cooperation.