



# LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND: Implementing the pledge

## CONTEXT

The Pledge to Leave No One Behind (LNOB) is a central principle underpinning the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The principle has two fundamental elements: the first is that the SDGs and accompanying targets must be met for all nations, peoples and segments of society. The second element is that groups of people that are the furthest away from achieving SDG targets must be prioritised, and their needs met first.

Over five years into Agenda 2030, we are seeing that national governments, through the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process are increasingly reporting on their commitment to LNOB, which is encouraging. In addition, more governments are detailing how they are embedding this principle in national plans and sustainable development policies in their VNR reports. Overall, this suggests that the pledge to LNOB is gaining prominence around the world as a concept in the delivery and implementation of the SDGs.

However, major challenges remain. The identification of communities and left-behind groups of people that are vulnerable to being left behind remains inconsistent. Out of the groups identified as at risk of being left behind, persons with disabilities, women and girls, and children and youth are the most frequently cited. However, groups that are often missing from official statistics such as migrants and refugees, or groups that face discrimination or marginalization due to ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and other factors receive less attention in VNR reports. In addition, in reporting on the pledge to Leave No One Behind, there is still insufficient evidence on intersecting inequalities (people that are vulnerable because they are part of more than one category of deprivation) and how this impacts progress on the SDGs. Furthermore, clear gaps remain in terms of targeting resources and programmes to respond to the pledge to leave no one behind, the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to increased demand for health and social protection, while at the same time many donor budgets are being reduced.

While there has been progress over the years in the use of age and gender disaggregated data among countries, data availability has frequently been cited as a continued challenge. The predominant practice is to utilise national averages when reporting on progress towards the SDGs, which masks persistent, glaring inequalities that can exist between groups in society, for example those residing in urban versus rural areas. While more countries are now reporting on specific policies or targeted programmes to leave no one behind or to reduce domestic inequality, this practice needs to be replicated and scaled up so that it becomes a regular feature in VNR reports in assessing progress on the pledge to LNOB.

## CASE STUDIES ON APPROACHES TO LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

### **Bangladesh's identification efforts towards leaving no one behind**

Bangladesh has identified an extensive array of persons as at risk of being left behind. Marginalized groups and vulnerable populations include transgender persons, persons with specific professions (e.g. tea gardeners, cleaners, domestic aides), Bede (gypsies), beggars and street children, people living in specific areas (e.g. char areas, people living in hilly regions), special needs children, neonate, adolescent girls and boys, HIV/AIDS affected people, people suffering from infectious diseases, people suffering from mental disorders, drug-addicted youths, people injured by road traffic accidents, persons with disabilities, children who have been dropped out from schools, youth not in education, employment or training, female students prone to violence, ethnic communities, and any other marginalized persons and communities.

**Source:** Excerpt adapted from Bangladesh's VNR report.

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## India's civil society involvement in identifying vulnerable groups

India's civil society held a series of national consultations with vulnerable communities around the SDGs. The process was headed by Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, which coordinated the action with both the government (through NITI Aayog) and the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO). According to the civil society report, over a thousand organizations participated in the consultation process, including 36 subnational consultations, and more than half of them also engaged in the national consultations carried out by the government. Wada Na Todo Abhiyan's civil society report identifies 16 groups focuses each one of its chapters on a specific group likely to be left behind, and focuses each of its chapters on a specific group. Each chapter includes challenges that were identified by participants and recommendations to address them. Moreover, the inputs from the civil society consultations were used by NITI Aayog while drafting the VNR report's standalone chapter on LNOB.

**Source:** Excerpt adapted from India's VNR.

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## The impact of India's SDG scorecard

In March 2018, a project launched in five Indian states with the aim of supporting people with disabilities to play a vital, proactive part in implementing and monitoring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at local, state, national, regional and international levels. As part of the project, we developed an innovative disability-inclusive scorecard on SDG implementation, with a specific focus on women with disabilities. The scorecard brings together service users and service providers to jointly analyse issues underlying service delivery problems and find collaborative ways to address them. It has supported organizations of people with disabilities (OPDs) to develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to advocate with local government officials on disability inclusion and SDG implementation. It has also increased engagement with government departments and district officials. The scorecard is a strong example of localisation of the SDGs framework, and accountability mechanisms, in order to meet the promise of the SDGs to leave no one behind. As Danjai, leader of a local OPD, puts it: "My dreams have wings now. When I was nominated group leader of the parents and OPD group recently in Ganjam, I 'found myself'. This was my first community exposure and I learned how to

lead active advocacy and stand up for the rights of girls and women with disabilities. For me, now there is no looking back. It's one of the things I will never want to give up, no matter what people say to me."

**Extract from Sightsavers case studies.** *Sightsavers with expertise from the European Disability Forum, Together 2030 and Newcastle University. Delivered by 15 Organizations of People with disabilities (OPDs) in 5 states in India. Author: N. Mehta*

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## Uzbekistan's efforts towards gender equality

Despite the lack of data disaggregated by gender, Uzbekistan's VNR report highlights the country's recent efforts to promote gender equality and considerable shifts in achieving it. In 2019, the Parliament adopted the "Law to Ensure Equal Rights and Opportunities for Men and Women" and the "Law to Protect Women from Discrimination and Violence." The proportion of women in leadership positions grew by 5.3 percentage points from 27.7% in 2015 to 33% in 2019. Women's employment is one of the priority areas in Uzbekistan's socioeconomic development, and the VNR report highlights many initiatives to increase it. The proportion of women in the total workforce is currently 45%. The VNR report is also cognizant of areas where further progress is needed.

**Source:** Excerpt adapted from Uzbekistan's VNR.

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## Niger's strategy to leaving no one behind

Niger's strategy of "les Nigériens Nourrissent les Nigériens" [Nigériens feed Nigériens] and the country's policy of free health care and education up to the age of 16 are good practices onto leaving no one behind. Together they support multiple SDGs and have a multiplier effect in achieving a sustainable development that is inclusive.

**Source:** Excerpt adapted from Niger's VNR.

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## Efforts to address inequality

**Comoros** is conducting a poverty survey so that the country can have better data, necessary for the effective implementation of the SDGs. Other measures include training women working in different productive sectors (e.g. fishing, livestock, agriculture, handicrafts) and organizing them in cooperatives to ensure effective management of their production. These actions were carried out by the local financial system (microcredit institutions, in particular) and by development partners.

In **Panama**, the “Colmena Strategy” establishes the integrity of the multisectoral action necessary to fight against inequities and asymmetries. It is clearly a cross-cutting policy design issue in the country.

**Solomon Islands** developed Medium-Term Strategies (MTS) whose objectives are linked to the SDGs and to the principle of leaving no one behind. For example, MTS 5 aims to alleviate poverty, improve provision of basic needs, and increase food security. MTS 7’s focus is on supporting the disadvantaged and the vulnerable, and on improving gender equality.

To address SDG 10, **Uganda** referred to the implementation of programs towards the support of social protection, and to the investment in regional economic growth and development. The VNR report also mentioned legislation to support women’s ownership of land and access to technologies to enhance agricultural productivity while also reducing intensive work. Country policies will also focus on promoting inclusive growth and creating jobs for the most challenged sections of society.

**Source:** Excerpt adapted from the VNR reports for Comoros, Panama, Solomon Islands, and Uganda

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Member States should apply a Leave No One Behind lens in reviewing progress on SDGs. Such an approach is essential to capture the situation of marginalized and vulnerable groups and ensure that their progress is recognized.

This approach will enable driving meaningful change and to turn the pledge to Leave No One Behind into practice. Governments, civil society and other stakeholders need to ensure that progress is routinely measured and reported on in a transparent and accountable manner and that national policies and programmes embed equity and inclusion into all stages of the planning, budgeting, implementation and monitoring process. The following recommendations spotlight how governments can ensure inclusive progress on the SDGs:

- Ensure policies and programmes are informed by and integrate efforts to leave no one behind, including by prioritizing those most in need to consistently reach marginalized communities.
- Include a specific chapter on leaving no one behind in VNR reporting and demonstrate how the principle of leaving no one behind is being translated into action in an overarching way.
- Provide information on the status of data collection and/or plans to improve data availability to inform efforts to leave no one behind. This includes information on age, geography and gender disaggregated data. Ensuring no one is left behind means knowing who is being left behind, by how much, and in what areas. This could be done using the [Inclusive Data Charter](#).
- Report not only on national averages for each target, but the rates at which progress on individual SDGs are being achieved for the most marginalized and vulnerable groups and communities.
- Highlight existing and planned efforts to leave no one behind, including how policies and programmes are being adapted, and in particular, new approaches to reach the people who are furthest behind first.
- Promote gender equality through international good practice such as gender budgeting, gender-based analysis and mainstreaming into policies and plans, and appropriate legal, policy and institutional frameworks.
- Report on the outcomes of efforts to leave no one behind, including by drawing on civil society expertise and citizen-generated data. Clearly present links between specific policies and actions with results, presenting progress for specific marginalized groups.
- Target domestic inequality in 2030 Agenda implementation, including in support of SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, and outline the current status of domestic inequality and how it is being addressed in VNR reports.
- Include major crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the efforts being made to ensure no one is left behind, outlining which groups are being covered and detailing what approaches are being taken.
- Identify national SDG targets for vulnerable or marginalized groups, including short, medium and long-term targets.

*This policy brief was prepared in February/March 2021, in the context of the 2020 Progressing National SDGs Implementation report (5th edition), an independent assessment of the Voluntary National Review reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development each year.*

