



# Realizing the SDGs for All: Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality for Every Person, Everywhere

*Together 2030 written inputs to the  
UN High-Level Political Forum on  
Sustainable Development (HLPF)  
2019*

*From policy to action*

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# Realizing the SDGs for All: Ensuring Inclusiveness and Equality for Every Person, Everywhere

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Leaving no one behind lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This principle is mentioned at least seven times in the Agenda itself, and has been a recurrent theme in documents, pledges, call to actions, interventions and statements delivered since - by Member States, the UN and civil society. A clear commitment to inclusiveness is made in the text of the Agenda when Member States “pledge that no one will be left behind” while at the same time recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, and by pledging that all goals and targets be met for all nations, peoples and societies committing to also reach those furthest behind<sup>i</sup>.

However, in spite of the frequent use and reference to this principle, focused efforts to leave no one behind remain insufficient, in terms of policy design, implementation and review. This is evidenced in our 2018 perception survey, where we found for example, that only 14% of respondents regarded the most vulnerable and marginalized groups as being included in national review<sup>ii</sup>. The theme of this year’s HLPF, *“Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality”* is not only a reminder that empowering people to ensure inclusiveness and equality is an ongoing and difficult task, it is also an opportunity to take concrete, collective and focused actions to ensure that the pledge of leaving no one behind indeed includes every person, everywhere as well as to review progress and challenges in realizing this core principle.

Inclusiveness, equality and equity are not just issues for developing countries. Though marginalization and vulnerability take different forms in different countries, and different groups are left behind in different contexts, the presence of these groups and individuals is universal and constant. Reducing these domestic disparities must be elevated as a priority. Furthermore, inclusiveness and equality are global, not only national matters. The significant gaps between developed and developing countries persist and even widen. We should not forget that whole countries can be ‘left behind’.

Ensuring inclusiveness, equality and equity means approaching the SDGs in an integrated manner. The realization of the set of goals under review this year will not be possible if progress across the other SDGs is not also ensured. By way of illustration, without addressing the root causes of exclusion and poverty, guaranteeing food and nutrition security, ensuring access to quality and equitable education and lifelong learning, universal health coverage, as well as fighting climate change by protecting the environment, its goods and resources, no inclusiveness, equality or empowerment will ever be possible. In addition, in order to ensure that empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality is achieved in a way that also promotes development and protects the environment, it is important to regard the SDGs as global public goods for which costs as well as figures on interlinkages should be published. OECD countries and donors should move away from the practice of setting unilateral agendas or commitments focused only on a few SDGs.



Furthermore, although in 2018, the majority of VNR countries reported on all goals rather than a set of goals as in previous years<sup>iii</sup>, we continue to stress the need to ensure that VNRs should reflect the implementation of the 17 goals in accordance to the universal, integrated and interrelated approach of the SDGs.

### Addressing Inequalities by catalyzing progress on SDGs- an example

SDG 4 on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all can be achieved by contributing to the realization of universal health coverage. For example, bolstering primary care provision -for prevention, screening and referral and treatment through rehabilitation- has the potential to catalyze progress towards SDG 4 as well as almost every other SDG. Similarly, strengthening the quality and equity of education and making it truly transformative would be a critical step for social change and realizing the entire SDG agenda.

## Meaningful participation, VNRs and the HLPF

Over three years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, stakeholder engagement remains limited. Although in 2018 VNR reports revealed an important increase in participation by non-state actors in formal governance mechanisms in respect to 2017, over 30% of the countries that reported provided no information on non-state actor engagement in governance mechanisms<sup>iv</sup>. Not surprisingly, only 37% of respondents to our 2018 survey on stakeholder participation said they knew how to engage with official review processes<sup>v</sup>.

The catalyzing potential of greater civil society engagement with the 2030 Agenda is significant yet remains untapped. Ultimately it is the responsibility of Governments to implement and progress the SDGs, however in many settings, much of the work required to drive progress towards the SDGs hinges on national and international civil society. Excluding civil society from formally engaging with the monitoring and reporting of progress towards the SDGs fails to capture this activity, and fails to mobilize future activity. Governments presenting VNRs at the 2019 HLPF should be expected to have demonstrated a commitment to comprehensive and inclusive stakeholder engagement to guide the development of their VNRs. We require a formal mechanism to include civil society within governmental framework for SDGs implementation, and capacity building to reach every citizen.

Some of the challenges that remain in engaging at national level are related not only to political will but also to the weak collaboration mechanisms put in place to facilitate such engagement. At a national level, civil society participation is inconsistent and in many settings, inexistent. Countries that are engaging civil society are frequently only selectively reporting on feedback from civil society, meaning the feedback shared is not always entirely reflective of the breadth of the consultation. As identified in our 2018 perception survey, approximately 66% of the respondents expressed frustration at the challenges to participation, citing a range of external obstacles - from lack of government transparency and superficial consultation, to lack of funding and government repression of NGOs<sup>vi</sup>. In response to these challenges many civil society organizations are attempting to engage with the SDGs in an ad hoc manner, rather than as a cohesive and consistent civil society voice. The absence of a united voice enables governments to continue to exclude civil society from engaging with the 2030 Agenda.



### How is civil society engaging in the VNRs? Case of Nigeria:

Civil society organizations are more focused at the subnational level, which is the state level in Nigeria. The CSOs in Nigeria are re-strategizing to hold the National Government accountable in committing through the VNR process by setting up measurable and actionable indicators in order to ‘walk the talk’. By forming coalitions around the 2030 Agenda, CSOs have been mobilizing to make governments at both the national and subnational level to commit not just in the adoption or planning stages but also in putting together the appropriate processes to measure actions and activities for an inclusive Nigerian VNR.

The HLPF retains a critical role for tracking progress on the SDGs, and should continue to encourage and facilitate multi-stakeholder dialogue and the strengthening of commitments to implement the 2030 Agenda. It has the potential to have an incredibly meaningful impact on the implementation of the SDGs and is key to strengthening the global partnership, both between countries and between state actors and civil society, for sustainable development. This can only be achieved by increasing civil society engagement with the HLPF by establishing a formal mechanism for reporting by civil society that brings the insights and contributions of civil society out of the shadows. This will be dually beneficial - increasing the level of accountability of government progress towards the SDGs, and allowing civil society to better support governments in implementing the SDGs.

Furthermore, the HLPF should also fulfill its mandate to provide political leadership, guidance and recommendations. It is unclear, for example, how the outcome document of the HLPF, which is the Ministerial Declaration, serves as policy guidance to foster change in addressing current, new and emerging issues. Additionally, the reporting of best practices and lessons learned remains limited. Although some progress has been made in this regard, existing gaps in reporting on these issues remain evident. This proves to be detrimental, too, to the HLPF’s mandate of spurring policy coherence informed by evidence. This gap undermines the VNR process and represents a missed opportunity for maximizing the impact of HLPF discussions<sup>vii</sup>.

The SDG Summit and the upcoming review of the HLPF will provide crucial opportunities to increase the effectiveness of the follow up and review mechanism of the SDGs. The HLPF need to continue to develop into a space for all stakeholders to share lessons and develop the partnerships necessary to increase implementation of the Agenda. All stakeholders must therefore be included in the review process, which must be transparent and participatory, in the same ways as the Open Working Groups. The coming year will be critical in shaping the HLPF for the remaining decade of the SDGs and we must not lose this opportunity.



## Specific action recommendations regarding SDGs under review:

<p><i>Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all</i></p>	<p><b>Ensure that everyone, girls and boys alike, including people affected by emergencies and crises, have access to free, universal, quality equitable, safe and inclusive education and lifelong learning opportunities.</b> This, in turn, entails concerted efforts for the orientation of line ministries on the Education 2030 Framework for Action<sup>viii</sup>, strengthening public provision of education and enhancing allocations to education to 4-6% GDP for education as agreed in the above framework. Efforts are likewise needed to strengthen participatory planning, monitoring and grievance redress and social accountability mechanisms.</p> <p><b>Taking interlinkages across the SDGs.</b> It is important to note that in SDG 4, schools can play a critical role in protecting children from violence, although they are also a setting for violence for many children. Consequently, this Goal has targets that can directly contribute to SDG 16 on its targets related to violence prevention.</p> <p><b>Ensure that both children and adults have an adequate health and nutrition</b> to allow them to effectively participate in their education and achieve maximum educational attainment. Further, good vision is vital to ensuring children can stay in school and engage effectively with the curriculum.</p>
<p><i>Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all</i></p>	<p><b>Economic growth must be geared to improving the life chances of people.</b> Economic Growth is harmful when it is aimed at profits for multinational companies and facilitates corruption. <b>Efforts must be made to open opportunities for everybody and to build human capacities</b> that support social and economic growth.</p> <p><b>Efforts are needed to promote job creation and improve the quality of jobs.</b> This entails efforts to strengthen implementation of labour standards (including but going beyond payment of living wages), provisions pertaining to collective bargaining and social dialogue with a view of improving the quality and accessibility of jobs available. <b>Efforts must likewise be made to end child labour.</b> Monitoring framework that supports quality entry, working condition, and suitable job for all is required.</p> <p>Disasters like floods and earthquakes can have dramatic impact on livelihoods. For example, recurrent flooding may discourage long-term investments by governments and the private sector, impacting jobs and livelihoods. <b>Governments must incorporate climate- smart and resilient thinking into infrastructure and economic plans</b> to ensure economic growth opportunities are not washed away by disasters.</p>



<p><i>Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries</i></p>	<p><b>Developed countries should support developing and least developed countries in the areas of human capacity development.</b> Efforts are needed to address inequality within countries through a range of measures including progressive taxation, improved implementation of social protection mechanisms, implementation of universal, free, quality and equitable public services like health and education as a right for all, developing and enforcing anti-discrimination legislation and taking concrete steps to ensure greater visibility of women and persons with disabilities in public life and institutions and ensuring equal access to justice for all.</p> <p>Similar to poverty, <b>inequalities increase children’s risk of experiencing different forms of violence including physical abuse, neglect, and sexual and economic exploitation.</b> The relationship between inequality and violence against children is complex and multi-directional. While inequalities increase children’s vulnerability to violence, the failure to protect children from violence can also contribute to and exacerbate inequalities and discrimination<sup>ix</sup>. Goal 10 contains a number of targets that address social and economic inequalities, and are thus indirectly relevant to ending violence against children.</p>
<p><i>Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts</i></p>	<p><b>National governments need to commit to reduce the impact of climate change and put in place actionable plans to improve the use of renewable energy sources at every household level.</b> Furthermore, high and low-income countries should initiate the decarbonization transition in accordance to the Paris Agreement (respecting the equity responsibilities of the high-income countries). We will all suffer but the low-income countries and people in poverty, the most. On the other hand, low-income countries will benefit from all the advantages in health and economic opportunities in a fossil free society.</p> <p><b>Promote traditional and local knowledge on climate mitigation</b> by which traditions sustained in times before. This valuable knowledge is not considered as such and in many cases is lost thus taking away the right of people to use their knowledge and practices to manage their livelihoods and be not dependent on Governments.</p>
<p><i>Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels</i></p>	<p><b>Prohibit all forms of violence in all settings</b> is an urgent call to Governments as well as to ensure national legislation is aligned with international human rights standards. More specifically, violence against children is directly addressed by this Goal in its target 16.2. It adversely impacts children’s development, health and education, and increases their risk of poverty, deprivation and exclusion. Not addressing violence against children jeopardizes the achievement of several SDGs and Targets.</p>



**Governments need to invest in what works to prevent violence.** In particular, evidence based solutions should be delivered through strong child protection systems, guided by policy solutions that mobilize multi-sectoral responses, and backed by investments that enable their application at scale necessary to reduce prevalence of violence against children.

**Strengthening national and international norms on peace, justice and governance institutions** including on the entire gamut varying from progressive taxation, corporate exemptions, financial transparency and protection of human rights defenders. This needs to be backed by coordinated efforts to build institutional capacities to ensure implementation and building mechanisms for participatory inclusive decision-making involving citizens in policy formulation, participatory monitoring and accountability.

**National governments should commit to peacebuilding activities** and also regional governments should support national government by building local capacities in the areas of peacebuilding and resilience

**National Governments and their Parliaments should be requested to endorse the call for a proposed UN Parliamentary Assembly (UNPA)** so that citizens of the world can have a direct and legitimate voice at the UN. More and better space for Parliamentary involvement in this year's HLPF should be created.

*Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development*

**Ensure that accountability and monitoring systems are in place** as well as having national governments commit to implementation strategy that ensures a participatory inclusive approach.

**Capacity for tax collection, particularly for direct taxes, requires further improvement,** leveraging technology to minimize fraud and/or evasion.



## About this paper:

This paper is issued on behalf of the Together 2030 Global Advocacy Working Group.

The process of drafting this collective paper was as follows:

- A set of questions were proposed for collection of inputs from March 1 to 11 2019.
- The Together 2030 International Secretariat developed a first draft based on the inputs received.
- A first review was opened for comments and additional inputs from March 18 to 23 2019, followed by another review/editing of the text.
- A second and final round of comments was opened to the Working Group from 25 March to 28 March 2019.
- The final edited version was submitted for the review of the Co-Chairs of Together 2030 Core Group.



Organizations engaged on the Together 2030 Global Advocacy Working Group were invited to collaborate and provide inputs to this document. Final text reflects the summary and collection of those inputs but not necessarily, the agreement or endorsement of those organizations on all proposals presented.

Country examples were provided by members of the Initiative engaging with the implementation and accountability of the 2030 Agenda at the national level and reflect their respective experiences. They were summarized and edited by the Together 2030 International Secretariat.

A summary of this position paper has been included in the official sectoral paper from major groups and other stakeholders to the HLPF 2019. The full text will also be published at the official HLPF 2019 website.

### *Diversity of Opinion within civil society:*

Members of Together 2030 express and prioritize different aspects of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs and provide a broad range of views regarding its implementation and follow up. Members are united in the following objectives:

- To strengthen partnerships between civil society and stakeholders to support the effective implementation of Agenda 2030 and the SDGs.
- To make the voices of people heard and have people holding governments accountable for the progress towards achieving Agenda 2030 and the SDGs at all levels.

[www.together2030.org](http://www.together2030.org)  
[contact@together2030.org](mailto:contact@together2030.org)  
[twitter.com/Together\\_2030](https://twitter.com/Together_2030)



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- i [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)- Paragraph 4, p 3.
  - ii [From principle to practice: stakeholder participation in Voluntary National Reviews](#), 2018, p6
  - iii [Progressing national SDGs implementation](#): An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018, Third Edition. Executive Summary, p. 9
  - iv [Progressing national SDGs implementation](#): An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018, Third Edition. Key Findings, p. 2
  - v [From principle to practice: stakeholder participation in Voluntary National Reviews](#), 2018, p13
  - vi [From principle to practice: stakeholder participation in Voluntary National Reviews](#), 2018, p6
  - vii [Progressing national SDGs implementation](#): An independent assessment of the voluntary national review reports submitted to the United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in 2018, Third Edition. Executive Summary, p. 6
  - viii [Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework of Action](#)
  - ix [Family for Every Child, Protect My Future: The Links Between Child Protection and Equity](#), p. 5.

