***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***

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 and the UN itself. 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[[1]](#footnote-1).

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 marginalised groups as being included in national review.[[2]](#footnote-2)  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 realising this core principle.

We believe that inclusiveness, equality and equity are not just issues for developing countries. Though marginalisation 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 realisation 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[[3]](#footnote-3), 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 realisation 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 a significant 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.[[4]](#footnote-4) Not surprisingly, only 37% of respondents to our 2018 survey on stakeholder participation said they knew how to engage with official review processes.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The catalysing 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 mobilise 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 which 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[[6]](#footnote-6). 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 civil society 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-strategising 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 mobilising 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.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Specific Action recommendations regarding SDGs under review:**

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| ***Goal 4****.Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all* | | 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. This, in turn, entails concerted efforts for the orientation of line ministries on the Education 2030 Framework[[8]](#footnote-8) for Action, 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.  Ensure that both children and adults have an adequate health and nutrition 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. Education for adults and inclusion of SDGs, sustainability in the curriculum is necessary for sustainable future. |
| ***Goal 8****. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all* | Economic growth must be geared to improving the life chances of people. Economic Growth is harmful when it is aimed at profits for multinational companies and facilitates corruption. Efforts must be made to open opportunities for everybody and to build human capacities that support social and economic growth.  Efforts are needed to promote job creation and improve the quality of jobs. 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.  Efforts must likewise be made to end child labour. Monitoring framework that supports quality entry, working condition, and suitable job for all is required.  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. Governments must incorporate climate- smart and resilient thinking into infrastructure and economic plans to ensure economic growth opportunities are not washed away by disasters. | |
| ***Goal 10****. Reduce inequality within and among countries* | Developed countries should support developing and least developed countries in the areas of human capacity development. 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. | |
| ***Goal 13****. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts* | National governments need to commit to reduce the impact of climate change and put actionable plans to improve on the use of renewable energy sources, adoption at every household level. Furthermore, high and low-income countries should initiate the decarbonization transition that will lead 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.  Promote traditional and local knowledge on climate mitigation by which traditions sustained in times before. These valuable knowledge is not considered as valuable and is lost thus taking away the right of cultural people to use this knowledge and practices to manage their livelihoods and be not dependent on Governments that govern in isolation at most times. | |
| ***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* | 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 & legitimate) voice at the UN. More and better space for Parliamentarian 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 minimise fraud and/or evasion. | |

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1. [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E). Paragraph 4, p 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [From principle to practice: stakeholder participation in Voluntary National Reviews,](https://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2018-T2030-Newcastle-University-perceptions-report_11072018.pdf) 2018, p6 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [Progressing national SDGs implementation:](https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/EN-Executive-Summary-Progressing-National-SDGs-Implementation-2019.pdf) 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 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Progressing national SDGs implementation:](https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Progressing-2019-Key-Findings.pdf) 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 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [From principle to practice: stakeholder participation in Voluntary National Reviews,](https://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2018-T2030-Newcastle-University-perceptions-report_11072018.pdf) 2018, p13 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [From principle to practice: stakeholder participation in Voluntary National Reviews, 2](https://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/2018-T2030-Newcastle-University-perceptions-report_11072018.pdf)018, p6 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [Progressing national SDGs implementation:](https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/EN-Executive-Summary-Progressing-National-SDGs-Implementation-2019.pdf) 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 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework of Action](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)