

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND?

A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation
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Executive Summary

With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 193 United Nations Member States pledged to ensure “no one will be left behind” and to “endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.”¹ In practice, this means taking explicit action to end extreme poverty, curb inequalities, confront discrimination and fast-track progress for the furthest behind.

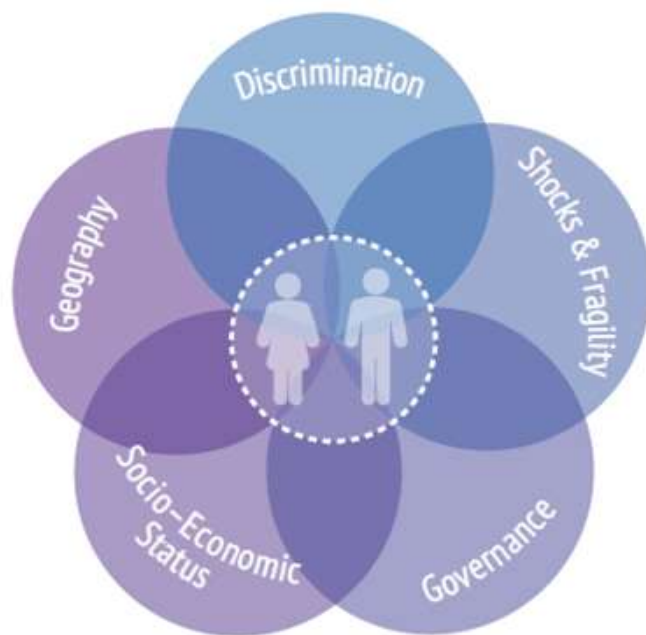
This paper suggests a framework that governments and stakeholders can use in their countries to take action to leave no one behind in a way that enables and accelerates national progress to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also seeks to inform the manner in which the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) works with countries to implement the 2030 Agenda, in keeping with the commitment of the United Nations Development System to put the pledge to leave no one behind at the heart of its support.²

Who is being left behind and why: Five key factors

People get left behind when they lack the choices and opportunities to participate in and benefit from development progress. All persons living in extreme poverty can thus be considered ‘left behind’, as can those who endure disadvantages or deprivations that limit their choices and opportunities relative to others in society.

This paper asserts that to understand who is being left behind and why, and to shape effective responses, five key factors should be assessed:

1. **Discrimination:** What biases, exclusion or mistreatment do people face based on one or more aspect of their identity (ascribed or assumed), including prominently gender as well as ethnicity, age, class, disability, sexual



People at the intersection of these factors face reinforcing and compounding disadvantage and deprivation, making them likely among the furthest behind.

¹ “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

² The framework proposed here strives to be fully consistent with the UN Sustainable Development Group’s SDG Operational Guide on “leaving no one behind”, Guidelines for UN Development Assistance Frameworks, the UN Chief Executive Board’s Framework on Inequalities and Non-Discrimination and UNDP Programming Standards.

orientation, religion, nationality, indigenous, migratory status etc.?

2. **Geography:** Who endures isolation, vulnerability, missing or inferior public services, transportation, internet or other infrastructure gaps due to their place of residence?
3. **Governance:** Where do people face disadvantage due to ineffective, unjust, unaccountable or unresponsive global, national and/or sub-national institutions? Who is affected by inequitable, inadequate or unjust laws, policies, processes or budgets? Who is less or unable to gain influence or participate meaningfully in the decisions that impact them?
4. **Socio-economic status:** Who faces deprivation or disadvantages in terms of income, life expectancy and educational attainment? Who has less chances to stay healthy, be nourished and educated? Compete in the labour market? Acquire wealth and/or benefit from quality health care, clean water, sanitation, energy, social protection and financial services?
5. **Shocks and fragility:** Who is more exposed and/or vulnerable to setbacks due to the impacts of climate change, natural hazards, violence, conflict, displacement, health emergencies, economic downturns, price or other shocks?

Realizing the opportunity to leave no one behind

To deliver on their commitment to realise the Agenda 2030, the paper suggests that countries take an integrated approach, drawing on mutually reinforcing “levers” *to examine, empower and enact change.*

Examine why people are left behind: To understand and address the drivers that leave people behind; countries must collect and use more and better disaggregated data and people-driven information. The progress of the furthest behind *versus* everyone else should tracked and reported for all relevant SDGs.

UNDP can support countries to examine by:

- Undertaking integrated “leave no one behind assessments” using the framework offered here as a starting point for thinking, analysis and action;
- Strengthening national capacities to gather, analyze and use disaggregated data and evidence, including to understand the range of disadvantages and deprivations that leave people behind;
- Working with governments, national human rights institutions and civil society to institutionalize community feedback mechanisms and collect people-centred data;
- Enabling the use of all available evidence to better understand and track the SDG progress of the furthest behind and most vulnerable, relative to others; and
- Mobilizing all levels of government, marginalized communities, stakeholders and partners to fill gaps in disaggregated data with improved surveys and registries, new techniques and technologies, perception surveys, practitioner know-how, participatory mechanisms etc.

Empower those who are left behind: To achieve the SDGs, the people that are being left behind must be full, equal agents of sustainable development. Urgent action is needed to enable and empower them, including by ensuring their meaningful participation in decision making and establishing safe and inclusive mechanisms for their civic engagement.

UNDP can support countries to empower by:

- Facilitating a rights-based approach to programming that is conducive to meaningful participation, civic engagement and supporting the role of people, communities and civil society organizations to shape public decisions and hold government to account to realize their rights;
- Supporting governments to ensure SDG reporting, follow-up and review are people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and focus on the most vulnerable and furthest behind;
- Expanding opportunities for local civil society, national human rights institutions and community networks to engage decision makers, including to build consensus on the policies required to address gaps in SDG progress, taking into account state obligations and recommendations from human rights treaty bodies and the Universal Periodic Review;
- Strengthening the capacities of civil society actors, and expanding and protecting spaces for people's participation in political and public life;
- Building capacities of national and local authorities to be inclusive, responsive and accountable to their populations, with a special focus on the furthest behind people and places; and
- Promoting and supporting women and young people's political participation in parliamentary and electoral processes as candidates and voters.

Enact policies, laws, reforms, interventions to confront the drivers that leave people behind across **SDGs**: Duty-bearers and rights-holders will both need to shape, deliver and improve policies aimed at curbing inequalities and upholding minimum standards of well-being.

UNDP can support countries to enact by:

- Integrating the pledge to leave no one behind in SDG strategies, plans and budgets through equity-focused and rights-based approaches;
- Promoting equity-focused and rights-based laws, policies, public information campaigns and frameworks to address stigma and discrimination;
- Encouraging SDG localization to understand and address divergent rates of progress, establish SDG support mechanisms and capacities at central, regional and local levels;
- Building accountable, responsive and inclusive local governance systems to reduce inequalities and exclusion;
- Supporting governments and other stakeholders to identify, embed and report effectively on locally achievable and ambitious SDG targets essential to leave no one behind;
- Promoting, supporting and learning from policies and interventions to improve the opportunities and capabilities of the furthest behind people, groups and communities, and respective governments; and
- Assessing options to finance leave no one behind policies and interventions.

I. Introduction

Impressive development gains over the last few decades have improved the lives of many millions. Despite population growth between 1990 and 2015, more than 1 billion people escaped extreme poverty and 2.6 billion gained access to an improved source of drinking water. Over the same period, the world made remarkable progress in lowering the mortality rate among children under five years old, reducing the proportion of women who die in child-birth and tackling the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), malaria and tuberculosis.³

Hundreds of millions of people, however, were left behind, unable to fully participate in or benefit from human development, innovation, economic growth or globalization. They are overwhelmingly among the world's poorest and most marginalized people. Many endure disease, deprivations and indignities that have long been solved elsewhere. As a result, we continue to live in world in which one person in nine is hungry, one in three is malnourished, around 800 million people struggle to survive on less than USD \$1.90 a day and one in every three women experiences physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.⁴⁵

As the poorest and most marginalized people slip further behind, inequalities have been pushed to new heights between and within countries. According to the 2018 World Inequality Report, income inequality between people around the world has been rising since 1980, despite a period of unprecedented poverty reduction and growth. From 1980 to 2016, the world's richest 1 percent captured twice as much of the growth in income worldwide, as the bottom 50 percent⁶. Over the last 25 years, the average (daily) income of the world's poorest 20 percent grew by US\$0.79; a significantly smaller margin than the average increase of US\$8.91 for the other 80 percent.⁷ The world's poorest countries have also become relatively poorer; while the spatial disparities between localities within countries grow wider.⁸

Inequalities in terms of wealth and well-being continue to grow more extreme.⁹ In 2015, Oxfam found that 62 people controlled as much wealth as the poorer 50 percent of the world's population. In 2017,

³ UNDP, "Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone," p. 29. Available from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2016-human-development-everyone>

⁴ World Health Organization (WHO) Department of Reproductive Health and Research, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and South African Medical Research Council, "Global and Regional Estimates of Violence Against Women," 2013. Available from <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/violence/9789241564625/en/>.

⁵ UNDP, "UNDP Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone." Available from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2016-report>

⁶ World Inequality Lab, "World Inequality Report 2018," page 11. Available from <http://wir2018.wid.world/files/download/wir2018-full-report-english.pdf>

⁷ Development Initiatives, P20 Baseline Report, 2017, p.30. Available from <http://devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/P20-Initiative-baseline-report.pdf>

⁸ *The proportion* of the world's poorest people in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) has *more than* doubled since 1990. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, "UNCTAD Least Developed Countries Report 2016," Geneva, Switzerland, 2016. Available from <http://unctad.org/en/pages/PressRelease.aspx?OriginalVersionID=384>

⁹ Wagstaff, A.; Bredenkamp, C and Buisman, L.R. "Progress on global health goals: Are the poor being left behind?" *The World Bank Research Observer* 29(2): p. 137-162, 2014.

they found that just 8 men controlled as much wealth as the bottom 50 percent.¹⁰ A study of 64 countries between 1990 and 2011 found rising health inequalities in nearly half of those countries; while in a quarter, the health of the poorest 40 percent had actually regressed¹¹.

People are left behind when they lack the choices and capabilities that enable others to participate in or benefit from human development. This can be due to their experience of:

- *Absolute deprivation*, where they live in multidimensional poverty or below other minimally accepted standards of security, income, public services, infrastructure or well-being; and
- *Relative disadvantage*, where they face exclusion, discrimination and/or entrenched inequalities; are less able to gain influence, get an education, survive setbacks, acquire wealth, access job markets or technologies; have shorter, riskier lives; rank below median in SDG outcomes and opportunities.

Across countries, women and girls, people in rural areas, indigenous peoples, ethnic and linguistic minorities, people with disabilities, migrants, gender and sexual minorities, youth and older persons are disproportionately among the left behind.¹² In all societies, the furthest behind tend to endure multiple and intersecting disadvantages. With little social mobility and stark inequalities conspire to entrench and perpetuate the disadvantages and deprivations that leave people behind, within and between countries. When people are unable to get ahead or gain influence and perceive “the system to be rigged”, their aspirations shrink, along with the space for political solutions, social trust, meritocracy and problem solving¹³.

New agenda, new opportunities

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development itself is grounded explicitly in the promotion and protection of human rights, including the principles of equality and non-discrimination that are the foundation of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. With the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, 193 countries pledged to “leave no one behind” and “endeavour to reach the furthest behind first”. They grounded their pledge in 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with targets that seek to end poverty, hunger, preventable deaths and curable diseases; curb inequalities in outcomes and opportunities; empower women and girls; and enable all people access to clean water, adequate nutrition, quality healthcare, education, energy services and other essentials.

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that in failing to improve the lives of the furthest behind, inequalities have been driven ever higher. Most development efforts today still stop at the end of the metaphorical paved road; failing to improve the lives of the poorest and most disadvantaged, citing the expense, capacity

¹⁰ Oxfam, “An Economy for the 1%,” January 2016. Available from <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/economy-1>

¹¹ Wagstaff, A.; Bredenkamp, C and Buisman, L.R. “Progress on global health goals: Are the poor being left behind?” *The World Bank Research Observer* 29(2): 137-162, 2014.

¹² UNDP, “Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone.” Available from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2016-report>

¹³ The World Bank, May 2018, “Economic Mobility Across Generations Around the World” Available from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/publication/fair-progress-economic-mobility-across-generations-around-the-world>

and time it requires. Without explicitly changing course, the furthest behind are thus likely to continue to be locked out of global progress, unable to benefit from or participate in innovation, new technologies or the global economy. In this case, the left behind in 2030 will likely be further behind their peers, trapped by many of the same deprivations and disadvantages poor and marginalized people endure today.

Countries around the world agreed to act in concert, to shift the current trajectory of human progress, so that by 2030 all people are enabled to realize their full potential. In setting out to leave no one behind, UN Member States understood that inequalities and acute deprivation will subside only when the furthest behind benefit to a greater degree and faster pace from government policies and investment.

The pledge to leave no one behind is a commitment to end extreme poverty in all its forms and to act explicitly to ensure that those who have been left behind can catch up to those who have experienced greater progress. Practically, the pledge means all governments must chart a new course aimed specifically at curbing inequalities between people, groups and places; correcting for legacies of discrimination and exclusion both between and within countries; and prioritizing and fast-tracking progress among the furthest behind.

Leaving no one behind is a recurring and overarching objective of the 2030 Agenda and SDGs. Implementing the pledge, thus, does not imply a separate course of action but is intrinsic to the action required to achieve the SDGs. As people who are left behind are likely to include more than just the income-poor, countries implementing the pledge will need to go beyond single-factor metrics in order to understand the severity, multiplicity and distribution of disadvantages within their societies.

The 2030 Agenda recognizes that high and rising inequalities are not only an impediment to growth and human development; but also a violation of shared norms, values and people's intrinsic sense of fairness. Evidence of stark and increasingly costly inequalities helped to drive the agreement of all UN Member States to put equity and poverty eradication at the heart of the world's development agenda.

In 2016, the UNDP Human Development Report estimated that inequalities had reduced the world's progress, overall, to achieve human development by around 22 percent.¹⁴ This relationship, however, is

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