United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

CEPA strategy guidance note on
Systematic follow-up and review

November 2022

The United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (CEPA) has developed a set of principles of effective governance for sustainable development. The essential purpose of these voluntary principles is to provide interested countries with practical, expert guidance on a broad range of governance challenges associated with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. CEPA has identified 62 commonly used strategies to assist with the operationalization of these principles. This guidance note addresses systematic follow-up and review of the pledge to leave no one behind, which is associated with the principle of leaving no one behind and can contribute to strengthening the inclusiveness of institutions. It is part of a series of such notes prepared by renowned experts under the overall direction of the CEPA Secretariat in the Division for Public Institutions and Digital Government of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

In reading this guidance note, individuals in government ministries and agencies at all levels of government who are less familiar with the topic will be able to understand the fundamentals. Those who have perhaps taken initial steps in systematic follow-up and review with limited follow-through or impact will be able to identify how to adjust elements of their practice to achieve better results and to better embed and institutionalize the strategy in their organizations. Those who are more advanced in systematic follow-up and review of the pledge to leave no one behind will be able to recognize the practices which contribute to its success.

Understanding the strategy

This strategy is designed to help governments and other stakeholders fulfill the commitment made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to undertake

> "the systematic follow-up and review of implementation of this Agenda over the next fifteen years. A robust, voluntary, effective, participatory, transparent and integrated follow-up and review framework will make a vital contribution to implementation and will help countries to maximize and track progress in implementing this Agenda in order to ensure that no one is left behind."[1]

This strategy focuses specifically on how the pledge to leave no one behind (LNOB) is addressed systematically in the follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The above passage contains a number of modifiers for systematic follow-up and review, some of which are more germane than others to tracking implementation of the LNOB pledge – notably, "robust, … participatory, transparent …"

The 2030 Agenda notes that follow-up and review should take place at all levels, from the local and national to the regional and global levels. At all levels, follow-up and review processes are supposed to maintain a longer-term orientation, identify achievements, challenges, gaps and critical success factors and support countries in making informed policy choices. Follow-up and review processes will help to "mobilize the necessary means of implementation and partnerships, support the identification of solutions and best practices and promote the coordination and effectiveness of the international development system".[2]

In short, follow-up and review at any level should take account of what has been achieved to engage, include, empower and benefit those otherwise left behind; what challenges remain in reaching and engaging those populations; what explains successes and failures in this regard in the specific context; what policy adjustments may be needed in order to more effectively include and benefit those at risk of being left behind; and what lessons may be useful for and transferable to other contexts and countries.

There is not a universally accepted definition of who exactly is being left behind. Yet, most people have an intuitive sense of what the term means. The most common understanding perhaps is of social and economic deprivation – not just the poor but the poorest and the powerless. That is the sense in which we understand the term here. The person who is powerless (and/or socially marginalized) depends on the country context. In some countries it may be indigenous or racial minority groups; in others it may be religious minority groups. In most societies, women and girls may be disadvantaged relative to men and boys. In many

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[1] United Nations, 2015, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.* Available at: https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda
[2] Ibid. para. 74(c).

countries, persons with physical disabilities and mental health challenges are disadvantaged and marginalized.

Social and economic deprivation is normally associated with a lack of political voice to assert one's social and economic rights, which in turn can ensure that those who are left behind continue to be so. Thus, the inclusion of the excluded requires a holistic approach which recognizes them as people entitled to a political voice as well as basic human dignity and a decent living standard.

This Guidance Note needs to be read in context: follow-up and review of progress is part of a series of cyclical steps governments and other stakeholders should take to implement the 2030 Agenda. This Note assumes that governments and others have undertaken previous steps, beginning with deliberation and action to align government strategies, plans and policies with the 2030 Agenda, including the LNOB pledge. Honoring the pledge may in turn require that governments introduce or amend legislation to remove existing legal barriers to the full enjoyment of rights and the full participation in society by all. This may be a point of contention insofar as governments may reserve certain rights only to citizens or others with a certain legal standing in their national territories. Thus, for example, whether undocumented migrants should enjoy the same rights – say to social protection – as citizens remains a highly contentious issue in many societies. The 2030 Agenda cannot be expected on its own to reconcile diverse national interpretations of rights.

Assuming policies and laws are aligned as far as possible with the LNOB pledge, then governments should have reliable means of tracking how efforts at inclusion and empowerment of those left behind are faring (and, if necessary, make policy adjustments and course corrections in a closed feedback loop to policy design/direction). The collection of reliable, disaggregated data and the use of appropriate indicators are essential to measuring progress, and some countries' capacities for such data collection require strengthening.

Not all indicators will be quantitative, just as not all the targets and indicators in the 2030 Agenda are easily quantifiable. Qualitative information will also be needed, for example, on legal safeguards against systematic group discrimination and whether these exist in a given country. Qualitative information can be collected (e.g., through workshops, focus group interviews) or alternative methods of data collection used where quantitative data is not readily available (e.g., citizen score cards).

Quantitative and qualitative measures of progress should be placed in the context of a narrative that explains where and why progress is or isn't being made. This assessment of progress – overall on the 2030 Agenda and specifically on the LNOB pledge – is now institutionalized in most countries as part of the preparation of Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), which they (not infrequently with representatives of civil society) choose to present at the high-level political forum on sustainable development (HLPF) at the United Nations, which is a central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs. Reporting on progress of LNOB implementation varies considerably across VNRs. While some countries particularly

emphasize the LNOB topic, others provide reports that are strongly technocratic, data-driven and oriented to the (national) SDG indicators. Presently, there are only a handful of countries that have not already presented a VNR at least once or which plan to do so by 2023, the midway point on the road to achieving the 2030 Agenda.

This Guidance Note is partly normative and partly empirical. There is no universal blueprint for how countries "ought to" incorporate LNOB into the systematic follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda, just as the 2030 Agenda itself and the follow-up and review process are voluntary in nature. No country can be compelled to conduct its follow-up and review in a particular way. The United Nations can only provide guidance to countries on how to go about the process, and it does so through a few key documents, most notably the "Voluntary Common Reporting Guidelines for Voluntary National Reviews at the High-level Political Forum for Sustainable Development" and the "Handbook for the Preparation of Voluntary National Reviews".[3]

This Guidance Note references these documents and provides examples of how countries apply the United Nations guidelines and integrate the review of LNOB into their own national 2030 Agenda follow-up and review. This Note also highlights what lessons can be learned from effective approaches and considers how cities and other sub-national administrative entities are integrating the LNOB pledge into Voluntary Local Reviews, which continue to grow.[4]

This Note briefly references a few systematic efforts to compile and report data and indicators, across countries and across sub-national entities within countries, on progress made on LNOB. This Note also cites a few case studies of countries or other actors that have made noteworthy efforts on the follow-up and review of progress on LNOB policies and measures and their outcomes.

While the 2030 Agenda is a universal agenda that covers a broad range of human endeavor, there are other internationally negotiated instruments relevant to the LNOB commitment. Notable among these are the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, compliance with which is monitored and reviewed by the United Nations Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.[5] Also notable are international human rights documents such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, with an emphasis on equality and non-discrimination. This process predates the 2030 Agenda and so the focus tends to be on specific issues and groups in society that are vulnerable to human rights violations, without necessarily referring to the LNOB pledge. One recent exercise maps

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[3] See Voluntary National Reviews website: https://hlpf.un.org/vnrs
[4] In 2021 and 2022, 40 subnational governments prepared Voluntary Local Reviews. See: https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews
[5] United Nations Human Rights Council. Basic facts about the UPR. See: https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/basic-facts.

some 50,000 recommendations made to countries in two cycles of the UPRs against the 17 SDGs.[6] The strongest connections are those to SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), SDG 5 (gender equality), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities). As that publication notes: "The pledge to 'leave no one behind' mirrors the fundamental human rights principles of equality and non-discrimination."[7]

Public sector situation and trends

The Sustainable Development Goal Progress Report 2022[8] contains specific examples of how different individuals and groups at risk of being left behind are faring.[9] It also contains frequent reference to the inadequacy of disaggregated data to provide better tracking of the LNOB pledge.

Part of the work of the United Nations Committee for Development Policy (CDP) is the review of VNRs, which includes analyzing the actions governments are taking to leave no one behind. In 2022, the CDP was encouraged by the increasing attention given to LNOB. It noted that all 41 VNRs submitted in 2021 referred to LNOB, which was not the case when reviews started in 2016. Even reports only referring briefly to LNOB discussed measures focused on targeting vulnerable groups. However, policy responses such as those related to the effects of the pandemic on vulnerable groups, focused mainly on social protection measures and less on structural issues. In addition, only two reports mentioned reaching the furthest behind first and none referred to actions to avoid pushing people further behind. While disabled persons, women and girls, the elderly and children were widely recognized when identifying

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[6] Danish Institute for Human Rights, (n.d.), *Linking the Universal Periodic Review to the SDGs*. See: https://www.humanrights.dk/sdg-human-rights-data-explorer; The Office of the United Nations High fdaCommissioner on Human Rights has also produced a Universal Human Rights Index (See: https://uhri.ohchr.org/en/search-human-rights-recommendations) which allows cross-referencing of recommendations made in the context of Universal Periodic Reviews as well as other human rights instruments (notably Treaty Bodies and Special Procedures) against specific SDGs, country and other criteria.

[7] Research conducted by the German Institute for Development and Sustainability (IDOS) through it SDG project at IDOS found that the engagement of national human rights institutions (NHRI) is seriously underreported in VNRs. Out of 136 VNRs analysed (from 2016 to 2019), only 18 mention NHRIs as important stakeholders and five explicitly recognise their oversight role in the SDG process. See Breuer, A. et al., 2021, *Key players in accountable SDG implementation: national human rights institutions*, Briefing Paper 16/2021 (DIE/DIHR). Available at: https://www.idos-research.de/en/briefing-paper/article/key-players-in-accountable-sdg-implementation-national-human-rights-institutions/

[8] Sustainable Development Goal Progress Report 2022. Available at: https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/

[9] Ibid. p.25 (examples of children, young people and women)

marginalized and disadvantaged groups, references to indigenous people, religious or ethnic groups, LGBTIQ and people living with HIV/AIDS were much less common.[10]

Independent assessments of the 2020 VNRs note positive movement (compared with earlier years) toward incorporating the LNOB principle when formulating national sustainable development plans. In 2020, 28 VNR countries (60 per cent, up from 36 per cent in 2019) highlighted LNOB or efforts to address inequality and social exclusion as part of their overarching development plans.[11]

The LNOB concept had evolved since its first VNR, from a focus on supporting least developed countries in international cooperation to one that also encompassed the principle in national policies.[12] This evolution suggests that some developed countries are making an effort to internalize the "universal" nature of the 2030 Agenda and to recognize that inequalities exist in various forms in all countries, and that these threaten to leave some individuals or groups behind.

UN DESA also produces annual synthesis reports of the VNRs. The 2022 report notes that:

> "The principle of leaving no one behind guides the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, which states that reaching those who are furthest behind is essential to achieving the SDGs. While the definition and identification of groups at risk of being left behind varies by country, persons with disabilities, older persons, indigenous peoples, children, youth, women, persons living in poverty and especially extreme poverty, and LGBTIQ persons are commonly highlighted as being most vulnerable. Awareness and action has grown with the demands of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disproportionately affected many vulnerable groups."

According to the report, most VNRs in 2022 documented how governments were mainstreaming their commitment to LNOB into national plans and policies. Governments applied different measures to support vulnerable groups, in the context of 2030 Agenda achievement and response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, such as providing relief aid in the form of cash, emergency employment and business grants; investing in crucial infrastructure; improving legal frameworks and creating multi-stakeholder councils or committees. Some of these measures were targeted at specific vulnerable groups, such as

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[10] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2022, *CDP Background Paper No. 54. What are the Voluntary National Reviews (still) not telling us?* (ST/ESA/2022/CDP/54). Available at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/CDP_BP54_July2022.pdf

[12] Committee for Development Policy (CDP), 2021, *What did the 2020 Voluntary National Review (VNR) still not tell us?*, CDP Background Paper No. 52 ST/ESA/2021/CDP/52, July, UN-DESA, p.3. Available at: https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/CDP-bp-2021-52.pdf

children, youth, women and girls, persons with disabilities, older persons, indigenous peoples, LGBTIQ and migrants.[13]

Ghana's VNR process, for example, included a series of consultations with targeted groups, including women, children, youth and persons living with disabilities to discuss progress made to bridge the gaps, persisting issues relating to vulnerabilities as well as innovative actions to accelerate the attainment of the SDGs. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ghana CARES programme supported vulnerable households with free electricity, water and food during the early period of the pandemic in 2020.[14]

For several years, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) has been publishing rankings of countries that have presented their VNRs to the HLPF in terms of both LNOB readiness and (since 2018) outcomes.[15] The readiness index contains component measures of data, financing (including social protection coverage) and policy (including legal access to health coverage and to land). The outcome index is composed of four components (under-5 mortality, population undernourishment, access by the poor to financial institutions and access to electricity). As of 2019 there were 159 countries with adequate data to rank them on the LNOB outcome;[16] of those 45 per cent were on track and 26 per cent exhibited partial progress toward achieving the LNOB pledge. The off-track countries were generally among the poorest.[17]

Methods of implementation

Systematic follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda begins at the national level, though ideally it should reach the local level in each country.[18] Here the focus is on a methodology for follow-up and review informed centrally by the LNOB pledge. The process involves technical measurement issues (such as collecting disaggregated data to track how the 2030 Agenda is affecting the poorest and most disadvantaged, marginalized people) as well as procedural issues, notably putting in place a broad consultation process – both in the preparation for implementation and in the review of implementation of the 2030 Agenda – which explicitly reaches out to those groups in society who are disadvantaged, marginalized and powerless.

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[13] UN DESA, 2022, Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report 2022, p.20. Available at:
https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/VNR%202022%20Synthesis%20Report.pdf
[14] Ghana, 2022, *Voluntary National Review 2022*. Available at:
https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2022/VNR%202022%20Ghana%20Report_0.pdf
[15] ODI, 2021, *'Leave no one behind' indices 2020*. Available at: https://odi.org/en/publications/leave-no-one-behind-indices-2020/
[16] The wide availability of these data is not surprising, considering that they are among the data that was regularly collected and reported in assessing progress toward the Millennium Development Goals before 2016.
[17] ODI, 2021, *Op.Cit.*.
[18] As noted by one reviewer, the process of follow-up and review of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda should be undertaken in conjunction with follow-up and review of national development strategies and plans if the LNOB pledge is to influence policy formulation and implementation.

With respect to tracking the performance of the inclusion of those otherwise left behind, ideally such analyses should be integral to the overall review of progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. One way of ensuring this is to identify, monitor and report explicitly on those SDG indicators that most clearly reveal differential performance across different societal groups on well-being. This will usually also require disaggregated data for those groups. For example, in the case of the United States, using data disaggregated by gender, a study by the Georgetown Institute for Peace, Women and Security tracks aspects of gender equality across all 50 states.[19] Similarly, a report for the United States produced by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) focuses on SDG indicators that highlight the differential opportunities and outcomes of different racial/ethnic groups, with a particular focus on how far the African-American population is being left behind in multiple dimensions of human well-being.[20] Identifying and measuring such opportunity and outcome gaps is an important first step to designing policies aimed at narrowing them (see Box 1).

Box 1. Focusing questions to identify the best policies to benefit those left behind

The Brookings Institution published an extensive analysis of what is needed if governments and other actors are to strengthen the 'leaving no one behind' agenda, both domestically and internationally. They call for reframing the questions around relevant SDG targets to make them more precise-focusing on *specific* people facing *specific* problems in *specific* places. Some examples of such questions are: How do we achieve gender equality by 2030? How do we improve the lot of the ultra-poor? What works for small-holder farmers? How can problems faced by refugees and migrants be resolved? What leapfrogging opportunities are available to deliver quality education? Are options for universal health care realistic? How can we make sure women participate in new technologies for accessing financial services? What are the trade-offs in using domestic taxes to finance pro-poor transfers? Can we identify poverty hotspots and develop better place-based policies?

Source: Kharas, H., J. McArthur, and I. Ohno (2019) (eds), Leave No One Behind: Time for Specifics on the Sustainable Development Goals, Brookings Institution.

National level implementation of systematic follow-up and review

The following is a guide to the different steps and aspects of systematic follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and its LNOB pledge. Some of these steps, notably the first one below, need to be put in place from the outset or early on if follow-up and review is to be effective. Critical to measuring progress on LNOB is the generation and collection of disaggregated data

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[19] Georgetown Institute for Peace, Women, and Security, 2020, *The Best and Worst States to Be a Woman: Introducing the U.S. Women, Peace, and Security Index 2020*, Washington, D.C. Available at: https://giwps.georgetown.edu/usa-index/
[20] Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), 2021, United States Sustainable Development Report, Available at: https://resources.unsdsn.org/united-states-sustainable-development-report-2021

to enable the tracking of progress by different population characteristics and in particular by those groups at risk of being left behind.

1. **Identify, in a specific national context and through a consultative process, which people are most vulnerable and most at risk of being left behind when progressing towards the SDGs**.

Identification of vulnerable groups

- An essential prerequisite for integrating the principle of leaving no one behind is identifying the groups at risk of being left behind. Even though the 2030 Agenda identifies some of these groups in paragraph 23, each country should identify their own at-risk groups at the national level.[21]

- The CDP provides examples of how different countries have sought to identify groups and individuals at risk of being left behind by socio-economic development. In Kenya, for example, the identification of those at risk of being left behind was made jointly by the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights.[22]

- At the broadest level, as called for by the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination, "[i]dentify unjust, avoidable or extreme inequalities in outcome and opportunities and their root causes, including discrimination in law, policy and practice, structural constraints and unequal relations of power".[23]

Measuring LNOB progress

- Decide what indicators to use to measure progress on LNOB. The United Nations Sustainable Development Group's Operational Guide on LNOB for United Nations Country Teams contains a discussion of the kinds of indicators from which countries may wish to select. It notes three types of indicators: structural or commitment indicators (such as evidence of an end to discriminatory legislation); process or effort indicators (such as the setting up of mechanisms for consultation with marginalized groups); and output or results indicators (such as the rate of change – say, in

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[21] See also: UN-DESA, 2022, *Repository of Good Practices in Voluntary National Review Reporting*, Available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/29453Repository_of_Good_Practicess_in_VNR_Reporting.pdf

[22] See CDP (2021), *Op.Cit.*, Box 3.1.

[23] United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), 2017, *Leaving No One Behind: Equality and Non-Discrimination at the Heart of Sustainable Development.* A Shared United Nations System Framework for Action. Available at: https://unsceb.org/sites/default/files/imported_files/CEB%20equality%20framework-A4-web-rev3.pdf

educational attainment – by the worst-off groups relative to the median or mean of others).[24] Box 2 and Box 3 illustrate different internationally comparative indexes.

- While identifying groups at risk of being left behind, it could be useful to also identify blind spots in data availability, which prevent some groups from being identified as "at risk". Making every group visible in statistical terms is part of the challenge of leaving no one behind.

- As far as possible, make use of geographic identifiers to localize high rates of "behindness" to specific locations to facilitate geographically targeted measures to reach those left behind.[25] For example, Panama calculated the Multidimensional Poverty Index at the township level, enabling the identification of areas most left behind as well as vulnerable groups.[26][27] England has constructed an "Index of Multiple Deprivations" for almost 33,000 small areas of the country with an average of 1,500 inhabitants each, to be able to target interventions geographically.[28]

- Be sensitive to and as far as possible measure the intersectionality of disadvantage and marginalization, that is, how different types of disadvantages tend to compound. In the Kyrgyz Republic, for example, an inter-institutional SDG working group conducted an assessment to identify the groups furthest behind, the specific problems they face, and possible ways to address them. It used multidimensional data in a series of consultations, considering the intersectionality of discrimination, geography, socio-economic status, demographic indicators and fragility.[29]

Box 2. The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index[30]

The Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) produced by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and United Nations Development Programme is meant to complement the income measure of poverty (i.e., the international $1.90 a day poverty rate), measuring each person's

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[24] United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2019, *Leaving No One Behind: a UNSDG Operational Guide for UN Country Teams*, Interim Draft, pp. 41-42, 18 March. Available at:
https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Interim-Draft-Operational-Guide-on-LNOB-for-UNCTs.pdf
[25] Ibid., p. 52.
[26] Panama, 2020, *Voluntary National Review 2020*. Available at:
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26427Panama_Informe_Voluntario_Reducido_1_reduced.pdf.
[27] See CDP (2021), *Op.Cit.*, Box 3.1.
[28] See Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Development, Government of the United Kingdom, 2019, *National statistics: English indices of deprivation 2019*. Available at:
https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2019
[29] Kyrgyz Republic, 2020, *Voluntary National Review 2020*. Available at:
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26459VNR_2020_Kyrgyzstan_Report_English.pdf
[30] OPHI and UNDP, 2022, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2022: Unpacking deprivation bundels to reduce multidimensional poverty*. Available at: https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdp-document/2022mpireportenpdf.pdf

deprivations across ten indicators in three equally weighted dimensions: health, education and living standards[31]. The data suggest that the two measures of poverty are often disparate, with 43 of the 60 countries having both measures in 2021 showing higher MPI than monetary poverty, in some cases by a wide margin.

The latest MPI report (2022) finds that across 111 countries, 1.2 billion people (19.1 percent) live in acute multidimensional poverty, half of which are children under age 18. A very high proportion live in Sub-Saharan Africa, followed by South Asia. Of particular note is that the vast majority of poor people (nearly 83 percent) live in rural areas. In addition, one in six poor people lives in a female-headed household. This suggests the need to be particularly concerned about such households when endeavoring to leave no one behind.

Ethnicity and caste are also important markers for the likelihood of being multidimensionally poor. In Latin America, for example, indigenous peoples are among the poorest people in all countries covered; in India, five out of six of those falling into multidimensional poverty are from lower castes and tribes. [32]

There are two important limitations of the MPI in tracking LNOB progress: (i) so far, the MPI is available for just over 110 countries, representing roughly 6.1 billion people (thus excluding close to 2 billion people); and (ii) the MPI is not available at all for the majority of developed countries, which also commit in the 2030 Agenda to leaving no one behind.

2. Develop an inclusive and participatory process for follow-up and review

A consultative and evidence-based process needs to happen in order to be able to prepare a country's VNR, but that generally happens only every few years. To ensure steady progress on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, resources permitting, governments would do well to conduct more frequent reviews of progress through VNRs, at least every two years. Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) can also be a valuable complement to national reviews and are rapidly growing.[33] In any event, the underlying statistics and SDG indicators are collected and reported to the United Nations Statistics Division by many States annually.

Follow-up and review, including in the context of preparing a country's VNR, must extend well beyond data collection. It should involve an inclusive, consultative and evidence-based process, with a concerted effort made to include the voices of the poorest and most vulnerable populations, and their legitimate representatives. Looking at national priorities from the perspective of the principle to leave no one behind as part of the VNR exercise could also help to frame the challenges that require urgent action.

One 2019 assessment of follow-up and review processes for the 2030 Agenda contains the following conclusion pertaining to inclusiveness:

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[31] Includes several amenities like cooking fuel and electricity, drinking water and sanitation, as well as assets.
[32] OPHI and UNDP, 2021, *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021: Unmasking disparities by ethnicity, casts and gender.* Available at: https://ophi.org.uk/global-mpi-report-2021/
[33] See complete list of VLRs at: https://sdgs.un.org/topics/voluntary-local-reviews

"Overall, standard practice suggests that reporting processes have yet to live up to their promise of inclusion and participation. There is a need for governments to adopt whole-of-society approaches to reviewing 2030 Agenda implementation, including through multi-stakeholder engagement to assess progress and identify ways to accelerate action based on the outcomes of reporting processes."[34]

While this is a general observation about consultation, it could be expected to apply with particular force to the engagement of those traditionally left behind who tend to have the weakest voices and fewest avenues for participation. This could be facilitated by defining explicitly from the outset the roles of different stakeholders, including those at risk of being left behind, including mechanisms to facilitate their participation and consultation – this for both the follow-up and review process and for discussion and preparation of policies and measures to address shortcomings and gaps identified in previous reviews (e.g., VNRs).

3. **Ensure, including through suitable institutional arrangements, that follow-up and review informs action-oriented course corrections and policy adjustments as needed**

The World Public Sector Report 2019 notes that the past few decades have witnessed the development of many direct participatory mechanisms, in various forms and at different geographical levels.[35] Consultation mechanisms at the systemic (cross-sectoral) level include traditional advisory councils such as Economic and Social Councils, and structures linked with the sustainable development tradition such as national sustainable development councils. Consultative mechanisms at the sector level have also been put in place. This has encompassed a great variety of institutional mechanisms and channels for engagement. The level of stakeholder engagement varies across sectors and within the same sector from country to country.

One 2020 assessment of follow-up and review processes for the 2030 Agenda finds that, since 2016, 70 per cent of reporting countries included non-state actors in institutional mechanisms for SDG implementation, and direct engagement of non-state actors in preparing the VNRs increased from 29 per cent in 2018 to 53 per cent in 2019. However, the actual inclusion of stakeholders' recommendations in the final reports is less verifiable. The report also expresses concerns with the decrease of civic space around the world.[36] The 2022 VNR synthesis report

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[34] Kindornay, S. and Gendron, R., 2019, *Accountability for 2030 Agenda Implementation. Good Practice in 2030 Agenda Implementation Series*. Vancouver and Ottawa: British Columbia Council for International Cooperation and Canadian Council for International Co-operation. Available at: https://www.bccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/International-Accountability.pdf

[35] https://publicadministration.un.org/en/Research/World-Public-Sector-Reports

[36] Kindornay, S. and Gendron, R., 2020 *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 2019*. Vancouver and Ottawa: British Columbia Council for International Cooperation and Canadian Council for International Co-operation. Available at: https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/progressing-national-sdgs-implementation-independent-assessment-voluntary-national-review/

confirms that, while holding consultations with local communities has become a common endeavor in preparing VNRs, some countries have set up more institutionalized mechanisms.[37]

The process of follow-up and review should form a continuous cycle of monitoring, reporting and appropriate responses, notably adjusting policies and taking new initiatives as needed. Many governments have taken a 'whole-of-government' approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and, to varying degrees, have engaged non-state actors in the follow-up and review process. Whole-of-society scrutiny of implementation is needed to ensure that public resources, policies and programmes produce the intended results, and corrective measures are taken when progress is insufficient. Governments should adjust the implementation of the SDGs as needed, based on independent evaluations, external audits, legislative oversight, and inputs from civil society, including vulnerable groups at risk of being left behind, among others.

Increasingly, countries report to their legislatures on SDG implementation. Legislatures are important arenas for follow-up and review of legislation, including through their oversight functions. Countries such as Finland have established a regular SDG monitoring and reporting cycle that integrates monitoring with legislative oversight, external auditing and independent evaluation as well as regular engagement of non-government stakeholders in the reporting process.[38] In Germany, the sustainable development strategy is independently monitored by the Federal Statistical Office through a set of indicators and is subject to international peer review.[39] Also, a parliamentary advisory council exercises oversight over the implementation of the sustainable development strategy. In Uganda, the country's VNR describes the important role of the legislature in SDG implementation.[40]

Supreme audit institutions around the world have also demonstrated a strong commitment to contribute to SDG follow-up and review, including by conducting targeted audits relevant to the LNOB pledge – e.g., one on "strong and resilient national public health systems" and one on "elimination of intimate partner violence against women."[41] These audits have often

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[37] UN DESA, 2022, Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report 2022, p.20. Available at:
https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/VNR%202022%20Synthesis%20Report.pdf
[38] Finland, 2020, *Voluntary National Review 2020*. Available at:
https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2021/26265VNR_Report_Finland_2020.pdf
[39] German, 2021, *Voluntary National Review 2021*. Available at:
https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2021/279522021_VNR_Report_Germany.pdf
[40] Uganda, 2020, *Voluntary National Review Report 2020*, Available at: https://sdgs.un.org/documents/vnr-2020-uganda-report-english-26083
[41] See INTOSAI website- Auditing the SDGs: https://www.idi.no/work-streams/relevant-sais/auditing-sdgs

triggered changes in SDG implementation and policies in countries around the world.[42] A few examples[43] of where supreme audit institutions have engaged on SDG implementation include:

- The Philippines: In 2022, to assess progress in providing an enabling environment for the SDGs, the Commission on Audit (COA) conducted the Performance Audit of Preparedness for Implementation of SDGs. The findings showed that significant progress had been made with respect to integrating the 2030 Agenda into national context.[44]

- Azerbaijan: In 2020, the Chamber of Accounts modified its mandate to incorporate the SDGs. The same year, it conducted its first sectoral performance audit of forestry policies and practices, informed by SDG 15 indicators.

- Federated States of Micronesia: In 2019, the office of the national public auditor (ONPA) in collaboration with the office of public auditors of the four states (Pohnpei, Chuuk, Kosrae and Yap) conducted an independent audit of the preparedness for implementation of the SDGs in the Federated States of Micronesia for the period July 2017 to July 2019, which was a cooperative initiative undertaken by the Pacific Association of Supreme Audit Institutions (PASAI).[45]

Independent institutions to combat discrimination and to monitor and follow up on leaving no one behind exist in many parts of the world, including Kenya, Nepal and South Africa. South Africa has a constitutionally established National Human Rights Commission, a Gender Commission and a Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities. The terms of reference of the institutions differ, but in general they are mandated to develop policies, report on compliance with international treaties, and monitor, evaluate and provide recommendations for further action.

Mechanisms for reporting, follow-up and review of international and regional human rights treaties exist in many countries, including ministerial and inter-ministerial bodies. Countries could use the analysis, data and recommendations that are being produced by institutionalized human rights mechanisms to inform SDG monitoring. This could help to identify systemic implementation challenges and align national monitoring systems with global standards. This could also allow countries to align their SDG follow-up and review and their international

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[42] UN DESA, 2021, *Policy Brief #114: Connecting the dots: The still elusive synergies between accountability institutions and the follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals*. Available at :
https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-114-connecting-the-dots-the-still-elusive-synergies-between-accountability-institutions-and-the-follow-up-and-review-of-the-sustainable-development-goals
[43] These are taken from UN-DESA's Good practices and lessons learned in VNR reporting database: https://hlpf.un.org/lessons-learned-and-best-practices
[44] The Philippines, 2022, *Voluntary National Review 2022*. Available at:
https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2022/06222022%20VNR%20of%20the%20Philippines.pdf
[45] Federated States of Micronesia, 2020, *First Voluntary National Review*. Available at:
https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2021/26668VNR_2020_Micronesia_Report.pdf

human rights reporting. Human rights institutions, which may be reporting under international conventions, could provide some useful data for tracking the LNOB pledge, but they are underutilized in many countries.[46]

Systematic follow-up and review at the regional level

Annual Regional Fora for Sustainable Development held under the auspices of the five United Nations Regional Commissions (Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Asia) are regularly involved in reviewing 2030 Agenda progress in advance of the HLPF. At those meetings the LNOB pledge can be and is sometimes reviewed in comparative regional perspective. The regional fora are intended to provide an opportunity to share lessons about 2030 Agenda implementation among countries within a given region, and also to synthesize regional lessons for presentation at the global level during the HLPF.

The United Nations Regional Commissions have produced reports providing comparative analysis and region-wide assessment of the state of progress towards the SDGs and 2030 Agenda, incorporating to varying degrees assessments of progress on the LNOB pledge.

- The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe produced such an assessment in 2021, asking if the region was on track to achieve the SDGs by 2030. Among others, the assessment noted that the COVID-19 pandemic pushed many in risk of poverty and increased inequalities. This exacerbated existing vulnerabilities and widened existing inequality gaps, increasing the risk of leaving behind certain groups.[47]

- The United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean recently published its 2022 report on the region's progress towards the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. The report concluded that overall, the countries of the region had made considerable progress in integrating SDGs into their national development plans. More countries were connecting national and local efforts to achieve the 2030 Agenda; including a specific section of their reports to "leaving no one behind"; providing data to show progress in achieving the 17 SDGs; involving all sectors of government and other stakeholders; and providing solutions to overcome challenges pointed out in previous voluntary national reviews. [48]

- Since 2015, the United Nations Economic Commission of Africa (ECA) in collaboration with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank

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[46] Breuer, A. et al., 2021, *Op.Cit.* . As reported there, "the NHRIs of Ghana, Palestine and the Philippines are engaged in national data partnerships with National Statistical Offices (NSOs), SDG coordination units and civil society to foster the use of human rights data in SDG monitoring and reporting".

[47] UNECE, 2021, *Is the UNECE region on track for 2030? Assessment, stories and insights*, See: https://unece.org/statistics/publications/unece-region-track-2030

[48] UNECLAC, 2022, *A decade of action for a change of era. Fifth report on regional progress and challenges in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in Latin America and the Caribbean*. Available at: https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/47746-decade-action-change-era-fifth-report-regional-progress-and-challenges-relation

and other entities of the United Nations System have organized an annual Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD) to review progress made towards the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda as well as the African Union's Agenda 2063. [49] The eighth session of the Africa Regional Forum on Sustainable Development (ARFSD-8), held in 2022, resulted in the Kigali declaration. Among others, participants called for renewed vigour on the part of African Governments, the entities of the United Nations system and development partners in the implementation of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development, including with regard to strengthening opportunities to improve domestic resource mobilization through sustainable budgeting principles that are aligned with the 2030 Agenda, Agenda 2063 and the Paris Agreement, and for renewed global solidarity in respect of public investment in the implementation of these agendas, on the basis of the principle of leaving no one behind.[50]

- The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia recently published its 2022 SDG Review in which, inter alia, it compared the Arab countries with the rest of the world in terms of the extent of social protection coverage (as of 2020), finding the former lagging behind for almost every category of vulnerable groups, with particularly large gaps for the unemployed, older persons and persons with disabilities. [51]

- The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific has just published its Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022, which details the exclusion and vulnerability of different population groups vis-a-vis progress made towards the SDGs. It concludes that even as governments in the region took action to help those most in need and respond to ongoing crises, the latest data indicated that vulnerability had increased, and huge gaps persisted across different population groups.[52]

Beyond the United Nations system, other actors have produced regional sustainable development reports, notably the Sustainable Development Solutions Network, which also provides regional monitoring and measurement of progress on LNOB (see Box 3 above).[53]

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[49]IISD, 2021, *Africa kicks off yearly regional reviews of SDG progress.* Article. Available at:
https://sdg.iisd.org/news/Africa-kicks-off-yearly-regional-reviews-of-sdg-progress/
[50] Eighth session of the African Regional Forum on Sustainable Development website:
https://www.uneca.org/?q=events/technology%2C-climate-change-and-natural-resource-management/eighth-session-of-the-africa
[51] UNESCWA, 2022, *Annual SDG Review.* Available at: https://publications.unescwa.org/projects/sdgs-review-2022/index.html#
[52] UNESCAP, 2022, *Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2022: Widening disparities amid COVID-19.* Available at: https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2022
[53] SDSN website: https://www.unsdsn.org/

Box 3. Leave no one behind indices for Africa, Europe and the United States[54]

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) has constructed 'leave no one behind' indices for its 2021 African and European Sustainable Development Reports using a set of 31 indicators clustered into four categories: extreme poverty and material deprivation; income inequality; access to and quality of services for all; and gender inequalities. Although measures of gender inequality are disaggregated, other indicators are only disaggregated by income. The SDSN indices for Africa and Europe are a gross way of comparing countries on LNOB outcomes but to be more useful for national policy making, they could benefit from more disaggregated measures of "behindness" to ensure that policies are well targeted. The LNOB index for the SDSN United States report is constructed from 21 indicators, of which eight measure racial disparities (e.g., in homelessness, youth incarceration, child poverty, toxic air burden from factories and rent burden). The report highlights the need to address structural inequality and prioritize the leadership of historically marginalized communities in both their development efforts and the development process itself.

Systematic follow-up and review at the international level

At the international level, systematic follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs is the responsibility of the HLPF meeting annually under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) – and once every four years at the highest level under the United Nations General Assembly. A major portion of each year's HLPF under ECOSOC is devoted to presentations of and discussions about VNRs. In the Secretary General's voluntary common reporting guidelines, countries are encouraged to devote a dedicated chapter to LNOB. [55] The United Kingdom's Overseas Development Institute has produced a template for countries to incorporate their assessment of LNOB progress into their VNRs.[56]

Each year, through a series of global and regional workshops, the UN DESA has provided guidance and peer learning opportunities to countries preparing to present their VNRs at the HLPF. The workshops include countries that have recently presented and can share their

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[54] Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), 2021, *Europe Sustainable Development Report 2021*. Available at: https://www.unsdsn.org/2021-europe-sustainable-development-report; *United States Sustainable Development Report 2021*. Available at: https://www.sustainabledevelopment.report/reports/united-states-sustainable-development-report-2021/; and the Africa report can be found at: https://www.sdgindex.org/reports/2020-africa-sdg-index-and-dashboards-report/.

[55] See https://hlpf.un.org/vnrs.

[56] Overseas Development Institute, 2021, *Leave no one behind – Five years into Agenda 2030. Guidelines for turning the concept into action*, p. 75. Available at: https://odi.org/en/publications/leave-no-one-behind-five-years-into-agenda-2030-guidelines-for-turning-the-concept-into-action/

experiences They have been supported by an informal Member State group of "Friends of voluntary national reviews, follow-up and review of the HLPF"[57].

At the 2018 HLPF, UN DESA introduced an innovation in the form of informal VNR Labs which allows countries (outside the formal HLPF programme) to delve more deeply into the discussion of specific VNRs or groups of VNRs, or to focus on a particular dimension of VNRs. In a number of VNR Labs, governments have invited civil society stakeholders to offer an independent assessment of the VNR process and the country's performance on the SDGs and 2030 Agenda.

One 2021 VNR Lab had as its focus "Inclusiveness and innovation in the VNR process: lessons and best practices from the regions." The discussion focused on the importance of inclusive VNR processes to ensure broad ownership of the SDGs and the realization of the LNOB principle.[58] Another 2021 VNR Lab focused on "Getting it right: Key elements of VNR preparation and reporting", noting that more space in VNR preparation should be allocated to stakeholder engagement and constructive feedback, and more attention should be given to the need for structural changes to be able to do justice to the LNOB pledge.[59] In 2022, several VNR Labs also touched upon the issue of LNOB. One VNR Lab, for example, had its focus on "The role of multi-stakeholder advisory bodies in VNR processes and their potential to accelerate SDG delivery.[60]

In advance of the HLPF, the United Nations Secretary-General produces an annual Sustainable Development Goals Report based on data from across the UN system**,** which contains some indicators of LNOB progress. The 2022 Report notes, with regard to the LNOB pledge, that disaggregated data are insufficient for monitoring progress on the SDGs of vulnerable population groups. Specifically, of the 32 SDG indicators with a requirement of sex disaggregation, only 21 have the latest disaggregated data available in most countries (more than 80 per cent of countries have at least one data point since 2015); for 8 indicators, no sex disaggregated data are available at all. Data are available for only 7 out of 21 indicators that require disaggregation by both sex and age. When considering other disaggregation dimensions such as disability status, the picture is even murkier. Out of ten SDG indicators that require disaggregation by disability status, data are available for only two of them. [61] Community-drive data (CDD) has emerged as an important complement to official data for assessing the status of marginalized, vulnerable groups. Discussions are ongoing, involving the

[57] IISD, 2019, *UNGA, ECOSOC President convene group of friends on VNRs, HLPF review. Article. Available at*: https://sdg.iisd.org/news/unga-ecosoc-presidents-convene-group-of-friends-on-vnrs-hlpf-review/

[58] VNR Lab 2021, *Inclusiveness and innovation in the VNR process: lessons and best practices from the regions*. See: https://hlpf.un.org/2021/programme/vnr-lab-6-inclusiveness-and-innovation-vnr-process-lessons-and-best-practices

[59] VNR Lab 2021, *Getting it right: Key elements of VNR preparation and reporting*. See: https://hlpf.un.org/2021/programme/vnr-lab-7-getting-it-right-key-elements-vnr-preparation-and-reporting

[60] See 2022 VNR Labs website: https://hlpf.un.org/2022/vnr-labs

[61] https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/.

UN Statistical Division as well as civil society organizations, on how such CDD might be effectively integrated with official statistics as a way of better tracking the LNOB pledge. [62]

Case studies

The case studies correspond to the three steps enumerated above for systematic follow-up and review of LNOB at the national level.

1. **Identify, in a specific national context and through a consultative process, which people are most vulnerable and when progressing towards the SDGs**

Sri Lanka: In 2022, a stringent stakeholder mapping process was undertaken, as well as steps taken to ensure inclusivity of a cross cutting sample of various groups, including vulnerable groups. This mapping allowed for over 700 stakeholders to be part of multi-stakeholder consultations and focus group discussions guided by a Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP).[63]

Montenegro: In 2021, a Common Country Analysis was carried out by the UN system in Montenegro, which assessed social exclusion and identified vulnerable population groups to whom particular attention should be dedicated in line with the principle of leaving no one behind. A total of 10 categories of vulnerable groups was identified.[64]

Cabo Verde: In 2021, Cabo Verde's VNR identified individual and collective barriers based on structural, institutional or cultural bias, and nine groups most at risk of being left behind: extremely poor; not in education, employment, or training youth; elderly; people with disability; immigrants; prisoners; children and adolescents at risk; sexual minorities; and women and girls. The VNR highlighted how these groups faced intersectional risks. The VNR identified these groups' immediate, underlying and structural causes of vulnerability and presented ongoing and to-be-developed government commitments to address them and to guarantee full access to rights for the entire population.[65]

Ghana: Ghana's 2019 VNR included an annex with comments on who is being left behind and suggested interventions, identified through the VNR consultation process.[66] In that report, Ghana describes its systematic approach to identifying those most vulnerable to being left behind and designing policies and measures to reach them:

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[62] See for example work of International Civil Society Centre: https://voicescount.org/stories/inclusive-data-as-a-strategic-tool-for-building-back-better-after-the-pandemic/
[63] Sri Lanka, 2022, *Voluntary National Report 2022*. Available at: https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2022/VNR%202022%20Sri%20Lanka%20Report.pdf
[64] Montenegro, 2022, *Voluntary National Review 2022*. Available at: https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2022/VNR%202022%20Montenegro%20Report.pdf
[65] UN DESA, *(n.d.), Repository of Good Practices in Voluntary National Review (VNR) Reporting*. pp. 6-7., *Op.Cit.*
[66] Kindornay, S. and Gendron, R., 2020, *Op. Cit.*

"Leaving no one behind consists of ending extreme poverty in all its forms, reducing inequalities and eliminating discriminatory behaviour. Leaving no one behind also means that those who are furthest behind and most excluded must be prioritised, and every person should have a fair opportunity in life to enable them to reach their full potential. As part of the VNR process, Ghana assessed how the LNOB principle has been put into practice. Population groups in danger of being left behind were identified, as well as the underlying factors that drive their exclusion. The key policies and interventions for addressing the poverty and inequality gaps were reviewed. From the assessment, recommendations were made to strengthen this effort."[67]

Sierra Leone: Sierra Leone's VNR recognized the importance of information, data and data disaggregation for identifying and supporting vulnerable populations. Sierra Leone performed the Integrated Household Survey, Demographic and Health Survey and the Multiple Cluster Indicator Survey to measure progress on the SDGs. The information gathered informed the government on vulnerable groups. Sierra Leone joined with other countries in the creation of a Multidimensional Poverty Index Report that provides information on poverty-related issues involving children. The report was issued in May 2019.[68]

Tunisia: Tunisia and the International Organization for Migration joined forces to launch a migration-related SDG prioritization process, building upon the need to consider migration a shared responsibility that cannot be addressed by one country unilaterally. As a result, a Tunisian national migration strategy will be adopted to guarantee respect for migrants' human rights[69].

2. Develop an inclusive institutional framework and process for follow-up and review

Luxembourg: A structure for citizen participation in the VNR process has been established as part of the major urban and architectural consultation known as "Luxembourg in Transition" which aims at producing land-use planning scenarios to support carbon neutrality in 2050. [70]

Switzerland: The country has fully digitized its stock-taking process for its 2022 VNR through the means of a customized digital solution called "SDGital2030". Through this process, representatives from the national government, cantons, and municipalities, together with diverse civil society actors, were invited to participate in the 2018-2022 baseline assessment to illustrate their contributions to attaining the SDGs.[71]

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[67] Ghana, 2019, *Voluntary National Review 2019*, p. 104. Available at: https://ghana.un.org/en/19155-ghana-voluntary-national-review-report-implementation-2030-agenda-sustainable-development
[68] Kindornay, S. and Gendron, R., 2020, *Op. Cit.*
[69] Tunisia, 2019, *Voluntary National Review 2019*. Available at:
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/23372Rapport_National_Volontaire_2019_Tunisie.pdf
[70] UN DESA, 2022, *Voluntary National Reviews Synthesis Report 2022*, p.20. *Op.Cit.*
[71] *Ibid.*

Lesotho: A Steering Committee on SDGs was established under the chairmanship of the Government Secretary which comprises Principal Secretaries, SDG focal points at the Ministry, the United Nations Country Team, development partners, representatives from academia, the private sector and civil society and Chief Executives of Government Agencies as special invitees. It will oversee and periodically review operations of Technical Coordination Committees for monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with associated targets.[72]

Denmark: A business community initiative partnered with the national statistics office to identify better ways to measure the impacts of SDG-related initiatives. The final goal of this work was to create a multi-stakeholder-based dataset to support evidence-based decision-making and the preparation of the government's annual SDG progress review. The Danish business community also conducted research on how SDG implementation could be measured and reported in private companies' reports.

Timor-Leste: Since its independence, the Government of Timor-Leste has adopted key legal instruments to promote inclusion, representation and the participation of women, youth and the elderly. Cash transfers to veterans and vulnerable groups were prioritized early on by the Government to ensure social cohesion and continued peace. Continuing to resource and implement concrete policies and actions to support remote rural areas, persons and children with disabilities, informal workers and young mothers is vital to reach the furthest behind first.

United Kingdom: Among other initiatives in the United Kingdom, the Government of Scotland has produced an Equality Evidence Finder tool in the form of an interactive matrix, which enables users to cross-reference various indicators of well-being to group characteristics, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups.[73] For example, one can access information and data on how COVID-19 affected different ethnicities, or how people of different socio-economic statuses compare in terms of health care, advanced learning and skills, and other categories.

3. **Ensure, including through suitable institutional arrangements, that follow-up and review informs action-oriented course corrections and policy adjustments as needed**

Greece: The National Roma Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2030 was established to address the identified and persistent issues of social exclusion of Roma in Greece. It aspires to address the issue through national, regional and local policies across 4 dimensions: (i) poverty prevention and alleviation, (ii) access to basic services and goods, (iii) prevention and fight against stereotypes and discrimination and (iv) active participation in economic, social and political life. The overall strategy and action plan sets measurable indicators to be

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[72] Lesotho, 2022, *Voluntary National Review 2022*. Available at:
https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2022/VNR%202022%20Lesotho%20Report.pdf
[73] See Equality Evidence Finder: https://scotland.shinyapps.io/sg-equality-evidence-finder/

complemented by a monitoring mechanism to enable continuous evaluation of achievements or setbacks and necessary adjustments of actions.[74]

Japan: In order to deepen the involvement of the next generation in SDG achievement, the 'Next-Generation Platform for Promoting SDGs' was launched in December 2018. In 2020, platform members discussed with the United Nations Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth how Japanese youth could contribute to a society where no one is left behind as emphasized by the SDGs..[75]

Uganda: The Parliament has been proactive in supporting Government efforts to implement the SDGs on several fronts. It plays a critical role in executing its oversight function and assesses the performance of the national budget using two key compliance tools. The first is the 'Certificate of Compliance', which gauges the country's commitment to achieving the national development plan "NDPII" and the 2030 Agenda through budget interventions and allocations. This has resulted in the level of compliance of ministerial budgets allocated to the SDGs going up from 54 percent in 2017/18 to 60 percent in 2018/192. The second is the 'Gender and Equity Certificate', which placed the compliance level of the 2019/20 budget at 61 percent. The discourse over these tools has identified the need to improve capacity at sector and local government levels to ensure that planning and budget execution is inclusive.[76]

Peer-to-peer learning and research

Peer-to-peer learning can take different forms, from compendia of case studies to workshops to networks of like-minded individuals and organizations who systematically share experiences in an effort to deepen understanding and improve performance on how to leave no one behind in decision-making, public policy, programming, budgeting and resource allocation.

Peer-to-peer learning may happen at different levels, from the local to the global. Two initiatives to promote peer-to-peer learning globally are the informal Member State group of "Friends of voluntary national reviews, follow-up and review of the HLPF"[77]established to provide mutual support in the VNR preparation process, and the UN DESA-initiated VNR Labs held during the HLPF (see discussion above).

UN DESA's 'Repository of Good Practices and Lessons Learned in VNR reporting'[78] has been updated and contains entries by different countries on good practices and lessons learned

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[74] Greece, 2022, *Voluntary National Review 2022*. Available at:
https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2022/VNR%202022%20Greece%20Report.pdf
[75] Japan, 2021, *Voluntary National Review 2021*. Available at:
https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2021/28957210714_VNR_2021_Japan.pdf

[76] Uganda, 2020, *Voluntary National Review 2020. Op.Cit.*
[77] IISD, 2019, *UNGA, ECOSOC President convene group of friends on VNRs, HLPF review.* Article. *Op.Cit.*
[78] UN DESA, (n.d.), *Repository of Good Practices in Voluntary National Review (VNR) Reporting. Op.Cit.*

on preparations, reporting and follow-up on the voluntary national reviews, including on reporting on the LNOB pledge. For example, Cabo Verde, Ethiopia, Guyana, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nicaragua, and Tunisia are listed as having good practices regarding LNOB; Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Japan, Niger, and Moldova regarding linking COVID-19 and LNOB; Norway, Republic of Korea, Sierra Leone, Thailand, Togo and Zimbabwe regarding engaging vulnerable groups.

The HLPF website also contains a list of tools that can be utilized to track progress on the SDGs in different aspects, including how specific vulnerable or disadvantaged groups are faring, analyzing for example the situation of children and youth, women and indigenous peoples.[79,80]

Besides the repository of good practices and lessons learned in VNR reporting and the tools for analyzing the situation of various groups, UN DESA has also produced a volume on *SDG Good Practices: A compilation of success stories and lessons learned in SDG implementation*, the Second Edition of which was released in February 2022.[81] Some examples cited of good practices in leaving no one behind are:

- **Angola**: The Train for Trade II' EU-UNCTAD Joint Program for Angola works with the Ministry of Industry and Commerce to train entrepreneurs and provide policy and institutional support to diversify the economy towards green products and sectors, away from its heavy reliance on fossil fuels. The Program has a particular focus on the participation of women and small producers to create equality through economic empowerment.

- **Egypt**: The national government and the World Bank launched the 'Upper Egypt Local Development Program' to boost public capital investments and develop broader connectivity, industrial infrastructure, and availability of services in two of the country's poorest governorates.

- **Nigeria**: The RecyclesPay Educational Project is "a 'Plastic-For-Tuition' project implemented by the African Cleanup Initiative. Its goal is to pay the tuition fees of over 10,000 vulnerable students by the year 2030. This program is targeted at low-income communities, to provide parents with an opportunity to pay their ward's school fees using plastic bottles and other recyclable materials like cans, paper, sachet, glass bottles and Nylon. It ensures children from underprivileged communities remain

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[79] See HLPF tools: https://hlpf.un.org/tools
[80] For HLPF tools relating to SDG 5 and the situation of women specifically, see also:
https://hlpf.un.org/tools?f%5B0%5D=tool_area_taxonomy_term_name%3ATools%20for%20analyzing%20the%20situation%20of%20women
[81] UN DESA, 2022, *SDG Good Practices: A compilation of success stories and lessons learned in SDG implementation - Second Edition.* Available at: https://sdgs.un.org/publications/sdg-good-practices-2nd-edition-2022

in school, identifies new ways to prevent plastic waste from littering the environment and promotes sustainable living amongst vulnerable groups and communities."

Civil society organizations have undertaken their own efforts to systematically follow up and review progress on various aspects of SDG 16 which contains several targets of particular importance to honouring the LNOB pledge. One initiative is the SDG16Hub, a practitioners' platform that allows different stakeholders with an interest in SDG 16 to share their experiences contains an inventory of "Best practices/Recommendations" from different stakeholder groups.[82] One example is a comprehensive report, prepared by a large international law firm, of all the 2021 VNRs and their treatment of progress on SDG 16+ targets (which includes SDG 16 targets and 24 related targets under other Goals).[83]

At the regional level, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific utilized "twinning" successfully to promote peer learning, pairing a first-time VNR presenter in the region with a repeat presenter. For example, in 2022, Tuvalu (a first-time presenter) partnered with the Philippines (a third-time presenter). Pakistan and Sri Lanka were twinning in 2022. Both had presented one earlier VNR.

International development cooperation

UN DESA and the United Nations Development System (UNDS) support many developing countries in preparing their VNRs, including by organizing national consultations.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG) has explicitly included LNOB as a framework for its country programming and advisory work, and consequently progress on LNOB will need to be assessed periodically in the context of the review of the effectiveness of its work. The most recent example of such a system-wide assessment, which evaluates UNDS's COVID-19 response, provides a partial picture of how far LNOB is being institutionalized at the country level. It cites the example of Jordan, where there is evidence that a focus on vulnerable groups is being integrated into key planning documents. Within the United Nations Country Team, positive indications are the presence of a Human Rights Advisor in the Office of the Resident Coordinator and the establishment of an empowered interagency Gender Theme Group. With regard to the 13 United Nations entities whose Strategic Plans were reviewed, reference to joint work with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCR) was found only in UNICEF's Strategic Plan.

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[82] See SDG16 Hub: https://www.sdg16hub.org/all-topics?field_topic_type_target_id=304

[83] Global Alliance for Reporting Progress on Peaceful, Just and Inclusive Societies, 2021, *Review of the 2021 Voluntary National Reviews and SDG16*. Available at: https://www.sdg16hub.org/system/files/2022-01/Review%20of%20the%202021%20Voluntary%20National%20Reports%20with%20a%20focus%20on%20Sustainable%20Development%20Goal%2016.pdf.

Three Strategic Plans (WFP, UNEP, UNICEF) cite working with the UNHCR in support of refugees and returnee populations as a strong commitment.[84]

The UNSDG provides an operational guide for United Nations Country Teams on leaving no one behind.[85] Step 4 of the guide provides guidance on how to measure and monitor progress, with the following specific checklist for country teams:

- Help identify and contextualize LNOB indicators and targets – having a clear overview of data and data gaps and a plan for monitoring SDG progress is an important precondition for effective SDG follow-up and review. Quantitative and qualitative indicators will be necessary – measuring commitments, processes and outcomes.

- Support innovative ways of tracking, visualizing and sharing information.

- Develop partners' capacity to monitor inequalities, including gender inequality and discrimination, including that of governments (national, subnational) and communities.

UN DESA has published a report on how the UN's Resident Coordinator Offices (RCOs) around the world have supported countries in the preparation and follow-up of their Voluntary National Reviews.[86] In India, for example, while the central planning unit of the Indian Government prepared the overall analysis of SDG progress, the RCO provided resources to enable a wide range of consultations with populations that are most often left behind. There were 17 consultations with marginalized groups, including persons with disabilities, local communities (e.g., Dalits, Adhivasis), indigenous peoples, women, and youth, which were co-hosted with civil society networks who already had trusted relationships with these communities. Inputs were then received from each of these consultations and a number of recommendations were included in the final VNR.[87]

In Latin America, the BRICS Policy Center and the Network of Southern Think Tanks-Latin America (NeST-AL), in collaboration with the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, organized the second annual "Dialogues on International Development Cooperation"[88] around the topic of

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[84] United Nations Executive Office of the Secretary General, 2022, *Interim Report: System-Wide Evaluation of the UNDS Response to COVID-19*, March. Available at: https://unsdg.un.org/resources/interim-report-system-wide-evaluation-unds-response-covid-19

[85] United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2019, *Operationalizing Leaving No One Behind*. Available at: https://unsdg.un.org/resources/leaving-no-one-behind-unsdg-operational-guide-un-country-teams

[86] UN DESA, 2022, *Enabling Transformation: The Role of UN Resident Coordinator Offices and Country Teams in Support of the Voluntary National Reviews on the 2030 Agenda* (prepared by Oli Henman). Available at: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/29830Enabling_Transformation_UN_RCO_VNR.pdf

[87] Ibid., p.11.

[88] Reported in OECD, 2018a, *Case Studies on Leaving No One Behind,* A companion volume to the Development Co-operation Report 2018, Paris. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/development/case-studies-on-leaving-no-one-behind-9789264309333-en.htm

South-South co-operation contributions to leaving no one behind. Among the ideas proposed for mainstreaming the LNOB pledge in South-South co-operation are the following:

- Identifying those furthest behind as preferential beneficiaries of development projects.

- Ensuring that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups are included in the whole project cycle.

- Formulating evidence-based policies and strategies to act against structural inequalities.

- Having disaggregated data that better capture official development assistance flows and South-South initiatives directed to those left behind.

Bilateral development cooperation

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which brings together in the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) the development cooperation agencies of all of its members (and more), focused its 2018 flagship Development Co-operation Report on how donor countries are approaching the LNOB pledge. As a companion to that report, it has produced a collection of LNOB case studies.[89] A number of developed countries have included explicit consideration and measurement of progress on LNOB in their development cooperation programmes.

The following are a few examples of how donor governments describe their efforts at addressing the LNOB pledge.

Latvia: Latvia has almost tripled its bilateral development cooperation budget managed by the MFA, allowing the country to expand its geographical scope of support, including to countries in Africa, beginning in 2022. In the run up to 2027, 16% of its bilateral development cooperation will be directed to the goal of promoting gender equality.[90]

Norway: The country prioritizes gender equality and human rights in its development co-operation as ways to advance progress on the LNOB pledge. Its 2021 VNR explains in part why it specifically supports a vibrant civil society:

> "Norway provides financial and political support for an independent, vibrant and pluralistic civil society, which contributes significantly to the objective of leaving no one behind through inclusive and peaceful participation and realisation of human rights. Results related to our efforts in preventing normative backsliding, supporting human rights defenders and protecting the existing international human rights

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[89] *Ibid*; OECD, 2018b, *Development Co-operation Report 2018: Joining forces to leave no one behind*, Paris. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/social/development-co-operation-report-20747721.htm
[90] Latvia, 2022, *Voluntary National Review 2022*. Available at: https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2022/VNR%202022%20Latvia%20Report%201.pdf

instruments and institutions are also highly relevant, as these instruments, institutions and organisations have equality and non-discrimination at the core."[91]

It also views its rule-of-law and anti-corruption emphasis as integral to leaving no one behind insofar as it advances impartiality in justice and public administration. In its 2021 VNR, Norway announced that it is preparing a strategy on disability inclusion for incorporation in its development cooperation.

Germany: In 2019, Germany adopted a strategy for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in its development cooperation. In 2021, Germany launched an LGBTI Inclusion Strategy to guide its foreign policy and development cooperation. As part of the strategy, the German Government is promoting the collection of aggregated and anonymized data on the human rights situation of LGBTI people to bring existing inequalities into the light, improve support for LGBTI people and their representatives, and tailor it to their specific needs.[92]

Sweden: In its 2021 VNR, Sweden reiterated the main dimensions of its commitment to leaving no one behind (contained in an earlier report devoted to LNOB[93]: realizing human rights and gender equality; strengthening empowerment and participation; advancing the transition towards resource-efficient, resilient and climate-neutral economies; promoting multidimensional poverty reduction; promoting social dialogue and decent work; progressively advancing universal social protection; and improving data and monitoring.[94]

United Kingdom: The United Kingdom's Digital Access Programme (DAP), which began in 2018, aims to promote the digital inclusion of underserved communities and excluded groups in the countries where its development cooperation program is active.[95] An interdepartmental task force including the Department for International Development and several other agencies conducted diagnostic assessments of digital inclusion needs in five partner countries – Brazil, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. A flexible delivery model enabled the DAP to leverage digital inclusion as an enabler to help respond to and mitigate the COVID-19 crisis in these countries.

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[91] Norway, 2021, *Voluntary National Review* 2021. Available at:
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/28233Voluntary_National_Review_2021_Norway.pdf
[92] Germany, 2021, *Voluntary National Review 2021*. Available at:
https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/vnrs/2021/279522021_VNR_Report_Germany.pdf
[93] Sweden, 2020, Sweden and the 'leave no one behind' principle. Nationally and globally. Available at:
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26672Sweden_and_LNOB_2020.pdf
[94] Sweden, 2021, *Voluntary National Review 2021*. Available at:
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/279582021_VNR_Report_Sweden.pdf
[95] OECD,2021, *Development Co-operation Report 2021: Shaping a Just Digital Transformation*, Paris. Available at:
https://www.oecd.org/dac/development-co-operation-report-20747721.htm

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