

United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth
2016 High Level Political Forum Paper
No One Left Behind

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Introduction

This position paper details the formal inputs of the United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth (UN MGCY) to the 2016 High Level Political Forum (HLPF) for Sustainable Development corresponding to its current theme, “*Leaving No One Behind.*” The thematic content is structured around the national level implications and operationalisation of the priorities identified pertaining to the institutional components and modalities of the HLPF.

Children and Youth and the SDGs

Children and youth development has seen significant progress since the turn of the century. However, success has not been even and in some cases, the poorest children and young people have experienced a decline in progress. Excluded groups of children and youth, such as refugees, ethnic minorities, children and young people in alternative care settings, children and youth with disabilities, indigenous children and youth, young migrants and others, are not benefiting from global progress, especially in health and learning. Such exclusion is a violation of children and youth’s rights and goes against the very principle of leaving no one behind.

What Does It Mean for Children and Youth to Be Left Behind?

Globally, excluded children and youth have less access to quality health and education services, water, sanitation, and electricity; are more likely to experience violence and crime; those in unstable or at risk households are more likely to lose parental care and end up living in alternative settings. Particular challenges for excluded children include: birth registration, stunting, infant mortality and access to quality care and education. The furthest behind children and youth face stigmatization, discriminatory laws and policies, and unfair cultural practices and social norms. They are persecuted because of their beliefs or identities; administratively invisible or unregistered; and adversely affected by disasters related to climate change and large population movements due to conflict. As such, they may face long-term psychological damage. The exclusion and neglect of these children is a clear violation of their rights.

All goals affect the lives of children and youth, which means that the targets and measures must be age-sensitive, and programs and measures must be available to children and youth regardless of their status and situations. Furthermore, children’s rights and special needs must be carefully integrated in the identification, design and implementation of national policies to achieve the SDGs. The indicators and reporting mechanisms must track progress and gaps to reach the furthest behind first when reporting at the national level and/or to the HLPF. Finally, governments, under the obligation of human rights treaties, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child must uphold the rights of all groups of children and youth, ensuring their progress against the SDGs in the short and long term.

Child and Youth-Centered Accountability

The 2030 Agenda recognizes children and youth as agents of change. Accountability is at the core of this narrative on children and youth. However, to enable them to be engaged in public and social accountability, its mechanisms need to be child and youth sensitive, as well as child and youth-led, and public officials must respectfully listen and respond. This means that children and young people need clear and predefined ways to meaningfully participate and dialogue with duty bearers, and must get relevant, age-appropriate information on matters that affect them – in language they can understand and formats they can access.

As implementation of the 2030 Agenda takes place at national and local levels, the primary focus of accountability must be directed there, with social accountability mechanisms having much to offer by equipping inhabitants, including children and youth, and governments to work constructively together to achieve sustainable outcomes by assessing how well States are fulfilling their responsibilities.

Data on the Situation of Children and Youth

Disaggregation of data and information by age and territory is essential for the monitoring of the SDGs. A key principle to ensure that this disaggregation does not leave anyone behind is to do so by different situations and exclusions such as gender, age, geography, ethnicity, disability, care status and/or social groups as appropriate. This will ensure that no group of children and youth is left behind.

But disaggregation of data is only possible if good data is collected, and analyzed. Efforts to fill the current data gap would help to enhance the design and monitoring of dedicated policy measures while promoting inclusive development ensuring that that no child is left behind. The lack of statistics and disaggregated data by age impede that we can assess how policies reach or affect children. Data on children is mostly collected through household survey. Consequently, it is imperative that existing methods on these surveys be aligned and adapted to the SDGs and the key principles on data disaggregation recommended.

Thus we call for all governments and its NSOs to further invest in data collection on the situation of children and youth living in vulnerable circumstances and that a dialogue with experts and partners is opened and maintained to ensure that those children and youth that are now “invisible” in official statistics are brought to light and the provisions of the SDGs are fulfill for and with them as well.

Finally, we call for the promotion of innovations in technology that support participatory monitoring and accountability, and enable children and youth to collect data. When children and youth help determine what data is collected and are enabled to collect data themselves, the resulting data can be more responsive to local contexts. In the process, children and youth learn to interpret data and use it to inform action and political engagement.

Intergovernmental Space for Children in the SDGs

To carry out its follow up and review mandate, the HLPF will “build on existing platforms and processes, where they exist, avoid duplication and respond to national circumstances,

capacities, needs and priorities.”¹ Unlike other marginalized groups addressed in Agenda 2030, children have no existing mechanism in the ECOSOC eco-system where progress on meeting child focused goals and targets can be tracked. This is a gap that must be addressed as HLPF will have reports from several functional bodies, Forums and others which will include declarations, decisions and resolutions on various population groups, except on children which can potentially lead to children being left behind.

We call on the General Assembly and the ECOSOC under which auspices the HLPF meets, **to facilitate an annual-intergovernmental forum on children in the SDGs** that would take stock of how children are faring in SDGs implementation. This exercise would track progress, identify gaps, review best practice, and contribute to a shared learning. Furthermore, it would enable early identification of emerging issues and challenges that could be addressed in a timely fashion to help build and maintain momentum on SDGs for children.

Using innovation and technology, children’s voices can directly and meaningfully interact with Member States. The UN’s “we the people” can then truly become a reality.

National Level Engagement of Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS)

National sustainable development councils or equivalent structures are critical to the effective and coherent implementation, follow-up, and review of the 2030 Agenda. Such structures should integrate elements of the agenda including the SDGs, into all ministries and streams of work. As part of their institutional mechanism, the councils should integrate MGoS in all their formal deliberations, across the policy spectrum: in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the 2030 Agenda and related frameworks.

Additionally, the guidelines and modalities of formal national reviews, at the national level should officially recognize and incorporate the shadow reports and inputs from MGoS across all thematic areas, especially since these inputs can help fill any gaps in the government’s data collection, reporting and evaluation efforts. “Leaving no one behind” means that those closest to the grassroots and to the people that the 2030 Agenda targets, must be seen as partners in the important work around follow-up and review.

Child Participation in National Level Accountability

Despite the great benefits that child participation can bring to decision making and monitoring processes, children are often excluded due to their different capacities and ways for engagement. Therefore, it is critical to provide child friendly materials and adapt processes to the needs of children so they can help create spaces for children, especially the furthest behind, to participate in the monitoring of the goals.

Amongst the groups of children that should be consulted on the progress made on SDGs are: girls, children in conflict, children living in alternative care institutions, children living in poverty or children with disabilities, among others.

¹ Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paragraph 74, f)

On a national level, governments should conduct regular reviews of progress with formal opportunities for all people, including children and excluded groups. The active and meaningful participation of children, and especially those children in situations of exclusion or vulnerability, will ensure more thorough analysis of the challenges they face as well as the development of more supportive and sustainable policies and strategies tailored to their needs, and national and local realities. National governments should establish and strengthen formal and informal spaces for children to engage in accountability and track how governments are performing.

The HLPF should ensure that children participate in its national meetings and global processes, that all reviews and meetings are open and inclusive with the participation of multi-stakeholders as well as putting in place interactive dialogue between Member States and civil society, including children and marginalized groups. In addition, all input opportunities for the HLPF should be made available in a child friendly online portal in a timely, open and child-friendly manner.

Linkage with Other Processes in Sustainable Development

Greater attention must be given to the integration of other sustainable development related frameworks (the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the 10 Year Framework of Programmes for Sustainable Consumption and Production, the Third Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development - Habitat III, etc.) in the context of national action plans and indicators, as well as reporting on best practices in building coherence across policy agendas. A recent good example on highlighting effective interlinkages can be borrowed from the inaugural report of the Inter-Agency Task Force report on Financing for Development.

This means that national implementation plans must formally seek to break silos in terms of the implementation of these frameworks, promoting the integration of the work of relevant ministries at the national level, while at the same time engaging regional and local authorities and stakeholders in the full spectrum of implementation, follow-up, and review. The HLPF is the body that can ensure the integration necessary to achieve the successful and coherent implementation of these frameworks, specially at the national level.

Science Based Reviews and Science Policy Interface (SPI)

The Rio+20 outcome, the HLPF, and the 2030 Agenda, all reinforce and emphasise the critical importance of promoting and implementing a science policy interface. This is meant to enhance the science-policy interface that is crucial to drive more empirically-based, data informed decision making for policy design, implementation, monitoring, follow-up, and review.

Policies aimed at such an approach, including national Science and Technology Roadmaps for the implementation of the 2030 agenda should recognize the value of institutional science and traditional indigenous knowledge systems. Such initiatives include action plans for coherence between science and technology roadmaps/process for different sustainable development agendas (i.e. S&T roadmap for implement of the Sendai Framework, COP21, New Urban Agenda, TFM, etc.)

In this regard the annual STI forum should be used as an avenue for countries to report on their progress on these fronts, to this effect, a section in the chair's summary should be dedicated to this.

The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR)

The Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR)'s focus on identifying emerging issues is a very important component for the longer term planning on national implementation strategies and their subsequent reviews. Member states should report on and share best practices about the steps taken to address the emerging issues specific to their context. This should be included as a priority guideline for national reviews at the global and national level. In addition special attention should be given to the local level while working on emerging issues.

In terms of the modalities for the peer reviews of policy briefs for the GSDR itself, it should incorporate spaces for nominations by MGoS.

Further reporting on the implementation of SPIs should include Interventions, especially involving technologies within local contexts and capacities to upscale local innovation that promote societal progress and economic opportunities, while staying within planetary thresholds.

Technology Facilitation Mechanism and Technology Assessment

An enhanced interpretation of the mandate for the Technology Facilitation Mechanism, should cover a broader spectrum of work that develops action plans for technology, specially associated with health and the environment to be more easily accessed for proactive and preventative measures.

At the same time it should develop guidelines for national level technology assessment mechanisms that use community based approaches to assess the social, environmental and economic impacts of a technology to ensure appropriate, purpose-driven, and context-specific change.

People Centered, Planet Sensitive Thematic Reviews

Serious cohesive reviews of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda involves assessments of the respective trajectories of the environmental, social, and economic variables, and how they affect to each other, and in turn the SDG indicators. Tracking and monitoring these linkages would create a data driven and evidence based overview of the progress of the agenda that is mutually reinforcing and creates a natural resource usage pattern.

Measuring and assessing the national progress on SDGs indicators, as compared to the national ecological footprint as a ratio along with new measures of progress beyond GDP is

critical to ascertain the genuine holistic national progress towards sustainable development. This analogy should also be extended to incorporate extra-territorial contributions to ecological footprints.

In addition, taking stock of a country's ecological footprint (through a natural capital accountability system) compared to environmental thresholds, planetary boundaries and bio capacity, should be included as a mandatory guidelines in national reviews at the global and national levels. Such an analysis should also track input oriented proactive measures like regulatory steps imposing biophysical caps on the extraction of virgin resources and measures being taken to replenish the depleted resources in the communities where the depletion took place (distance and hypothetical replenishments through credits and offsets do not account for real replenishments.) The structure of such an analysis can be borrowed from the work of the Secretary General's scientific advisory board, whose terms of reference (TORs) includes actions points on creating global assessments of critical environmental thresholds.

Voluntary Commitments and Partnerships

The voluntary Commitments and their reporting are only a basic steps to achieve truly inclusive "Partnerships" leaving no one behind. Every form of partnership, including those making voluntary commitments, should be held accountable in a systematic manner through institutional mechanisms such as the registry of commitments (one of the outcomes of Rio+20). Failure to effectively do so should result in Any partnerships should go through ex ante and ex post community based assessment and be assessed for its economic, social, and environmental aspects.

To ensure the effectiveness of partnerships, partnership activities have to be reported corresponding to their specifically related areas and indicators of the SDGs and related frameworks. In order to get a genuine picture of the contributions of the partnerships, the reporting of process should also include the trade offs between different indicators of the respective sustainable development indicators.

Conclusion

Children and youth surely have a role to play in the implementation, follow-up, and review of the 2030 Agenda at all levels. As has been made clear, leaving no one behind means that children and youth must not only be lifted up by the SDGs, but seen as partners in implementation. In addition, their view span thematic areas and institutional arrangements beyond their own demographic. A national and global review process that is rights based, people centered, planet sensitive, evidence based, and participatory is a basic minimum. Fifteen years of success requires all stakeholder to be involved. Surely, those most closely associated with future generations must be viewed as the backbone of the framework.