

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

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

Ensuring inclusiveness, equality and equity means approaching the SDGs in an integrated manner. The realization of the set of goals under review will not be possible if progress across the other SDGs is not also ensured. The VNRs should reflect the implementation of the 17 goals in accordance to their universal, integrated and interrelated approach.

Over three years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, stakeholder engagement remains limited. The HLPF has the potential to have an incredibly meaningful impact on SDGs implementation; however, this can only be achieved by increasing civil society engagement. The HLPF should establish a formal mechanism for reporting that brings the contributions of civil society out of the shadows.

The upcoming review of the HLPF will provide crucial opportunities to increase the effectiveness of the follow up and review mechanism of the SDGs. All stakeholders must be included in the review process, which must be transparent and participatory, in the same ways as the Open Working Groups.

For the specific goals under review, particularly on Goal 4, Governments must ensure that everyone, girls and boys alike, including people affected by emergencies and crises, have access to free, universal, quality equitable, safe and inclusive education. They must also ensure that both children and adults have an adequate health and nutrition to allow them to achieve maximum educational attainment. Similarly, it is important to consider interlinkages across the SDGs. In SDG 4, schools can play a critical role in protecting children from violence. Consequently, there are targets on SDG 4 that can directly contribute to SDG 16 on its targets related to violence prevention.

On Goal 8, efforts are needed to promote job creation and improve the quality of jobs. This means strengthening implementation of labour standards going beyond payment of living wages. Efforts must likewise be made to end child labour. Governments must incorporate climate- smart and resilient thinking into infrastructure and economic plans to ensure economic growth opportunities are not washed away by disasters.

Regarding Goal 10, efforts are needed to address inequality within countries through measures including progressive taxation, improved implementation of social protection mechanisms as well as universal, free and equitable public services, ensure greater visibility of women and persons with disabilities and equal access to justice. Inequalities also increase children’s risk of experiencing different forms of violence. The failure to protect children from violence can also contribute to and exacerbate inequalities and discrimination.

On Goal 13, national governments need to put in place actionable plans to improve the use of renewable energy sources at every household level. High and low -income countries should initiate the decarbonization in accordance to the Paris Agreement. In addition, Governments must promote traditional and local knowledge on climate mitigation to allow people to use their knowledge and practices to manage their livelihoods.

Regarding Goal 16, strengthening national and international norms on peace, justice and governance is required. This needs to be backed by coordinated efforts to build institutional capacities and mechanisms for inclusive participation. Similarly, Governments must prohibit all forms of violence against children in all settings. Evidence based solutions should be delivered through strong child protection systems, guided by policy solutions and multi-sectoral responses, and backed by investments that enable their application.

In respect to Goal 17, accountability and monitoring systems must be put in place and national governments must commit to implementation strategy that ensures a participatory inclusive approach.