

# WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND?

A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation  
July 2018



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## Executive Summary

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

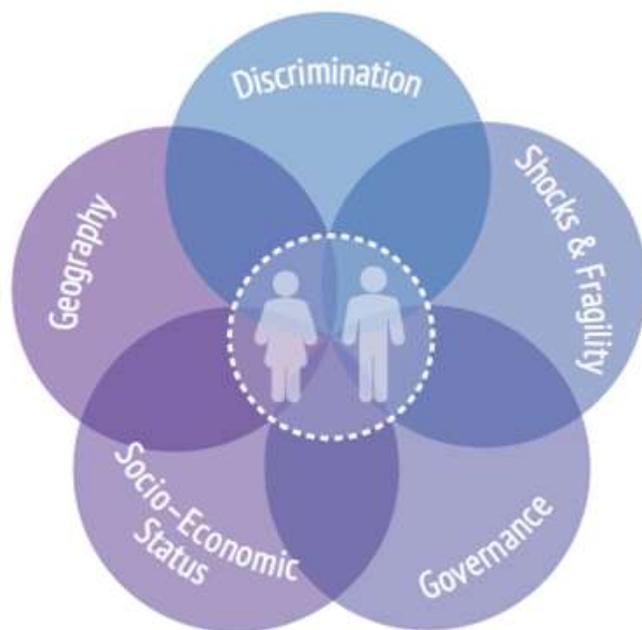
This paper suggests a framework that governments and stakeholders can use in their countries to take action to leave no one behind in a way that enables and accelerates national progress to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also seeks to inform the manner in which the United Nations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

### *Who is being left behind and why: Five key factors*

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

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

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



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

<sup>1</sup> “2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”

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

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

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

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

### ***Realizing the opportunity to leave no one behind***

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

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

#### **UNDP can support countries to examine by:**

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

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

### UNDP can support countries to empower by:

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

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

### UNDP can support countries to enact by:

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

## I. Introduction

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

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

As the poorest and most marginalized people slip further behind, inequalities have been pushed to new heights between and within countries. According to the 2018 World Inequality Report, income inequality between people around the world has been rising since 1980, despite a period of unprecedented poverty reduction and growth. From 1980 to 2016, the world's richest 1 percent captured twice as much of the growth in income worldwide, as the bottom 50 percent<sup>6</sup>. Over the last 25 years, the average (daily) income of the world's poorest 20 percent grew by US\$0.79; a significantly smaller margin than the average increase of US\$8.91 for the other 80 percent.<sup>7</sup> The world's poorest countries have also become relatively poorer; while the spatial disparities between localities within countries grow wider.<sup>8</sup>

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

they found that just 8 men controlled as much wealth as the bottom 50 percent.<sup>10</sup> A study of 64 countries between 1990 and 2011 found rising health inequalities in nearly half of those countries; while in a quarter, the health of the poorest 40 percent had actually regressed<sup>11</sup>.

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

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

Across countries, women and girls, people in rural areas, indigenous peoples, ethnic and linguistic minorities, people with disabilities, migrants, gender and sexual minorities, youth and older persons are disproportionately among the left behind.<sup>12</sup> In all societies, the furthest behind tend to endure multiple and intersecting disadvantages. With little social mobility and stark inequalities conspire to entrench and perpetuate the disadvantages and deprivations that leave people behind, within and between countries. When people are unable to get ahead or gain influence and perceive “the system to be rigged”, their aspirations shrink, along with the space for political solutions, social trust, meritocracy and problem solving<sup>13</sup>.

### ***New agenda, new opportunities***

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In 2016, the UNDP Human Development Report estimated that inequalities had reduced the world's progress, overall, to achieve human development by around 22 percent.<sup>14</sup> This relationship, however, is reversible: countries that succeed in advancing equity and social mobility see gains in productivity, more efficiently allocated resources, greater social consensus and higher growth in the long run. Efforts that unlock the human potential of the furthest behind can also have catalytic impacts in the short-term, laying the ground for countries to realize their priorities<sup>15</sup>. A recent UNICEF study found that every \$1 million invested in the health of the poorest children prevented nearly twice as many deaths, on average,

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<sup>14</sup> UNDP, "Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone." Available from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2016-human-development-everyone>

<sup>15</sup> World Bank, 2018, "Fair Progress? Economic Mobility across Generations around the World" Available from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/28428>

as the equivalent spent on the same interventions for non-poor children.<sup>16</sup> Similar efficiency gains have been found from directing health and nutrition interventions to the poorest. By investing upfront in the capabilities of disadvantaged and deprived populations, countries can save lives while laying the ground for sustained, people-driven progress across the SDGs.

Realizing the pledge to leave no one behind will not be easy. A person may in the first instance be left behind due to discrimination, poor services and geographic isolation. In practice, however, the disadvantages they face may be underpinned by a political economy<sup>17</sup> that perpetuates imbalances in wealth and power; shortfalls in human and institutional capacities; and/or entrenched belief systems. Governments are ultimately responsible for overcoming such underlying constraints, by combating and correcting for stigma, discrimination and exclusion; delivering budgets, policies and services that make their society, political system and economy work for all.

Delivering the pledge represents a challenge as well as an opportunity. By confronting the root causes of inequity, exclusion and deprivation; governments can begin to dismantle the roadblocks that prevent progress across population segments and SDGs. In shaping national and local SDG strategies to leave no one behind, governments and stakeholders are deciding to invest in their people. They understand that the SDGs cannot be achieved without unlocking the potential of all people to solve problems, contribute to their communities and adapt creatively to new realities. UNDP supports countries to set such synergies in motion; we understand from practice that addressing discrimination, for example, is a necessary and important part of what it takes to boost health, educational and other SDG outcomes. We also understand the importance of breaking cycles of exclusion and deprivation that trap or push people into risk-prone localities, increasingly exposed to climatic shocks and environmental degradation.

## II. Who is being left behind and why: Five key factors

Establishing a shared understanding of what it means to leave no one behind is an essential first step to formulating an appropriate response. In practice, a country can establish such a shared understanding by discussing the key factors that help determine who and to what degree people are left behind in their particular contexts. Figure 1 suggests five intersecting factors that are essential to understand who is being left behind and why, and shape solutions accordingly.

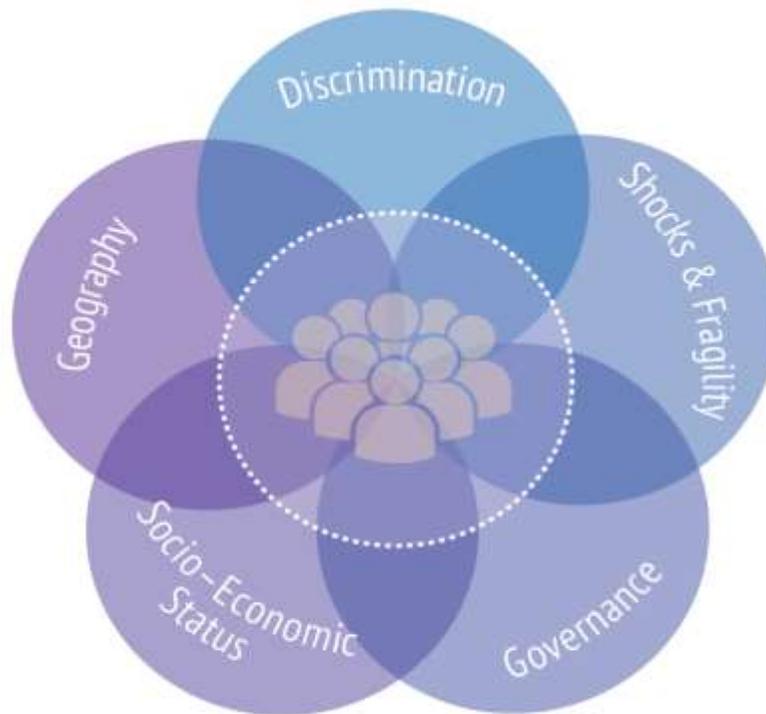
The United Nations Development System is determined to put the pledge to leave no one behind at the heart of the support it provides countries to realize the SDGs. As a UN agency with a broad mandate that crosses disciplines and sectors, UNDP has developed this framework to guide its own work and help facilitate national efforts to take action to leave no one behind.

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<sup>16</sup>UNICEF, "Narrowing the Gaps: the power of investing in the poorest children", June 2017. Available from [https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF\\_The\\_power\\_of\\_investing\\_in\\_the\\_poorest\\_children.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/publications/files/UNICEF_The_power_of_investing_in_the_poorest_children.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Political economy refers to the interplay of politics, society, culture and economics.

**Figure 1. Being Left Behind: Five Intersecting Factors**



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

The framework in Figure 1 offers countries a practical way to implement the leave no one behind pledge, in conjunction with the SDGs. It can be applied to facilitate national/local dialogue and assessments that shed light on who is being left behind and why in any particular country or sub-national context.

Although incomplete, all countries have some degree of evidence corresponding to each of the five factors. By collecting, comparing and contrasting information across factors, while ratcheting up investment in disaggregated data, countries can seek to illuminate some of the systematic disadvantages and deprivations that leave or threaten to leave segments of society behind. With such an understanding, countries can, in turn, better shape and sequence interventions to tap SDG synergies; accelerate progress among the furthest behind; and fill gaps in essential data, financing and capacities.

A country, initiative or community may opt to address any single one or sub-set of factors whilst recognizing that identity often has an amplifying effect. The likelihood that a person will be left behind due to a situation of shock or fragility, for example, is significantly higher where they identify with a marginalized group.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, in all cases, the leave no one behind pledge demands explicit action to

<sup>18</sup> Ferris, Elizabeth, "Natural Disasters, Conflict, and Human Rights: Tracing the Connections," 2010, Brookings Institute. Available from <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/natural-disasters-conflict-and-human-rights-tracing-the-connections/>

address the disadvantages, deprivations and discrimination related to all five factors. In practice, people's challenges intersect, often compounding deprivation and reinforcing their disadvantage. In all societies, therefore, the furthest behind are the most likely to endure challenges from multiple and overlapping factors.

Whether or not people are left behind can be explained by one or more of the following five factors:

### 1. Discrimination

People are left behind when they experience exclusion, bias or mistreatment in laws, policies, access to public services and social practices due to their identity (ascribed or assumed, and primarily relating to their gender, but also age, income, ethnicity, caste, religion, disability, sexual orientation, nationality, as well as indigenous, refugee, displaced or migratory status). A person's identity refers to the particular subgroup or subgroups in society to which they ascribe or are assigned; where that group or population is marginalized or excluded, the risks of being left behind increase.

Discrimination towards populations on the basis of one or more such identities may cause a person to be left behind due to stigma, shame, discriminatory actions and/or other human rights violations. A young gay man living with HIV, for example, who is a refugee in a country that criminalizes same-sex activities may face discrimination and multiple barriers to realizing his rights. An older woman who identifies as Roma and lives with a disability may also experience compounding sources of discrimination and disadvantage.

#### Discrimination in education and health

Being a poor rural girl in Pakistan more than triples the risk of being out of school.<sup>19</sup> Around the world, children are denied opportunities due to child labour, forced marriage, disability or because they happen to be a girl or speak a minority language. Children from marginalized backgrounds, including ethnic minorities, migrants, those in armed conflict or with disabilities, face the greatest difficulty accessing education. Unless their specific challenges are addressed, including stigma and discrimination, estimates suggest 43 percent of those children are not in school and will never go to school.<sup>20</sup>

In Viet Nam, a child born into the majority Kinh, or Viet, ethnic group is three and a half times less likely to die in his or her first five years than a child from other Vietnamese ethnic groups.<sup>21</sup> In the United States, a black woman is four times more likely to die in childbirth than a white woman.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Watkins, Kevin, Overseas Development Institute, "Leaving no-one behind: An equity agenda for the Post-2015 Goals," 2013. Available from <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8638.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), Statistics Division, "United Nations Sustainable Development Goals Report 2016." Available from <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/>

<sup>21</sup> Save the Children, "The Lottery of Birth," 2015. Available from [http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/The\\_Lottery\\_of\\_Birth2.pdf](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/The_Lottery_of_Birth2.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Pregnancy Morality Surveillance System," 2015. Available from <https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/pmss.html>

### When does data drive change?

Accessible and robust data can, in and of itself, help drive change. Civil registration, for example, allows people to become citizens and thus, exercise their rights to healthcare, education, political participation, legal protection, etc. It is also the basis for accurate, timely statistics essential to effective policy-making. Nevertheless, UNICEF estimates that 35 percent of children under five are not registered (including majorities in South Asia and Africa). For many varied reasons, whether or not a child is registered depends largely on their mother's socioeconomic status. Women with little education or economic means may be unable to travel or obtain the permission or involvement of the father, or may simply lack information about where or how to register their children. In Nepal, Nicaragua and Bhutan (among other countries) birth registration requires the use of the father's or grandfather's name.

Stark realities revealed by data can also spark change. In 2000, public findings in Mexico and Peru revealed that the proportion of births attended by a health professional was 38 and 45 percent lower, respectively, for indigenous women than non-indigenous women. This glaring disparity violated societal norms and people's sense of fairness, generating demands for better information and policies in both countries.<sup>23</sup> Steps were subsequently taken to make healthcare more rights-based and consistent with the practices and values of indigenous populations. By 2012, over 80 percent of births by indigenous women in both countries were attended by health professionals. In the 2010 census, more Latin American countries (17 of 20) gathered specific information on indigenous people.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. Geography

People are left behind and left open to vulnerability and inequity when denied social and economic opportunities, human security and/or quality public services based on their place of residence. Contaminated or degraded natural resources can make it impossible for people to sustain their livelihoods or prevent natural disasters. Legacies of deprivation and/or inequity in infrastructure, transportation and/or public services limit the choices, mobility and opportunities of people in some localities [over others]. Climatic conditions, altitude, desertification and/or proximity to high-risk areas such as floodplains or steep embankments can leave people isolated and vulnerable to setbacks.

People who reside in least developed, landlocked and small island developing countries tend to be disproportionately poor and/or vulnerable. At the same time, a high and growing proportion of the world's extreme poor reside in pockets of poverty that may be hard to access, including peripheral settlements, areas affected by explosive remnants of war and/or urban slums disproportionately affected by environmental pollution, crime and violence, including in middle and high-income countries.<sup>25</sup> Where people lack access to justice, equal protection under the law, basic services and/or roads, public transport, broadband, sanitation and energy, physical isolation has a particularly high cost.

Overall, people in rural areas across low- and middle-income countries are far more likely to be multi-dimensionally poor than people in urban areas<sup>26</sup>. For example, twice as many rural children as urban

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), "Report on the World Social Situation 2016: Leaving no one behind: the imperative of inclusive development." Available from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2015/12/30/report-on-world-social-situation-2016-2/>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Laurence Chandy, Hiroshi Kato, Homi Kharas, *The Last Mile in Ending Extreme Poverty*, Brookings Institution Press, Washington D.C., July 20, 2015, p. 110.

<sup>26</sup> Multidimensional poverty is comprised of factors that constitute people's experience of deprivation, such as poor health, lack of education, inadequate living standards, lack of income, disempowerment, low quality of

children are out of school.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, the world is home to around 1 billion urban slum dwellers who are frequently denied basic rights, services and opportunities.<sup>28</sup> From now to 2030, the world's rural population is expected to stay largely static, while urban dwellers are projected to grow by 1.5 billion.<sup>29</sup>

Isolation can also be caused by factors other than geography, such as lack of access to technology. The inability to access technology such as mobile phones and other internet-enabled devices prevents many of the world's poorest and most marginalized people from fully participating in their country's economy, society and political system. Approximately 52 percent of the world population is still without access to internet, the majority of whom live in Asia Pacific and Africa in rural or low-income areas with weak infrastructure<sup>30</sup>. People in least developed countries [LDCs] are particularly disadvantaged, with internet penetration of only 15.6 percent. In increasingly interconnected societies and technology-enabled economies, digital exclusion translates into exclusion on many fronts from economic opportunities to participating in 'the public sphere'<sup>31</sup>.

#### Explaining people's relative access to opportunities in the Arab States

Human development data in Tunisia suggests that geography may reveal more about a person's access to opportunities than their wealth, gender or education. Whether a person was born in a rural or urban area, for example, was found to explain around 30 percent of the disparities in school attendance and close to 50 percent of the disparities in access to sanitation. Egypt, Morocco and other Arab States have found similar patterns.<sup>32</sup>

### 3. Governance

People set back by global, national and/or sub-national institutions that are ineffective, unjust, exclusive, corrupt, unaccountable and/or unresponsive; and/or by laws, policies and budgets that are inequitable, discriminatory or regressive. At the global level, high-income countries tend to dominate decision-making, a trend mirrored by the reach and power of transnational companies. Their decisions shape the large-scale economic and political processes that drive globalization. With limited capacities and leverage to engage and influence global decision-making, poor countries and populations are less able to anticipate and benefit from global trends in technologies, trade and markets. They are less able to prevent and recover from global shocks, manage corrupt and illicit practices or confront transnational organized crime. Inequitable global trade, finance, investment and intellectual property regimes also prevent many countries, particularly smaller ones, from fully engaging in, or benefiting from, globalization.

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work, threat from violence etc. See also the Multidimensional Poverty Index:

<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi>.

<sup>27</sup> UNDP "Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone," p.53. Available from

[http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016\\_human\\_development\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), "Slum Almanac 2015-2016." Available from

<https://unhabitat.org/slum-almanac-2015-2016/>

<sup>29</sup> UNDP, "UNDP Sustainable Urbanization Strategy 2016." Available from

<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/sustainable-urbanization-strategy.html>

<sup>30</sup> UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, 2017, *The State of Broadband*. Available from

[https://www.itu.int/dms\\_pub/itu-s/opb/pol/S-POL-BROADBAND.18-2017-PDF-E.pdf](https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-s/opb/pol/S-POL-BROADBAND.18-2017-PDF-E.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> UNDP, "Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone", p. 62.

Poor, disadvantaged and marginalized communities tend to have the least say in the decisions that affect them and are least likely to be included in the data and evidence governments use to allocate resources and shape policies. At the same time, the space for civic action, fundamental freedoms and meaningful participation is shrinking drastically in countries around the world<sup>33</sup>. The lack of visibility that results both reinforces and perpetuates the disadvantages certain groups and people face. It also erodes the social contract between the state and the people and makes it harder for governments to identify challenges, enact solutions and build the trust, legitimacy and mutual understanding that are among the basic building blocks of effective, equitable and inclusive governance.

In countries with wide inequalities, governing institutions can suffer from elite capture, where resources for the benefit of the population are being taken by a few for individual gain. This reinforces an imbalance of power and exacerbates the likelihood that economic and social gains are confined to a privileged few<sup>34</sup>. The result can aggravate social tensions, render governments less effective and increase the chances of violence and conflicts, trapping entire populations in poverty for generations. The drastically shrinking space for civic action in countries around the world makes support for civil society all the more important to hold government and other stakeholders to account.<sup>35</sup>

Insufficient capacity, funding and/or political autonomy often undermine the role human rights institutions can play in ensuring governing institutions are accountable, inclusive, rights-based and capable of investigating and seeking redress for human rights violations. National governance institutions are responsible for putting in place and supporting a legal, regulatory and budgetary framework that advances human development and human rights. Where the rule of law is weak or unjust, legal protections and justice systems are inaccessible and under-resourced. As a result, poor, marginalized and disadvantaged groups and people are vulnerable to abuse, setbacks and extortion.

The failure of governments to recognize individual claims on land and secure land tenure, for example, has led directly to the paucity of land owned and/or inhabited by poor and disadvantaged people. The result aggravates inequalities and deprivation particularly where the responsible governing institutions permit or even facilitate land grabbing by large corporations and powerful elites who earn lucrative agricultural, logging, mining concessions, while often displacing poor and disadvantaged communities. Sub-national and local governance institutions typically play a more direct role, addressing people's needs for health, education, water and/or local economic opportunities, for example. It is through local institutions that women and men most often seek to influence the decisions that affect them.

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<sup>33</sup> Civicus Monitor Data and Updates, Global Findings June 2016-March 2017. Available from <https://monitor.civicus.org/globalfindings0417/>

<sup>34</sup> World Bank, "World Development Report 2006: Equity and Development," 2006. Available from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/435331468127174418/World-development-report-2006-equity-and-development>

<sup>35</sup> World Bank, "Horizontal Inequalities as a Cause of Conflict," 2011. Available from [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTWDR2011/Resources/6406082-1283882418764/WDR\\_Background\\_Paper\\_Stewart.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTWDR2011/Resources/6406082-1283882418764/WDR_Background_Paper_Stewart.pdf)

### Responding to people: lessons from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

To achieve the MDGs, many governments found it necessary to invest in their own capacities to coordinate across units and levels of government, learn from and engage people directly. They adopted new approaches to facilitate participation and accountability, illustrating the potential to boost the pro-poor impact of national and local policies and budgets.

Brazil built a national movement around the MDGs that incentivized coordinated action at all levels; including clear markers and roles for local groups, mayors, organizations and businesses. The result led to action that helped to eliminate hunger and deliver MDGs. In 2005, India established a system of village health and sanitation committees tied to Panchayats (self-governments). A study conducted before and after, found that the committees boosted people's access to preventive care, in part by facilitating better coordination.<sup>36</sup>

With the MDGs, local governments, particularly in Latin America, began testing and improving participatory budgeting. Many proved effective at boosting the impact, responsiveness and equity of public expenditures.<sup>37</sup> Participatory budgeting in Peru led to allocations that disproportionately benefited poorer districts and were uniquely well-aligned to local needs for water, sanitation and electricity.<sup>38</sup> In Porto Alegre, Brazil, participatory budgeting improved outcomes in under-served districts.<sup>39</sup> Participatory budgets work when governments are willing and able to establish credible, effective mechanisms to inspire broad participation and reflect diverse perspectives in budget decisions.<sup>40</sup> Specific attention is also needed to ensure disadvantaged populations are heard. Belém, Brazil, for example, established quotas to ensure budget deliberations included women, people of African descent, the indigenous, gender and sexual minorities, older persons and people with disabilities.<sup>41</sup>

Coalitions of civil society and community groups also powerfully compelled MDG progress, including through the elimination of primary school fees across Africa and the Arab States. Successful campaigns worked through and with international organizations, social movements, faith groups, trade unions and other actors with direct ties to marginalized, poor and disadvantaged people and communities.

## 4. Socio-economic status

People get left behind when they lack the opportunities and capabilities to earn an adequate income, accumulate wealth or otherwise fully and equitably participate in their economy and society. A person's ability to get out and stay out of poverty, in all its dimensions, is shaped by the economic rules, policies and public services open to them.

Social services determine people's ability to stay healthy, get an education, acquire skills, stay safe and avoid setbacks. The laws, policies and regulations governing the economy determine people's ability to inherit or acquire wealth; own land; find and sustain jobs or livelihoods; demand decent jobs and safe working conditions; benefit from insurance and social protection systems; start, form, finance and formalize small/micro businesses; open a bank account; and benefit from trade and investment. The

<sup>36</sup> UN University, "Political agency and healthcare," 2016. <https://www.wider.unu.edu/publication/political-agency-and-public-healthcare>

<sup>37</sup> McNulty, Stephanie, "An Unlikely Success: Peru's Top-Down Participatory Budgeting Experience," *Journal of Public Deliberation*: Vol. 8: Issue 2, Article 4, 2012. Available from: <https://www.publicdeliberation.net/jpd/vol8/iss2/art4>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> World Bank, "Toward a More Inclusive and Effective Participatory Budget in Porto Alegre," 2008. Available from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/8040>

<sup>40</sup> International Budget Partnership, "Citizen Participation." Available from <https://www.internationalbudget.org/category/citizen-participation/>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

degree to which tax burdens and budget expenditures are distributed equitably and progressively has profound, differentiated and enduring impacts across different segments of society.

Those living in least developed countries face particularly steep capacity, capital and human resource barriers that often effectively lock them out of global markets and trade and investment opportunities, as well as prevent innovation and the diffusion of new technologies. The ability of governments to establish and enforce taxation or otherwise generate revenues aligned to the SDGs is often hampered by capital flight, power imbalances with large multinationals and weak global coordination. Although globalization has benefited some, the gains have not necessarily been distributed equitably or inclusively. Leaps in productivity have not consistently translated into higher wages.<sup>42</sup> Unskilled workers in many economies have lost jobs, particularly in the manufacturing sector, while in the formal and informal sector, many remain vulnerable to job loss, exploitation, low-pay and dangerous conditions. The introduction of new technologies, robotics and fast-moving value chains in the production process have raised the stakes, making it harder for unskilled, “off-line” workers and businesses to compete.

Many who have escaped income poverty, including particularly in middle-income countries, remain dependent on low-paying unstable jobs (often in the informal sector), without stabilizing assets or wealth, affordable essential services (such as healthcare) or adequate social protection. Their lingering economic insecurity thus puts them at high risk of slipping back under poverty lines.

#### **Inequalities: Violating fairness, hampering growth, poverty reduction**

Extreme concentrations of wealth and rising inequalities violate people’s intrinsic sense of fairness and leave people behind by raising the prospect of violence, polarization and instability; they undermine human rights and impede efforts to generate poverty reduction and inclusive growth. Estimates for Tanzania suggest, for example, that without rising inequality, economic growth would have lifted another 700,000 people out of poverty<sup>43</sup>. The African non-partisan research network Afrobarometer, in its surveys of public opinion, consistently reports a widespread belief that the benefits of growth are skewed towards national elites, an opinion echoed around the world by many of the millions who took part in the 2015 UN led global conversation on the World We Want<sup>44</sup>.

#### **Out-of-pocket healthcare costs: driving people back into poverty**

Paying out-of-pocket for healthcare leads to deep impoverishment in many nations. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), over 100 million people fall into poverty every year due to medical expenses. An additional 150 million are required to spend almost half of their incomes on medical bills.<sup>45</sup> An estimated 80 percent of people across 44 countries lack healthcare due to the high cost.<sup>46</sup> The vast majority live in countries without social healthcare programs, affordable insurance options or government-funded healthcare.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> UNDP, “Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone.” Available from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2016-human-development-everyone>

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> United Nations Development Group: “A Million Voices: The World We Want,” 2013. Available from <https://undg.org/document/a-million-voices-the-world-we-want/>

<sup>45</sup> The Borgen Project, “Paying out-of-pocket for healthcare contributes to poverty,” January 2015. Available from <https://borgenproject.org/paying-pocket-healthcare-contributes-poverty/>

<sup>46</sup> World Health Organization (WHO), “Universal Health Coverage,” December 2017. Available from: [http://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-\(uhc\)](http://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/universal-health-coverage-(uhc)).

<sup>47</sup> At least half of the world’s population still do not have full coverage of essential health services. About 100 million people are still being pushed into “extreme poverty” (living on \$ 1.90 (1) or less a day) because they have

## 5. Shocks and fragility

People get left behind when they are vulnerable to risks related to violence, conflict, displacement, large movements of migrants, environmental degradation, natural hazard induced disasters and other types of climate events, or health shocks, such as epidemic outbreaks. The impact of these shocks and situations of fragility can cause entire communities, sub-regions or countries to be left behind, and they can also often spill over national borders.

Widening inequalities, climate change, protracted conflicts, widespread hazards and environmental degradation, rapid urbanization and the overconsumption of natural resources have driven systemic risks and instabilities to new and unprecedented levels. The result threatens to send human progress into reverse. In 2015, close to 28 million people became internally displaced persons (IDPs), 70 percent of whom were driven from their homes due to a national disaster.<sup>48</sup> Among the world's 244 million migrants, 41 million are internally displaced, more than 21 million are refugees and 3 million are asylum seekers<sup>49</sup>. Migrants and displaced persons often lack shelter and access to other essentials, legal identity, the protection of the law and the ability to participate fully in the economy and society of host countries. They may also face discrimination and marginalization due to language, religion, culture or ethnicity, leaving them among the world's most vulnerable and furthest behind.

Extreme poverty is increasingly concentrated among vulnerable groups displaced by violent conflict and within countries and regions affected by conflict.<sup>50</sup> Today, some 1.6 billion people live in fragile and conflict affected settings; half of the world's extreme poor live in such contexts.<sup>51</sup> Fragility, multi-dimensional poverty and inequalities mutually reinforce each other, as fragility and conflict can lead to the absence of public services, intolerance and limited access to resources, which in turn can provoke grievances resulting in mistrust and conflict. The reality and threat of violence or conflict limits the freedom of movement and economic and social opportunities of deprived and disadvantaged communities and groups, who experience crime and violence at greater rates and with more severe consequences than richer members of society.

Those with fewer assets, information and resources, who are marginalized or disadvantaged are more likely to be affected and more adversely affected by climatic shocks such as floods, droughts or heat waves, as well as the crop failure, price spikes and illnesses they generate. People living in poverty are more exposed to higher temperatures and tend to live in countries where food production is expected

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to pay for health care. Over 800 million people (almost 12 percent of the world's population) spent at least 10 percent of their household budgets to pay for health care. All United Nations Member States have agreed to try to achieve universal health coverage by 2030, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

<sup>48</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, "GRID 2016: Global Report on Internal Displacement," 2016.

Available from <http://www.internal-displacement.org/globalreport2016/>

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*

<sup>50</sup> World Bank, "By the Numbers: The Cost of War & Peace in the Middle East," 2016. Available from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2016/02/03/by-the-numbers-the-cost-of-war-and-peace-in-mena>

<sup>51</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "States of Fragility," 2016, p. 16 and p.

79. Available from [http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/development/states-of-fragility-2016\\_9789264267213-en#page1](http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oecd/development/states-of-fragility-2016_9789264267213-en#page1)

to decrease.<sup>52</sup> The World Bank estimates suggest that without urgent climate-smart action, more than 100 million additional people could be living in poverty by 2030.<sup>53</sup> Commodity prices have an important impact on public revenues in many developing countries. Climate change-driven price volatility can affect the funding available for public investment. Economic growth can also have unintended and adverse impacts on people and their environment if associated risks are inadequately mitigated.

### The impact of conflict and shocks: compounding fragility and disadvantage

Conflict has a profoundly negative impact on the prospects of affected people, communities and countries. Conflict tears the social fabric of societies, impacting generations of people, who face violence, mistrust and fear, often long after the conflict subsides. Persons in landmine-affected areas, for example, may or may not become victims of explosive devices; but will most likely, in any case, endure poor or missing services due to impassable roads and/or the lack of teachers and health officers reluctant to move to the area. The result can undermine the self-confidence of locals, perpetuate mistrust and resentment and undermine the legitimacy of government. Fear may also keep investors and tourists out of the community, limiting the prospects for employment.

Unfortunately, there are many examples to illustrate the setbacks caused by shocks and fragility and their disproportionate impact on poor and disadvantaged people and communities. The lengthy civil war in Syria is leaving an entire generation of refugees and internally displaced people behind in terms of education, health, housing and livelihoods. When the United States was hit by Hurricane Katrina in 2006, the immobile poor were disproportionately left behind.<sup>54</sup> In Japan during the earthquake of 2011, the death rate amongst people with disabilities was twice that of the general population. The 2004 tsunami resulted in an increase of proportion of people living below the poverty line in Aceh, Indonesia from 30-50 percent by 2006. The province of Rizal in the Philippines, affected by Typhoons Ondoy and Pepeng in 2009, indicated that the incidence of poverty had almost doubled from 5.5 percent to 9.5 percent within 3 years.

Even without active conflict or national disasters, short-term shocks can change the trajectory of entire populations. Due to the Ebola crisis, West Africa may have lost an average of US\$3.6 billion per year between 2014 and 2017 due to declining trade, closing borders, flight cancellations and reduced Foreign Direct Investment and tourism activity.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>53</sup> World Bank, "Shock Waves: Managing the Impacts of Climate Change on Poverty," 2015. Available from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/22787/9781464806735.pdf>

<sup>54</sup> Scheuer, Jo: Protecting people with disabilities in times of disaster, UNDP, 2013. Available from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourperspective/ourperspectivearticles/2013/10/11/protecting-people-with-disabilities-in-times-of-disaster.html>

<sup>55</sup> World Bank, "2014-2015 West Africa Ebola Crisis: Impact Update," 2016. Available from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/macroeconomics/publication/2014-2015-west-africa-ebola-crisis-impact-update>

### III. Understanding intersectionality

A person may be left behind due to disadvantages related to only one of the five factors described above. Discrimination, for example, can lock a person out of the job market, keep them from essential services and prevent them from having a say in decision-making. Most of the left behind and particularly the furthest behind, however, face intersecting disadvantages stemming from more than one factor. The multi-dimensionally poor, for example, are uniformly more vulnerable to setbacks from shocks; many also face discrimination, entrenched inequalities and/or political or social exclusion.

Available data across 16 countries found that the most likely to be left behind are women and girls in rural areas who are born to poor families and belong to a minority ethnic group<sup>56</sup>. This population has had the fewest years of education, the highest under-five child mortality rates and the least progress in human development over the last few decades.<sup>57</sup> In this case, three factors intersect to generate reinforcing deprivations and disadvantages: geography (rural), socio-economic status (income poor families) and identity/discrimination (gender *and* ethnic minority). The more severe the poverty and inequities people experience, the more tightly interwoven and enduring such barriers become and the more vulnerable people become to exploitation and human rights abuses.

This paper thus argues for a holistic response to the leave no one behind pledge that considers the severity and overlaps between different types of deprivation and disadvantages, within the context of the five factors. The objective should be to understand who and why people face multiple compounding and/or severe disadvantages, by assessing the disparities and shortfalls in SDG achievements, across geographic units and between people and groups (female and male; persons with / without disabilities; linguistic minorities and non; etc.).

Such an integrated approach is important, both because of the potential to better understand the particular barriers populations face; and the opportunity to illuminate the systemic barriers that leave people behind across the SDGs. The latter can open the door to more effective and efficient policies that multiply and reinforce SDG progress for everyone; over time and across sectors. Such far-sighted government action is also important to break the cycles that bind poor outcomes to poor opportunities. Parents that experience multiple disadvantages in their own childhoods often face poor development outcomes, limiting their ability to improve the capabilities and opportunities available to their children<sup>58</sup>.

The same is true for societies as a whole. Left unchecked, inequalities often reinforce and perpetuate themselves. Growing concentrations of economic power often concentrates political power, as those

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<sup>56</sup> Lenhardt and Samman , "In quest of inclusive progress: Exploring intersecting inequalities in human development," 2015. Overseas Development Institute. London. Available from <https://www.odi.org/publications/10041-quest-inclusive-progress-exploring-intersecting-inequalities-human-development>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> UNDP, "Humanity Divided: Confronting Inequality in Developing Countries," 2014. Available from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/humanity-divided--confronting-inequality-in-developing-countries.html>

outside the privileged few find it harder to gain influence and get heard. Shrinking democratic space, in turn, can further impede meaningful participation and distorts political processes, feeding intolerance, undermining social cohesion and government legitimacy.<sup>59</sup>

### **Multidimensional Poverty Index: Tracking progress to end poverty & leave no one behind**

The SDGs commit countries to tackle inequalities and poverty in all its forms, across economic, political, social and environmental sectors. They thus mark consensus on what has long been maintained by those living in poverty: no one factor can capture the experience of poverty; its causes and manifestations are multiple and compounding.

And yet, money metrics largely continue to dominate headlines and national measures. The pledge to leave no one behind is an invitation to countries to make a decisive split with single factor metrics. A range of disaggregated measures must necessarily be employed to identify and find solutions for those affected by intersecting discrimination, disadvantage and deprivation. While not sufficient to understand who and why people are left behind, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is an important contribution that can help enable national assessment and monitoring of the furthest behind; incentivize action to leave no one behind and deepen national understanding about what poverty means in context.

The MPI tracks the proportion of people in poverty and the intensity of poverty in three dimensions and 10 indicators including health (child mortality, nutrition), education (years of schooling, enrollment) and living standards (water, sanitation, electricity, cooking fuel, assets). It includes cutoffs to identify those in acute poverty; those vulnerable to falling into poverty and those who endure severe poverty. The ability to distinguish poverty intensity and disaggregate by sub-population makes the MPI a potentially important contribution to national efforts to assess, track and reach the furthest behind. Without progress among the poorest it is difficult for any country to significantly reduce multidimensional poverty, measured by the MPI.

SDG 1.2 commits countries “to reduce at least by half, the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions.” To track progress, countries must thus have a nationally defined measure of multidimensional poverty. To this end, many have or are in the process of adopting a National MPI (Armenia, Bhutan, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Pakistan and Tunisia). Each has drawn on the methodology developed by Alkire and Santos, in collaboration with UNDP’s Human Development Report Office.

To enable SDG tracking and policy-making, UNDP supports countries to establish their own National MPIs, with threshold and parameters reflecting their specific priorities and context. Chile, the Dominican Republic and El Salvador, for example, established MPIs with new dimensions related to the environment as well as women’s empowerment and security (respectively). When inclusive and participatory, the process of developing an MPI can help build national consensus on the action required to confront poverty in their particular context.

Starting in 2010, UNDP has reported annually on the MPI in its Human Development Report. In 2016, the MPI covered 102 countries encompassing 75 percent of the global population. 30 percent were found to be multi-dimensionally poor. Also in 2016, the global MPI was mapped against 990 subnational regions in 78 countries. *For more see <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/multidimensional-poverty-index-mpi> and <https://ophi.org.uk/research/multidimensional-poverty/>*

<sup>59</sup>The World Bank, May 2018, “Economic Mobility Across Generations Around the World” Available from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/publication/fair-progress-economic-mobility-across-generations-around-the-world>

## IV. Acting on 'leave no one behind': Three "levers" of change

The SDGs and pledge to leave no one behind can be powerful drivers of transformational change in and of themselves. Global participation and excitement in the lead up to the SDGs' adoption in 2015<sup>60</sup>, is proof of their potential to inspire people and leaders to engage in a collective project for a better world. Local leaders and change agents can tap into this inspiration and build on the legitimacy of globally agreed SDGs – in order to unite diverse actors and drive progressive action at home. The 2030 target date, means action is now urgent, particularly to understand who and why people are left behind within their own particular national and local contexts. Taken together, the five factors elaborated in this paper constitute a framework that can be applied to this end.

To leave no one behind, however, work cannot stop there. Early efforts to implement the pledge suggest three mutually reinforcing "levers" are required:

- i. Examine: disaggregated and people driven data and information;
- ii. Empower: civic engagement and voice; and
- iii. Enact: integrated, equity-focused SDG policies, interventions and budgets.

Given the urgency of achieving the SDGs, no country can afford to do one at a time. Integrated approaches are needed to move all three "levers" forward simultaneously by improving what is known about who is left behind, where they are and why; empowering marginalized populations to act and claim their rights; and building the capacity of governments to adopt equity-focused and rights-based SDG targets, policies and budgets which are inclusive and accountable.

Action to leave no one behind should not be conceived or presented as something separate to national efforts to achieve the SDGs. The pledge to leave no one behind runs across all 17 SDGs, embedded in goals, targets and indicators that demand disaggregated data, inclusion and equity in social, environmental and economic spheres. To leave no one behind, countries must live up to the promise of the SDGs to transform their societies. Success in all countries is highly dependent on political will, which may be lacking where elites defend vested interests. Limited and shrinking space for civil society may also constrain efforts to change minds, reach those who are left behind and ensure meaningful participation.

Leaders in all walks of life will need to become agents of change, challenging and disrupting business as usual, building national consensus on the policies the pledge requires, making hard choices and finding innovative ways around trade-offs. To this end, UNDP provides capacity and policy support in all of its programme countries, including to empower local leaders seeking progressive change in line with the leave no one behind pledge. In conjunction with our UN partners, UNDP supports their efforts to formulate and deliver SDG strategies, policies and interventions aligned to budgets and financing.

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<sup>60</sup> See: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/sustainable-development-goals/from-mdgs-to-sustainable-development-for-all.html>

Although the 2030 Agenda marks a new consensus, the challenges of leaving no one behind are not necessarily new, nor are the efforts to overcome them. UNDP has long supported countries to lessen inequalities, including gender inequalities, take a multidimensional approach to poverty alleviation, and improve the lives of marginalized people and communities. Like many others, our work to leave no one behind did not start with the 2030 Agenda. The suggestions in this paper thus benefit and seek to build on the lessons learned from cumulative experience, in particular our understanding of role global goals can play in driving change and emphasis on early, integrated and concerted action<sup>61</sup>.

### **i. Examine: Understanding who is being left behind and why**

Lack of knowledge and information is a powerful barrier to tackling the disadvantages, deprivations and discrimination that leave people behind. It is often the most disadvantaged people for whom we have the least data. Stigma and mistrust of institutions can lead disadvantaged groups themselves to resist data collection. Proven techniques and principles will need to be adapted to local contexts in order to address and anticipate ethical challenges around data gathering and reporting, ensuring that no one is inappropriately exposed, categorized or potentially put in harm's way.<sup>62</sup>

The 2030 Agenda calls on all countries to identify who is left behind across income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location. The five factors in Figure 1 provide a starting place. All countries have, at least, some evidence related to each of the five factors, disaggregated by gender, age, disability, social groups and/or geography. In practice, however, the existing data and information is rarely considered together. Shocks and vulnerabilities, for example, are often considered by environment ministries, disaster risk and climate change experts; while income inequality is the purview of economists and finance ministries; and specific populations such as women and girls or people with disabilities are the focus of yet other Ministry or organization.

To see the big picture, governments will need to work around the usual silos. The totality of disaggregated evidence and information will need to be considered together across the five factors to identify the intersecting disadvantages and deprivations that leave people behind; to recognize patterns; and to fill essential gaps in data, financing and capacities. With such integrated assessments, governments can shape their SDG strategies to confront the underlying and reoccurring reasons people get left behind, tackle the compounding disadvantages that trap the furthest behind and head-off the risks that threaten to leave people behind. With equity-advancing policies, processes and budgets; governments can prevent unrest and development setbacks, build social capital, improve lives and strengthen the human capacities necessary to drive progress across the SDGs.

Investments will be needed to improve the quality, availability and application of disaggregated data

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<sup>61</sup> UNDP, "From the MDGs to Sustainable Development for All: Lessons from 15 Years of Practice," 2016. Available from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/sustainable-development-goals/from-mdgs-to-sustainable-development-for-all.html>

<sup>62</sup> UNDP, "Guidance Note: Data for Implementation and Monitoring of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," September 2017. Available from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/guidance-note--data-for-implementation-and-monitoring-of-the-203.html>

and information. Although important, existing standard survey tools (such as the Household Budget Surveys<sup>63</sup>) are and will likely remain insufficient to capture those being left behind (particularly the homeless, displaced, institutionalized, those facing stigma, exploitation or discrimination).<sup>64</sup> To learn who, where and why people get left behind, therefore, countries will need to make greater effort to gather, analyze and use disaggregated data, particularly via administrative sources that include “statistically invisible” populations more regularly and cost-effectively than large surveys.<sup>65</sup> To fill gaps and complement quantitative data, governments and stakeholders will need to be open and flexible enough to employ new technologies and rely on new qualitative and innovative sources; including, most critically, mechanisms to listen, understand and respond to the left behind themselves.

A range of new technologies, analytical and mapping techniques can be applied for a more holistic, multi-layered and granular picture of the lives of left behind populations.<sup>66</sup> Research has made it possible to bring together data from satellites, surveys, censuses, mobile phones and other sources to get a more in-depth understanding of where and why people are left behind, identify previously invisible communities, people and households and enable real-time information and monitoring. Small area estimation (SAE) can be used to generate maps combining census and survey data; and newly affordable geospatial data and analysis can enable and/or complement SDG monitoring, even in the most isolated communities.

#### **UNDP can support countries to examine by:**

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

<sup>63</sup> Household Budget Surveys focused on consumption expenditure; for more information see <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/household-budget-surveys>.

<sup>64</sup> The Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) “Guide on Poverty Measurement” explicitly recognizes this issue and also makes some suggestions for addressing it. Available from <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=47512&L=0>

<sup>65</sup> Bidarbakhtnia, Arman, UNESCAP (2017) “Data that leaves no one behind,” 2017. Available from [http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Session2.1\\_Arman\\_SDG\\_DLNOB\\_PSS\\_RSG\\_28-31Aug2017.pdf](http://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Session2.1_Arman_SDG_DLNOB_PSS_RSG_28-31Aug2017.pdf), and Lynch, Alainna and Tom Berliner with Chiara Mariotti, “Who is being left behind in sub-Saharan Africa?: An illustration in Benin and Nigeria,” 2016. Available from <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/10280.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> World Bank, “More Than a Pretty Picture: Using Poverty Maps to Design Better Policies,” 2007. Available from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/6800>.

## ii. Empower: Enabling voice and meaningful participation

The poorest, most vulnerable and marginalized populations invariably face the most complex, intersecting and dynamic challenges and barriers, which are unlikely to be fully understood or addressed without direct and on-going feedback and engagement. Leaving no one behind therefore necessitates the kind of bottom up, continuous and iterative learning and participation that has, in any case, proved essential for sustained impact. The MDG track record suggests the efficacy of broad engagement and open political processes. Where such approaches were taken, MDG initiatives were better informed by local know-how and more likely to survive political change.<sup>67</sup> Community level participatory SDG planning, monitoring and reporting processes can be a similarly powerful way to improve results by learning from and with left behind communities, while building on and strengthening local capacities, innovations, ownership and engagement.

Governments will need to facilitate learning, community engagement and trust-building by establishing inclusive and safe spaces and mechanisms to secure and respond to feedback from marginalized communities and groups, as well as to ensure their interventions are informed by the rights, voices and perspectives of the furthest behind. Participatory, community-level SDG planning, monitoring and reporting can be a powerful way to improve results by learning from and with left behind communities, by building on and strengthening local capacities, innovations, ownership and engagement.

The supply side of civil engagement is also vital. Empowering the left behind to understand and claim their rights through the provision of information and meaningful engagement allows governments to build legitimacy, accountability and leverage local participation. To meet these obligations, concerted government and stakeholder efforts are necessary to strengthen the voice and capacities of left behind communities and people, as well as the local authorities, civil society, community groups and associations who work with and for them, including national human rights institutions.

Marginalized and poor people and communities as rights-holders will need to be involved and engaged in efforts to claim their rights including local SDG intelligence gathering, benchmarking and implementation. There are many examples on which to build. Community-based monitoring mechanisms; networks of community groups, volunteers, social workers, youth-led networks, movements and organizations can be harnessed to understand barriers that otherwise go unacknowledged, such as violence against women, gender-based violence, fear of hate crimes and stigma or discrimination in access to resources. National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) play a vital role in bridging state and stakeholder efforts to include excluded and marginalized groups and advance non-discrimination and equity in national policy making.<sup>68</sup> The recommendations of human rights treaty bodies and the accepted recommendations of the Universal Periodic Review process to Member States are also vital entry points. Leave no one behind approaches should be designed to empower local people

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<sup>67</sup> UNDP, "From the MDGs to Sustainable Development for All: Lessons from 15 Years of Practice," November 2016. Available from <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/sustainable-development-goals/from-mdgs-to-sustainable-development-for-all.html>

<sup>68</sup> The presence of fully functioning NHRIs in line with the Paris Principles is an indicator in the global SDG framework on non-discrimination and equity.

and institutions, while building the evidence base to inform equity-focused and rights-based laws, policies and budgets to ensure no one is left behind.

With transparent and non-discriminatory processes and growing bodies of evidence, leaders and change agents can employ the SDGs as instruments to help build broad national consensus on the change required to improve the lives of the left behind using human rights-based approaches. The 2030 Agenda demands that inequities be made visible and actionable within and between countries and across SDG themes. Locally tailored, equity-focused SDG targets that are tracked, reviewed and reported through transparent and inclusive processes can be a powerful motivator to close gaps.

**UNDP can support countries to empower by:**

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

**iii. Enact: Inclusive, catalytic and accountable strategies, policies and financing**

Identifying and tasking those responsible to take action on the pledge to leave no one behind is a critical first step to enable effective and inclusive SDG implementation. Capacity support is necessary not only for rights-holders but also to enable duty-bearers to respond effectively to left behind communities, anticipate risks, plan and deliver SDG strategies that improve public services and policies.

Analytical capacities are particularly important for governments seeking to prioritize policies that have maximum and *progressive* impact across the SDGs, including through opportunities for inclusive and sustainable growth and employment. Also vital is the ability to anticipate and analyze policy trade-offs given resource constraints and the need to balance universal solutions (i.e. social protection or health insurance) with targeted interventions. Finally, capacity support is essential to enable governments to assess the fiscal space available to invest in the SDGs, weigh financing and policy options.

Many of the policy solutions are well known. Community outreach to improve nutrition and hire teachers; more and better neo-natal health service; childcare and education services; public works and local area development; "one-stop" social services; insurance systems and cash transfers have all been

effective at enabling left behind communities to catch up. Such measures can have vastly greater impact when integrated in well-designed and unified social protection systems and/or embedded across sectoral strategies. Countries are increasingly building-in sustainable livelihoods and employment-generation, for example, in policies aimed at sustainable energy, clean water and sanitation; preventing and recovering from natural disasters; adapting to climate change, protecting and regenerating forests and other vital ecosystems. Such approaches protect the environmental services on which poor communities depend; while expanding incomes, skills and opportunities.

Countries that have successfully reduced income inequality, such as many in Latin America in the 2000s, largely attribute their success to straight forward redistributive changes, including increases in the minimum wage, cash transfers and progressive tax reforms<sup>69</sup>. Research demonstrates that income tax

*"Recall the face of the poorest and weakest person you have seen and ask if the step you contemplate is going to be any use to them." - Mahatma Gandhi*

progressivity is effective at combatting inequalities, not only because it reduces post-tax inequalities but also because it gives top earners less incentive to capture ever higher shares of growth.<sup>70</sup> Tax progressivity, however, has been sharply reduced in most rich and some emerging countries starting in the 1970s. Inheritance taxes are also either non-existent or

near zero in most high-inequality, rapidly developing countries.<sup>71</sup> The track record suggests that progressive taxation, debt relief and inflation have been used responsibly by governments to confront challenges and empower youth.<sup>72</sup> In this respect, global mechanisms related to taxes, international trade, technology transfer and debt management may need to be revisited.

Inclusive growth strategies can be powerful accelerators of poverty reduction. Every percent increase in Brazil's gross national product (GNP) in the early 2000s reduced poverty at five times the rate of India in the same period, benefiting a far larger proportion of people in poverty.<sup>73</sup> The advancement of women, a priority in its own right, is also a sound basis for inclusive growth. If women would play an identical role as men in labour markets, estimates suggest it could add as much as \$28 trillion, or 26 percent, to global annual GDP in 2025; roughly the size of the US and Chinese economies. To enable the full and equal participation of women and other marginalized populations, policies must seek explicitly to achieve *inclusive* growth and anti-discrimination; extending and facilitating job training, new technologies, access to markets; social protection systems, financial services, equitable inheritance and land tenure.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), "Leaving no one behind: the imperative of inclusive development: 2016 Report on the World Social Situation," 2016. Available from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/report-on-the-world-social-situation-rwss-social-policy-and-development-division/rwss2016.html>

<sup>70</sup> World Inequality Lab, "2018 World Inequality Report," 2018. Available from <http://wir2018.wid.world/files/download/wir2018-full-report-english.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> McKinsey Global Institute, "The power of parity: How advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth," September 2015. Available from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>

In practice, the delivery of SDG public services falls, at least in part, to local government; while discriminatory policies and practices are most concretely experienced by people at the local level. To leave no one behind, therefore, national efforts must take subnational context fully into account and seek to strengthen the capacities of local governments, communities and stakeholders; while improving intergovernmental coordination and coherence.

Increasingly robotic and technologically-driven manufacturing and services put a premium on skilled, informed and digitally-connected workers and businesses. Opportunities to generate broad-based employment and domestic demand are thus likely to depend on the ability of governments, people and the private sector to learn, innovate and leapfrog into new markets and value chains. To maximize opportunities and avoid further entrenching inequalities; equitable and affordable access to high-quality internet services must be a priority; along with improvements in essential infrastructure, education, health, energy, social protection and sanitation services.

The SDGs can be leveraged to directly address discrimination through public outreach campaigns that pave the way for change. Public service messaging, for example, has proven important to facilitate reforms aimed at making schools fully accessible to people with disabilities.

National, equity-focused and rights-based SDG targets can be a powerful instrument to compel the change required. Countries can set targets that are feasible and ambitious in their particular context, including to, for example, curb disparities in health and education outcomes and access to quality services. They may be set to close disparities between women and men, geographic localities, income-levels and/or between the furthest behind and everyone else [median progress]. Locally meaningful targets can help leaders and change agents to focus attention, build consensus and overcome hurdles to confronting the inequalities and disparities deemed unfair and unacceptable in context.

**UNDP can support countries to enact by:**

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

## V. Conclusion

With the pledge to leave no one behind, all governments committed to break with “development-as-usual”. They recognized that outdated approaches had put “average rates of progress” ahead of people’s lives and were thus threatening to leave the worst off irrevocably behind.

UNDP commends the wide range of actors who have taken early action to chart a new path, consistent with the pledge to leave no one behind. This paper draws heavily from their initiative and seeks to inform and multiple their efforts, including by encouraging local leaders and change makers to join their ranks - be they academics, government ministers or Prime Ministers, advocates, business leaders, civil servants, parliamentarians or among the left behind themselves. It is hoped that the framework put forward here will provide the basis for dialogue among like-minded actors and set in motion the kind of on-going exchange, iterative learning and broad collaboration it will take to leave no one behind.

In 170 countries and territories, the United Nations development system works together, through joined-up UN Country Teams to support our national partners to mainstream, accelerate and deliver the SDGs. In keeping with this support, the United Nations is well-placed to promote and enable action to *examine, empower and enact* the changes demanded by the pledge to leave no one behind. Further to this support, UNDP is applying the pledge as a principle across all of its programming.<sup>75</sup> The framework outlined in this paper intends to inform both the outward-facing work of UN Country Teams and national partners, as well as the manner in which UNDP designs, implements, monitors and evaluates its programmes and projects.

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<sup>75</sup> See the UNDP Strategic Plan 2018-2021, available from <http://strategicplan.undp.org> and “United Nations Development Assistance Framework Guidance,” 2017, Available from <https://undg.org/document/2017-undaf-guidance>

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