



Development  
Progress

## Flagship Report Summary

# Leaving no one behind

A critical path for the first 1,000 days of the Sustainable  
Development Goals

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Cover image: An elderly Palestinian woman stands in front of her home, destroyed by a powerful winter flood, Mughraqa, Gaza. Photo: © UN Photo/Shareef Sarhan.

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## Acronyms

<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome	<b>MENA</b>	Middle East and North Africa
<b>CEE</b>	Complementary Elementary Education	<b>MGNREGA</b>	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
<b>EAP</b>	East Asia and the Pacific	<b>MIC</b>	Middle-income country
<b>ECA</b>	Europe and Central Asia	<b>NEET</b>	Not in education, employment or training
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product	<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>HIC</b>	High-income country	<b>ODA</b>	Official development assistance
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus	<b>PPP</b>	Purchasing Power Parity
<b>ICT</b>	Information and communication technology	<b>SC/ST</b>	Scheduled Tribe/Caste
<b>IGME</b>	Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation	<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization	<b>SSA</b>	Sub-Saharan Africa
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund	<b>UHC</b>	Universal health care
<b>IVR</b>	Interactive voice response	<b>UMIC</b>	Upper-middle-income country
<b>LAC</b>	Latin America and Caribbean	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>LDC</b>	Least-developed country	<b>UNESCO</b>	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>LGBT</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender	<b>UNICEF</b>	UN Children's Fund
<b>LIC</b>	Low-income country	<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>LMIC</b>	Lower-middle-income country	<b>WIDE</b>	World Inequality Database on Education
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goal		

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# Executive summary



Emmanuel Wilkinton doing his science homework in Delmas 32, Haiti. Photo: © Dominic Chavez/World Bank.

## Key messages

- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will not be met if the poorest and most marginalised people continue to be left behind by progress. Efforts to ensure that no one is left behind are vital in the first 1,000 days – or three years – of the SDGs: the longer governments take to act, the harder it will be to deliver on their promises by 2030.
- If sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is to eliminate ultra poverty, for example – that is people living on less than just \$1 a day (2011 PPP), an estimate of the minimum survival level – by 2030, its current progress needs to be nearly twice as fast, rising to over three times as fast if no action is taken in the next six years. If nothing happens until 2024 or 2027, the region will need to speed up progress by factors of 4.5 and nearly 8 respectively – a formidable task.
- There is clear alignment between the leave no one behind agenda and what marginalised people say they want from their governments: better services such as universal health coverage and rural electrification; greater public awareness, such as creating environments where all girls are expected to go to school; and institutional and legal reform, including the extension of a minimum wage to informal workers, or the introduction of women's land rights.
- The total cost of leaving no one behind in health, education and social protection across the 75 countries for which we have data is an annual average of \$739 billion. Of these, the 30 low-income countries (LICs) will require an additional \$70 billion each year to meet these costs. In the case of the 45 middle-income countries (MICs), governments are generating enough public revenues to meet these costs: the challenge is their allocation.
- The benefits of leaving no one behind include solid returns. Evidence suggests an additional dollar invested in high-quality pre-schools delivers a return of anywhere between \$6 and \$17 (Engle et al., 2011). Recent research by the World Bank (Olinto et al., 2014) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Dabla-Norris et al., 2015) suggests a pro-poor growth agenda helps to improve overall growth levels.

## Recommendations

- By the end of the first 1,000 days of the SDGs (September 2018), governments should identify their marginalised populations, develop a leave no one behind strategy, and begin its implementation. This could be overseen by a cross-ministerial leave no one behind working group. A high-level summit should be convened in September 2018 to share learning, change direction if necessary and monitor progress.
- The first 1,000 days are just the beginning. They need to be followed by sustained action until 2030 to address the systemic barriers to the progress of marginalised people. Progress could be monitored by a series of ‘stepping stone’ targets, set every three to five years, aiming to ensure that any disparities in progress are narrowing fast enough to leave no one behind.

## Introduction

Nelson Mandela once said: ‘A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones’ (Mandela, 1995).

Leaving no one behind is the moral issue of our age, and is at the heart of an ambitious blueprint for action: the SDGs. One specific goal is ‘ending poverty, in all its forms, everywhere’, but the SDGs also aim to tackle marginalisation and meet the needs of all groups. The SDG outcome document specifies that the goals should be met for all segments of society, with an endeavour to reach those furthest behind first (UN, 2015).

Now the focus is on implementation, particularly at the national level, and this report not only makes the case for early action, it also quantifies its benefits. The report outlines the actions that governments can take in the first 1,000 days of the SDGs to respond to what poor people want, to deliver for the most marginalised people and

groups, and serve as the foundation for the achievement of the 2030 agenda. The evidence shows that achieving the SDGs, and the ambition to leave no one behind, will become far more difficult, the longer governments delay. The report concludes, therefore, that early action is critical for the achievement of the SDGs.

## The case for early action

In the era of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), some countries did not start implementation in earnest until 10 years after the goals were adopted (Sarwar, 2015). We have also learned from bitter experience that delayed action on global warming has compounded the policy challenge. The world simply cannot afford delays that threaten the chances of achieving the SDGs.

Looking at the SDGs of greatest relevance to the leave no one behind agenda, and for which data are available, this report calculates the consequences of delay. The results show that the amount of effort needed for every three years of inaction will increase exponentially.

In Africa, for example, our analysis shows that countries will need to reduce preventable child deaths at a rate of 7% a year between 2015 and 2030 to meet the SDG target. If they wait until 2018 before taking action, that rate increases to 9%, and if they wait until 2027, they will have to reduce child mortality more than four times (32%) faster than they would if they start to take action today – an impossible task.

We see a similar story for education. Our calculations show that African countries need to reduce the number of children attending school for less than four years at a rate of 15% each year between 2015 and 2030 to eliminate education poverty. If action is delayed until 2021, the rate increases to 23% per year.

**Table 1: Annual rates of change needed in furthest behind regions, by year efforts begin, for different goal areas**

Goal and target	Region furthest behind	Annual rate of change needed in region furthest behind by year efforts begin				
		2015 **	2018	2021	2024	2027
SDG 1: Ending poverty Target: National poverty	Sub-Saharan Africa	4.5%	5.6%	7.4%	10.9%	20.6%
SDG3: Health Target: Under-five mortality	Sub-Saharan Africa	7.5%	9.3%	12.1%	17.7%	32.2%
SDG 4: Education Target: Education poverty	Sub-Saharan Africa	14.8%	18.2%	23.5%	33.0%	55.2%
SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth Target: Youth not in employment, education or training	South Asia*	12.6%	15.6%	20.2%	28.7%	49.2%
SDG 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions Target: Birth registration	Sub-Saharan Africa	5.9%	7.4%	10.0%	15.4%	33.1%

\* Data are only representative for South Asia and LAC for this indicator. Education poverty is not an SDG target but a prerequisite for meeting the education targets in an equitable way.

\*\* Note that 2015 data are the latest data available.

**Table 2: Annual rates of change needed to eliminate ultra poverty in the region furthest behind, by year efforts begin**

Target	Region furthest behind	Annual rate of change needed in region furthest behind by year efforts begin				
		2015	2018	2021	2024	2027
Ultra poverty	Sub-Saharan Africa	10.4%	12.9%	16.8%	24.1%	42.4%

At present, nearly 16% of the population of SSA live below the ‘ultra poverty’ line – that is, on less than just \$1 a day (in 2011 PPP) – and the region is the furthest behind on this indicator. If SSA is to eliminate ultra poverty by 2030, it needs a reduction of over 10% (compounded yearly), far in excess of the 5.4% average rate of reduction recorded for 2000-2015.

If no action is taken until 2018, rates of progress would need to be 2.5 times faster than they are at present. If nothing is done until 2021, that rises to over three times faster. If nothing happens until 2024 or 2027, this would need to become 4.5 and eight times faster respectively – a formidable task.

Putting the individuals, countries and regions that are furthest behind first, known as progressive universalism, is not only morally right: it can have concrete benefits. On child mortality, for example, Save the Children analysis of disaggregated data for 87 countries finds that, far from slowing progress, a focus on disadvantaged groups is associated with progress that is 6% faster over 10 years, on average (Roche et al., 2015). There is no trade-off here between equity and the efficiency needed to drive progress.

### Who is being left behind?

Those who have previously been excluded or overlooked by progress must now be included. While the answer to the question ‘who is being left behind?’ is different in different countries, it implies groups that are marginalised and/or poor because of their identity, such as women, older people and disabled people. It also refers to the income poor. While these are marginalised groups, this is far from being a marginal issue: in many countries, most people live in poverty. In Madagascar, 82% of the population lives below the \$1.90 a day extreme poverty line, while in Nigeria that figure is 52%.<sup>1</sup>

The leave no one behind principle is challenging because it requires action on entrenched discrimination that is, in many countries, the result of political choices that have benefited ruling parties, majorities and elites.

### Early action is possible

Delivering results by September 2018 may seem implausible, but many countries – including fragile states

– have invested significantly in their most marginalised people. Many reforms have started to improve people’s lives while building foundations for longer-term progress.

While implementation may take far longer than three years, and fragile states will be more limited in what they can achieve, early action is essential for the achievement of ambitious change. Policy responses will differ from one country to another, but our examples demonstrate the feasibility of early action if governments are committed to act and focus on delivering results for those left behind.

- **Viet Nam:** in 2010, the prime minister approved a scheme to improve education outcomes for ethnic minorities. By 2013, ethnic minorities represented over 16% of all children enrolled in pre-school education, more than the percentage of the ethnic minority population (14%) in the total population of Viet Nam (UNESCO and Ministry of Information, 2015).
- **Ethiopia:** the Productive Safety Net Programme, launched in 2005 and the largest programme of its kind in SSA, was reaching 7.5 million poor people by 2009 (Wiseman et al., 2010).
- **Senegal:** the Rural Electrification Senegal project targeted 191 villages in rural areas of the country, increasing the number of people with access to electricity from 17,000 in 2010 to 90,000 in 2012 (Peracod, 2012).
- **Ecuador:** in 2007, the Vice-President of Ecuador made disability a priority for his office; by 2010, a law had been passed stipulating that 4% of public and private employees should be people with disabilities. From 2007 to 2011, annual government spending on programmes for those with disabilities leapt from \$2 million to \$150 million (Otis, 2013).
- **Eritrea:** in 2007 the Government, in conjunction with UNICEF, launched a programme to ensure the children of nomadic herders – often excluded from formal education because of seasonal migration patterns – attend primary school. Within two years, more than 5,000 children age 9-14 were enrolled in 57 specialised learning centres.<sup>2</sup>
- **India:** the *Bharat Nirman* flagship rural infrastructure programme initiated by the Government of India from 2005 to 2009 aimed to connect every community with 1,000 or more people (500 or more in hilly, tribal and

1 World Bank, PovcalNet, <http://iresearch.worldbank.org/PovcalNet/>

2 Azmera D., ‘Complementary education programme puts children back to school in Eritrea’, [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/eritrea\\_56989.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/eritrea_56989.html)

# Leaving no one behind in sub-Saharan Africa

## The longer we wait, the harder it gets

Annual change needed to **halve national poverty** by 2030 if governments start in:

2015	2018	2021	2024	2027	2030
4.5%					
	5.6%				
		7.4%			
			10.9%		
				20.6%	

Annual change needed to **reduce under-five mortality to threshold of 25 preventable deaths per 1000 live births** by 2030

7.5%					
	9.3%				
		12.1%			
			17.7%		
				32.2%	

Annual change needed to reach **universal birth registration** by 2030

5.9%					
	7.4%				
		10%			
			15.4%		
				33.1%	

Annual change needed to **eliminate ultra poverty** by 2030

10.4%					
	12.9%				
		16.8%			
			24.1%		
				42.4%	

Annual change needed to **eliminate education poverty** by 2030

14.8%					
	18.2%				
		23.5%			
			33%		
				55.2%	

desert areas) with all-weather roads. By 2009, over 70% of target communities were connected (Government of India, 2010).

- **Nepal:** the country's interim constitution provided a legal basis to the rights of minorities and introduced quotas for members of lower castes and women. In the Constituent Assembly formed just one year later, one-third of seats were held by women (Paz Arauco et al., 2014).

## Responding to what poor and marginalised people want

Governments developing their SDG implementation plan would be wise to listen to what poor people say about their lives and priorities.

Quantitative data from the MY World survey and the World Values survey, combined with qualitative data from focus group discussions by ODI in marginalised communities in Ghana, Pakistan and South Africa, suggest that poor people want action in three priority areas:

1. services that are available and accessible when they need them
2. a society that respects them and does not discriminate against them
3. institutions and laws that enshrine their rights.

These priorities map neatly on to the policies and programmes that are, according to the evidence, among the most effective in lifting people out of exclusion and entrenched poverty.

## An agenda for the first 1,000 days

The data show that early action makes it feasible to achieve the aspiration to leave no one behind, while delay puts it further out of reach. But governments and others still need to choose the actions that are likely to be most effective to achieve different objectives in different contexts. This report sets out a critical pathway to leave no one behind, focusing on the policies needed to allow the poorest and most marginalised people to make their own progress.

The pathway is built on the evidence of what marginalised people say they want; what works to allow people to lift themselves out of extreme vulnerability; where the main policy gaps are; and what policies offer the best value for money. We then map the elements of a policy agenda that countries of 'lower' progress and 'higher' progress can deliver in the first 1,000 days of the SDGs. We suggest a sequence for reforms for different stages of development, as we assume that countries that have made more progress in a given area will already have the policies and programmes suggested for the lower progress countries. The policy areas that emerge speak to the

integrated agenda of the SDGs, including economic, social and environmental issues.

Many policies to leave no one behind will take more than 1,000 days to implement fully, and will require sustained investment through to the SDG deadline of 2030. However, countries can make an important 'down payment' by September 2018.

The private sector, NGOs, and academia will also be responsible for delivering leave no one behind. But this report focuses on action by governments, as the players technically accountable for SDG implementation.

## What is needed to deliver the change?

Determining the critical pathway is only part of the answer: governments need the means to implement the policies they want to prioritise.

**Data are crucial** to both identify where the need is greatest and monitor implementation. The first step would be for governments to identify their marginalised populations by expanding the response samples for major surveys to reach people who have been missed, and by making better use of 'big data'. There must also be an environment that responds to, and acts upon, the data gathered.

**Financing models** need to ensure that money goes where it is needed. Delivering the SDG agenda will require more resources, both domestic (including those generated by effective taxation) and official development assistance (ODA). According to ODI calculations, **the cost of ensuring no one is left behind in health, education and social protection across 75 countries for which we have data is an annual average of \$739 billion.** Of these, 30 low-income countries (LICs) will require another \$70 billion annually to meet these costs. In the 45 middle-income countries (MICs), governments are generating enough public revenues to meet these costs, but are not allocating enough to these basic services.

**Effective governance** needs to ensure that financing and policies are implemented as planned, and the political prioritisation and full inclusion of marginalised groups. There has to be explicit recognition of the interlinkages between economic, social and environmental challenges, and an institutional set-up that does not make policy in siloes. Where governments are marginalising people deliberately, a normative shift is needed to reverse entrenched attitudes. It is here that the global nature of the SDGs is vital: the international scrutiny and pressure that they bring makes it harder for governments to neglect the needs of a sizeable share of their citizens.

Finally, action needs to continue beyond the first 1,000 days of the SDGs. Governments could set rolling 'stepping stone' targets every three-five years, to ensure that enough progress is being made on closing the gaps between outcomes for different groups across the SDGs (Watkins, 2013).



# Leave no one behind: the critical pathway

## Lower progress countries

## Higher progress countries



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Development Progress is a four-year research project which aims to better understand, measure and communicate progress in development. Building on an initial phase of research across 24 case studies, this second phase continues to examine progress across countries and within sectors, to provide evidence for what's worked and why over the past two decades.

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