



# Achieving the SDGs and ‘leaving no one behind’

## Maximising synergies and mitigating trade-offs

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A teal circular icon containing the text 'Key messages' in white.

### Key messages

- The transformative potential of the SDGs will not be realised unless the interactions between them – both synergies and trade-offs – are grasped and acted upon.
- Governments risk taking decisions in particular areas which might have negative impacts on the prospects for progress in other areas; mitigating action will be needed to keep each country in overall terms on track for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- The High Level Political Forum at summit level in September 2019 will be an important moment for leaders to take stock of progress made so far and an opportunity to provide guidance on critical aspects of implementation.

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# Acronyms

<b>HLPF</b>	High Level Political Forum
<b>HSUP</b>	Harare Slum Upgrading Programme (Zimbabwe)
<b>NHIS</b>	National Health Insurance Scheme (Ghana)
<b>ODI</b>	Overseas Development Institute
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PCSD</b>	policy coherence for sustainable development
<b>PSIA</b>	Poverty and Social Impact Analysis
<b>PSNP</b>	Productive Safety Net Programme (Ethiopia)
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UHC</b>	universal health coverage
<b>UN DESA</b>	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
<b>VNR</b>	Voluntary National Review
<b>ZHPF</b>	Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 An integrated agenda

The integrated nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development poses special challenges for policy-makers worldwide. The transformative potential of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets will not be realised unless the numerous and complex interactions between all of them are grasped and acted upon. This requires a fundamental shift of mindsets on the part of governments and, indeed, all other stakeholders who have a role to play in implementing the Agenda.

Governments must think through the implications of an integrated global agenda which spans virtually the entire range of their policy responsibilities. Le Blanc (2015) has noted that 60 of the SDG targets refer explicitly to at least one Goal other than the one to which they belong. Seven targets across four of the SDGs refer to more than 10 other Goals. The Goals and targets do not respect traditional ministerial portfolios; they will be achieved only through holistic action which considers, on the one hand, the positive opportunities for making progress across several Goals simultaneously and, on the other, the risks of decisions being taken in individual policy areas which could adversely affect the progress needed in other areas.

As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) 2018 report on policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) points out, the SDGs cannot be achieved through single-sector or silo approaches but will require supporting institutional mechanisms, which can anticipate, balance and reconcile diverging policy pressures, and which can also foster an administrative culture which promotes cross-sectoral collaboration (OECD, 2018). Of course, each country will need to determine its own institutional mechanisms and sequencing of

actions based on what is best for it nationally; there is no 'one size fits all' solution.

## 1.2 Interactions

Interactions across the 2030 Agenda's Goals and targets can have positive or negative effects. Those that have positive effects – and therefore contribute to sustainable development and the realisation of the 2030 Agenda – are known as 'synergies'. Those that have negative effects – and therefore hinder or reverse sustainable development – are known as 'trade-offs'.

Take climate action (SDG 13) as an example. Responses to climate change in the form of adaptation and mitigation measures can interact with other Goals and targets in ways which are either positive or negative. These responses can be planned in such a way as to maximise the synergies and limit the trade-offs.

An example of a synergy is sustainable forest management, which can interact with other dimensions of sustainable development by providing food and clean water (SDGs 2 and 6) and protecting ecosystems (SDG 15). An example of a trade-off is if ambitious climate action mitigation measures change land-use in ways which have negative impacts on sustainable development, such as the transfer of land to plantations for bio-energy production, which could ultimately threaten food and water security and cause biodiversity loss. Trade-offs can be minimised if they are effectively managed – for example, taking care to improve bio-energy crop yields to reduce harmful land-use change (IPCC, 2018).

Much important work has already been done on these issues. The Overseas Development Institute (ODI)'s Development Progress project, which ran from 2010 to 2016, examined closely country-level progress on several dimensions of well-being which align with the SDGs. The

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project produced 50 case studies – 49 from more than 35 countries around the world and the 50th, entitled *Progressia*, which imagined a country that could deal with the most common SDG trade-offs (Machingura and Lally, 2017). This past work is the motivation for this new paper and, throughout, we draw on some of the Development Progress case studies (including Sri Lanka, Viet Nam and Ecuador) to show how certain policy actions have taken into account synergies and trade-offs. We also draw on examples from existing literature (Nillson et al., 2017; Kenny, 2018) to illustrate the synergies and trade-offs which can arise and to show different ways in which governments have responded.

The paper aims to help governments and key stakeholders as they face up to these challenges. We encourage governments to put in place structures which will help them to identify in good time both opportunities and threats. There is rich potential for decision-making which would take advantage of the countless positive synergies across the Goals and targets. But governments also face the risk that decisions they may be contemplating in particular areas might have negative impacts, perhaps unforeseen, on

the prospects for progress in other areas. Trade-offs of this kind are probably inevitable given that no country is in a position to meet all Goals and targets immediately and difficult policy choices and prioritisation cannot be avoided. While it may be possible to limit the impacts of particular trade-offs, a certain number of trade-offs will ultimately be unavoidable. The simplest and most obvious dilemma for a government, one might observe in passing, is the choices it makes in allocating finite budgetary resources or directing investment.

We look at the implications of synergies and trade-offs for achieving the Agenda, in particular, the commitment to ‘leave no one behind’ and to ‘endeavour to reach the furthest behind first’ (UN, 2015: Intro, para. 4). We provide examples from a range of countries of synergies being successfully exploited and of trade-offs being addressed – albeit with varying degrees of success. The High Level Political Forum (HLPF) meeting at summit level in September 2019 will be the first major opportunity since the SDGs were adopted in 2015 for leaders to take stock of progress made so far and to provide guidance on this and other critical aspects of implementation.

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## 2 The challenges of prioritisation

All parts of the 2030 Agenda are deemed to be equally important, and no hierarchy or priority-setting is officially entertained. The reality, of course, is that for various reasons governments *are* indeed setting priorities – even if they do not necessarily acknowledge this in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on implementation which they make to the HLPF. Resources are finite and frequently unpredictable; electoral terms impose their own short-term pressures – and short-term electoral considerations often prevail over the need to take a long-term intergenerational perspective (even if, as the OECD’s PCSD 2018 notes, some countries have chosen to apply 20- or 30-year timeframes to their national strategies). Moreover, there will be ‘low-hanging fruit’ – that is, easily demonstrable progress to which governments will want to draw attention in the early years of implementation. The 2030 Agenda is unprecedentedly broad and, to be made more manageable, may require some concentration of effort. There will also be aspects of the Agenda which are less interesting to some countries than to others (e.g. Goal 14 on life below water will be less interesting to land-locked states). A degree of prioritisation is inevitable – and may itself delay moves by some governments towards the integrated perspective which full implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires.

Analyses of the VNRs submitted at the three annual HLPF meetings since adoption of the 2030 Agenda have been prepared by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA, 2017, 2018). The evidence laid out in these indicates that many governments continue to rely on traditional silo thinking and fragmented approaches (*ibid*). Although most have established structures to facilitate

internal coordination on SDGs implementation, relatively few have provided evidence of actions which have transcended ministerial boundaries in pursuit of good SDG outcomes. Of course, mindsets will not change overnight and there are significant capacity constraints – in many administrations, particularly in smaller low- or middle-income countries. But, in the short term, governments need to recognise more fully: (1) the opportunities for making important cross-sectoral progress with the right decisions; and (2) the damage – potentially irreversible – that can be done by making decisions in one sector which fail to take account of their possible negative impact on other sectors. There may be no perfect way of resolving such dilemmas but, at the very least, mitigating action can be factored into the planning process.

The risks of short-sighted decision-making are particularly apparent when we consider the commitment made by world leaders in the Agenda to leave no one behind and to try to ‘reach the furthest behind first’. The furthest behind – individuals and groups who are most exposed economically, socially and environmentally and whose needs are greatest – will benefit most from positive synergies across the Goals and targets. The ‘transformation’ promised by the 2030 Agenda, and from which they have most to gain, will only be realised through such synergies. But, they are also more vulnerable to policies and decisions which create detrimental trade-offs. Exploiting synergies and avoiding – or minimising – trade-offs are more important for these groups than for any others. The OECD (2018) rightly points out that the leave no one behind pledge builds on an important lesson from the era of the Millennium Development Goals, which preceded the SDGs: the 2030 Agenda will fail if the SDGs

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are not achieved for the world's poorest, most vulnerable and marginalised people.

Many governments will find it easier in practical terms, of course, to continue with silo-based decision-making and to duck the challenges of an integrated development agenda. They may also be tempted to seek easier, shorter-term options for SDG implementation and to defer the politically difficult choices required to ensure no one is left behind. They may prefer to

tackle the demands of this Agenda only in part at this stage and defer key decisions to much later. But if they are serious about their commitment to leaving no one behind and prioritising the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable above everything else, action is needed now (Stuart et al., 2015; 2016; Stuart and Samman, 2017). Failure to step up to this challenge could undermine confidence in the Agenda more generally and perhaps even deal it a fatal blow.

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# 3 The importance of synergies and trade-offs

Machingura and Lally (2017) point out that understanding trade-offs between individual Goals will contribute to a better evaluation of past and present progress. They observe that the ability to make a wise choice regarding trade-offs is one of the most challenging for policy-makers. Nillson et al. (2017) argue that policy-makers' understanding of trade-offs and synergies should be grounded in a science-based analysis of interactions across SDG domains (something which is currently lacking). They point out that this will help support more coherent and effective decision-making and better facilitate follow-up and monitoring of progress.

A key test of governments' fidelity to the ambition of the 2030 Agenda is whether decisions they take uphold their commitment to leave no one behind. And, in this respect, there is merit in Machingura and Lally's (2017) recommendation that policy-makers consider distributional analysis. Such analysis would allow governments to better understand the costs and benefits of their decisions and mitigate quickly any negative impacts on their populations.

Systematic use of the Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (PSIA) would be a good starting point for this kind of measurement. Some countries have used PSIA to assess distributional and social impacts of policy reforms on various social groups. Its strength lies in its application both *before* and *during* a policy reform process, providing evidence on the distribution of losses and gains that will result from a proposed policy change. The PSIA can also be usefully applied *after* a policy reform to examine policy impacts on different social groups (ibid.).

In countries that have adopted the PSIA, case studies by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have shown positive results (ibid.).

For example, using this approach, Nepal was able to analyse the distributional impact of increasing power tariffs on political and social outcomes. The PSIA findings showed how the higher tariffs benefited the government but negatively impacted the poorer segments of society. The negotiations that ensued led to multi-sectoral discussions of the Financial Recovery Plan for Electric Utility. In those discussions, the relevant actors tried to understand how best to change the tariff structure and created space for more transparent policy dialogues (ibid). Ghana also used the PSIA when it increased petroleum prices through the 2005 Energy Subsidy Reform programme as a way to understand the impacts of the reform on vulnerable populations. The PSIA pointed to some dire consequences for the economic outcomes of vulnerable populations and therefore suggested some mitigating interventions – particularly for poorer groups – which the government then considered. Suggestions included free access to primary and secondary school education at all government-run schools; investments in rural electrification; and increased funding to facilitate access to public transport and healthcare. If the PSIA is incorporated systematically into the policy-making process (before, during and after policy reforms are made), this will help to accelerate the progress needed to leave no one behind.

Kenny (2018) has urged governments to consider the implications of trading off one policy area against another and to plan accordingly. This means, he suggests, discussing the potential outcomes of policies with stakeholders to ensure that the likely distributional impacts are fully understood, especially for the poorest and marginalised, who are most vulnerable to change. We support his recommendation that governments put in

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place complementary policies to compensate the immediate losers from a specific policy decision.

Kenny (2018) also advises governments in developing countries, with donors supporting them, to design holistic policies that minimise negative impacts on the prospects for achieving progress relating to the Goals and targets. This would mean exploiting synergies across different policy areas with high cross-sectoral dimensions. On trade-offs, he notes that, as meeting the SDGs will require considerable investment, there is the basic trade-off that investing in one area may crowd out investment in other Goal and target areas. We urge governments also, if negative trade-offs between different areas become unavoidable, to take steps to at least mitigate the most harmful consequences of these trade-offs. As Kenny (2018) has pointed out, trade-offs need to be managed effectively in ways which will maximise overall progress.

*Development Progress* case studies have shown excellent results in countries that have adopted holistic and integrated policy approaches. For example, Ethiopia took a holistic and integrated approach, centring government policy on poverty eradication and taking a multidimensional approach to its achievement. This encouraged different line ministries to work together more comprehensively and consistently on poverty-reduction measures leading to the integration of social sectors into broader economic planning, and tremendous successes in the reduction of poverty. There were also gains in education, health and employment. With Costa Rica's government in the driving seat and strong partnerships among donors, the private sector and civil society, that country established a holistic policy for conservation areas. This entailed effective legislation, including a ban

on future land-use change on all forested land along with innovative incentive structures which provided direct financial incentives to landowners to conserve forests instead of converting them to agricultural land. This policy approach not only improved the country's total forest cover, but also household nutrition security (Lenhardt et al., 2015; Machingura and Lally, 2017).

Illustrations of the kind we use here – Nepal, Ghana, Ethiopia, and Costa Rica – only offer top-level findings. In reality, of course, different understandings of synergies and trade-offs would have emerged among key actors (including policy-makers) as policy actions unfolded.

The seven examples in the following section serve a different purpose. They highlight how individual governments have: (a) seized opportunities to take decisions which involved synergies across a number of Goal and target areas; or (b) taken such decisions with clear positive intent but without this being realised fully in implementation; or (c) taken decisions in furtherance of individual Goals and targets which, however, had adverse impacts with mitigating elements; or (d) taken decisions which were generally negative in their impacts and had no discernible mitigating elements. The examples are chosen to reflect balance across different Goals, different regions of the world and different income groups. In evaluating each, we have considered, based on secondary evidence, whether the policy-makers concerned took key synergies and trade-offs into account; what the actions' implications were for leaving no one behind; whether they looked at action to mitigate risks and negative impacts; and whether overall the steps taken were the most sensible policy choice or set of choices.

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# 4 Lessons in realising synergies and managing trade-offs

## 4.1 Examples from around the world

There are countless examples around the world either of synergies across various SDGs and targets which have been recognised and acted upon by governments or of challenging trade-offs that governments have had to address in their policy-making.

In India, for example, a programme to remove expensive subsidies on a range of goods and replace them with cash transfers, which was targeted at the most vulnerable groups, has had a range of beneficial effects spanning several SDGs and is reinforcing the government's efforts to combat poverty (Kenny, 2018).

In Germany, the passage of legislation to promote greater use of wind, solar, bioenergy and other forms of renewable energy not only contributes to SDG 7 but has also had positive impacts on job creation within the country and therefore serves SDG 8 (Nillson et al., 2017).

In the United States, clean air legislation addresses the environmental damage done by air pollution as well as contributing to a range of important health outcomes under SDG 3, which in turn has benefits for several other Goals (ibid.).

There are other good examples of governments recognising that an action which is in itself beneficial (e.g. in terms of economic or social reform) could have detrimental effects in the short-term on their citizens and therefore needs to be balanced by some compensatory measure.

Recognising that a plan to remove fuel subsidies would cause the price of some energy

and agricultural goods to rise significantly, Iran ensured that nearly four out of five households would receive compensatory payments. These were designed in a way that promoted purchases outside the energy sector and therefore had positive effects in terms of improved welfare and diversification of the economy. The removal or reduction of fossil fuel subsidies is, in itself, a beneficial step that reduces vehicle use and promotes the objectives set out in a range of SDGs (Kenny, 2018).

There are numerous examples of policies and initiatives which, though yielding a wide range of benefits across the SDGs, nevertheless also have some negative consequences.

In Senegal, a rapidly growing population is increasing pressure on natural resources and the environment. The government therefore introduced a programme to reduce land degradation, improve land and soil quality and thereby improve fertility agricultural production. This has benefits across a range of SDGs including relating to water, food security, biodiversity, climate change and poverty alleviation. However, there are also some detrimental trade-offs, including the increased use of fertilisers and pesticides, which have adverse impacts on water quality and increase associated diseases (Nillson et al., 2017).

In the United States, the agricultural sector in California plays a significant role in the nutritional quality of the national diet and as such makes an important contribution to SDG 2 and to other Goals. However, it has an adverse impact on health, water, environmental and

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climate outcomes because of the higher carbon emissions contributed by farm activities, the effect of fertilisers and dust on efforts to combat air pollution and the related threats to water resources (of particular concern in a region prone to periodic drought). In response to these challenges, various steps are being taken to promote ‘climate-smart’ policies that balance mitigation, adaptation and production (ibid.).

In Australia, authorities have grappled with the challenges of reconciling inevitable urban development along the country’s extensive coastline with the need for good coastal management that will protect marine ecosystems. Sustainable urbanisation is part of the SDGs (SDG 11), as are a whole range of environmental, biodiversity and climate objectives. Bringing these competing concerns into balance is not easy: on the one hand, population growth along Australia’s coasts is for various reasons unavoidable and, on the other, these coastal areas are already exposed to a variety of environmental threats (ibid.).

A good example of interdependence between several Goals is to be found in the states which adjoin the Baltic Sea. These states face the challenge of sustaining tourism and fisheries, two critically important sectors for employment, in a marine environment which is severely affected by pollution and by ecologically harmful fishing practices. Tourism and fisheries – particularly marine aquaculture – depend on healthy oceans and marine resources. If the Baltic Sea is not restored to good ecological health, the considerable employment potential of these two sectors will be jeopardised. Action to reduce pollution of the Baltic Sea will facilitate progress across several Goals and is urgently needed. The European Commission is working to identify options for supporting sustainable blue growth in this region (ibid.).

We go on now to examine in more detail decisions taken in a number of countries which either (a) achieved synergies; or (b) had clear positive intent but failed to realise this fully in implementation; or (c) had significant adverse impacts because of a failure to balance competing considerations sufficiently; or (d) were generally negative in their impacts and had no discernible mitigating elements.

## 4.2 Realising synergies in Ethiopia and the Republic of Korea

We showcase initially how the authorities in two countries – Ethiopia and the Republic of Korea – have seized opportunities to take decisions which involved **synergies** across a number of Goal and target areas.

### 4.2.1 Protecting the poorest: Ethiopia’s Productive Safety Net Programme

This section examines Ethiopia’s positive use of synergies in developing its social protection policy, specifically its Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP). While acknowledging that the PSNP pre-dates the SDGs, we find that it continues to have major significance for Ethiopia’s implementation of the 2030 Agenda. This includes the effectiveness or otherwise of the country’s efforts to leave no one behind. In this context, we also look at the trade-offs made by Ethiopia.

Social protection policies are among the major policies that will deliver the SDGs and meet the leave no one behind commitment (Stuart et. al, 2016). SDG target 1.3, under the overarching goal of ‘ending poverty in all its forms everywhere’, calls on countries to ‘implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable’ (UN, 2015). The target reinforces the objectives set out in the other SDG 1 targets. And, if implemented well, social protection policies can help meet these targets as well as having a positive impact on many of the other Goals – for example, ending hunger (SDG 2), ensuring healthy lives (SDG 3), promoting work and economic growth (SDG 8) and combating climate change (SDG 13).

However, targeted social transfer programmes tend to extend to only a small proportion of poor people and, in general, the transfers have low monetary value (Manuel et al., 2018). The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017) and the World Bank (2018) estimate that social protection benefits cover only 45% of the world population and social safety nets reach only 20% of those living in extreme poverty in low-income countries.

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There is also no single design for social protection programmes to address poverty; instead they vary across individual political, social, economic and historical contexts. As governments decide on how to roll out social protection policies and related transfer programmes, they will need to address questions such as:

- What share, and segment, of the population will the social transfers cover?
- Are these going to be of sufficient monetary value?
- Are the transfers intended to protect basic levels of consumption among the poor or to prevent vulnerable households from slipping into poverty, or will they address a combination of the two?

Policy-makers will recognise that trade-offs must be made across these various dimensions – especially between population coverage and the monetary value of the transfers. Furthermore, in allocating financial resources, there can be a trade-off if social assistance is used essentially to prevent vulnerable households from slipping into poverty and to continue supporting those who are already in poverty (Scott and Diwakar, 2016). This is especially true in contexts where national and donor budgets are constrained and where social assistance for the poorest is inadequate in terms of both the amount given and national coverage.

Ethiopia's PSNP is the largest-scale safety net programme in any LIC and the largest of its kind in sub-Saharan Africa. It began in 2005 after the recognition that a decade of annual humanitarian appeals had not lowered chronic hunger among Ethiopia's poorest people (Manuel et al., 2018). Resources committed in response to an appeal were often in the form of food aid shipped from donor countries. The challenge for the government was to integrate relief, asset protection and development into a single effort that could adequately support vulnerable people while decreasing future food insecurity (World Bank, 2012).

In 2004, and by using the average number of people requiring food aid over the last five years as a proxy for chronic food insecurity, the Ethiopian government proposed a caseload of

5 million chronically food-insecure individuals. While not an assessment of chronic food insecurity, the approach was deemed sensible given the lack of other data sources and the aim of moving households from the emergency food aid system over to the PSNP. Donor agencies saw the proposed figure as a minimum, with the actual number of chronically food-insecure people probably closer to 7.9 million. However, while a larger programme was likely required, the PSNP was not yet a proven social protection instrument. It was therefore unlikely that such a large safety net could be resourced or implemented from the outset (ibid.).

While the introduction of cash payments enjoyed strong support within the government and the donor community, they widely recognised that it needed to be implemented carefully. Setting the PSNP transfer level was challenging. The programme had four objectives: to smooth consumption among targeted households; to ensure adequate consumption among targeted households; to enable households to invest in productive assets; and to meet the above objectives without disruptions in the labour or food markets (ibid.). And while at first glance these objectives may seem comparable, their differences pose challenges for deciding a programme transfer rate in either cash or food. The first objective suggests that the transfer should be set at a level that guarantees the existing diet of households, even though this diet may be nutritionally inadequate. In contrast, the second and third objectives suggest progressively higher transfer rates so that households can purchase a nutritionally adequate diet and/or have sufficient money left over to invest in productive assets (ibid.).

In addition to reconciling these objectives, the transfer level had to consider the political imperatives of setting a uniform national cash wage rate and commitments of international agencies and the government to the Sphere Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response (the 'Sphere Standards'). The process for setting the transfer level (also called the wage rate) was thus a careful balancing act that converged around 6 Ethiopian Birr (\$0.21) per day for the cash transfer and the Sphere standards for food transfers (ibid.).

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## Key facts

Ethiopia's PSNP is well targeted, with 80% of transfers going to the poor – a direct result of its emphasis on public works. Beneficiaries are self-selecting, with only the poorest taking part as they lack other livelihood opportunities (Manuel et al., 2018). It has lifted 1.4 million people out of extreme poverty and enabled Ethiopia to avoid famine during the severe 2010/11 drought (ibid.), as well as playing a pivotal role in the response to the worst drought for 40 years in 2015/16 (ibid.).

Analysis of household panel data along with climate and price data corroborates these achievements, demonstrating that public works under PSNP have helped households to mitigate the impacts of moderate crop failure and the consequences of the drought (Vargus Hill and Porter, 2015; Scott and Diwakar, 2016). The panel data also shows that public works have reduced the likelihood of people becoming impoverished in the future (Vargus Hill and Porter, 2015; Scott and Diwakar, 2016).

The programme is to be scaled up and doubled to reach 10 million beneficiaries by 2020 and lift nearly half of them out of extreme poverty (Manuel et al., 2018). Under the planned scale-up, over 80% of beneficiaries will receive an income transfer due to adult members of the household working half the year on local public works, worth \$42.00 per beneficiary a year or, in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms, \$0.28 a day. Those unable to work (e.g. people with disabilities or older people living on their own) will receive the same transfer for the whole year (ibid.).<sup>1</sup>

But the PSNP is also interesting for other reasons. It is a good example of how social protection can scale up during a crisis. With an early warning system monitoring developments in the country, there are triggers for activation of the Risk Financing Mechanism under the programme. Activation of the Risk Financing Mechanism during the 2011 drought, for instance, brought support to an additional 3.1 million beneficiaries in PSNP districts;

and it extended the duration of transfers for a further three months for the existing 6.5 million beneficiaries. Funds were disbursed six weeks after the Risk Financing Mechanism was triggered – a faster response effort than that of the humanitarian sector (Scott and Diwakar, 2016).

The programme offers important lessons for the design and implementation of 'shock-responsive' social protection. First, money needs to be available in bank accounts and earmarked for this purpose; second, appropriate early warning systems need to be in place; third, coordination among a range of actors across the development and humanitarian communities is crucial; and, finally, the roles and responsibilities of different institutions need to be clear (ibid.).

As the planned scale-up of the PSNP aims to provide a broader range of support including training in nutrition practices and livelihood skills (Manuel et al., 2018), it will therefore offer a wider set of benefits and synergies. Most of the public works projects are agricultural investments, such as soil and water conservation programmes and small-scale irrigation schemes (ibid.). These help with large-scale carbon sequestration. Other projects build infrastructure for local economic development (e.g. rural roads) and basic service delivery (e.g. school rooms and health posts). A focus on climate-smart approaches will also maximise the adaptation benefits and minimise the risks from maladaptation (ibid.).

Against all this, the PSNP with its current resources, and even with the planned scale-up, will reach only a third of those living in extreme poverty in Ethiopia. The average transfer will be only half the amount needed to lift the typical poor household above the poverty line. A programme that reaches all poor households with the full amount would cost more than \$4 billion a year – six times more than the value of the current one (Manuel et al., 2018). This is not presently viable, even if taxes were increased to fund it or additional donor assistance were provided.

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1 Most beneficiaries are expected to receive payment in cash, and e-payment mechanisms are being increasingly piloted (Manuel et al., 2018).

## Our assessment

- The main synergies achieved by the PSNP are with the poverty-, health-, income-generating and climate-related Goals (SDGs 1, 3, 8 and 13). This is due to the programme's focus on reducing chronic hunger, addressing climate-related shocks, such as drought, and increasing the range of the programme to include projects with wider benefits such as on nutrition and livelihood skills.
- There is a key trade-off between population coverage and the monetary value of the transfers: while coverage has been high, the average transfer is insufficient to lift the typical poor household out of poverty.
- It seems that, in balancing the various programme objectives, policy-makers were acutely aware of both the synergies and trade-offs involved. They considered financial pragmatism, getting the cash and food transfer balance right and built on their initial success to add more components to the design and to scale up.
- In so far as the PSNP is having a positive impact on a third of those living in extreme poverty in Ethiopia, it provides concrete evidence of a serious commitment on the part of the Ethiopian government to leave no one behind.
- On balance, this is a sensible set of policy decisions taken by the Ethiopian government. Yet challenges remain – especially the cost of reaching all the poor.

### 4.2.2 Rundown motorway becomes multi-purpose public space: Seoul's Cheonggyecheon stream restoration project

Urban development policies are vital to delivering the SDGs and leaving no one behind. SDG 11 calls for 'cities and human settlements [to be] inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable' by 2030. Target 11.7 focuses in particular on providing 'universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities'. This reinforces the objectives set out in the other SDG 11 targets and, if implemented well, can impact positively on many of the other Goals, such as SDG 3 (ensuring healthy lives) and SDG 13 (combating climate change).

The Cheonggyecheon stream restoration project is an initiative in the Republic of Korea that aims to create a public space of the kind set out in target 11.7. The project exploits synergies across several SDGs. Seoul's municipal authorities have rebuilt a motorway that previously covered a stream, making it a multipurpose public space with continuous walkways and cycleways along the length of the stream.

#### Key facts

During the mid- to late 20th century, the Cheonggyecheon motorway had allowed easier access to the downtown area of Seoul, leading to rapid industrial development. However, by the early 2000s, it was so dilapidated that a decision was needed on whether to demolish it completely and build a new motorway or to deculvert and restore the Cheonggyecheon stream. There were also safety issues of various kinds. In Gangbook (north of Han river) where the Cheonggyecheon stream runs, the worn-out infrastructure compared unfavourably with other infrastructure in the vicinity. This was causing an urban imbalance that was contributing to a loss of economic competitiveness in the area (Nillson et al., 2017).

The change in Seoul's priorities in favour of sustainable well-being followed the collapse due to poor construction of two major pieces of infrastructure elsewhere in Seoul. With renewal of the Cheonggyecheon stream being proposed for cultural and historical reasons, this project became a major political issue during the 2002 Seoul mayoral election and led indeed to a victory for Mayor Lee Myung Bak, who had advocated for the immediate restoration of the stream (ibid.).

The motorway was dismantled between 2003 and 2005. The concrete that had covered the stream was removed and the entire area was converted to an important environmental and cultural amenity (with a new museum to capture its historical legacy).

The motorway's daily traffic flow had been around 170,000 vehicles. However, after its demolition, the Seoul Metropolitan Government limited car traffic to two-lane, one-way streets on either side of the stream and invested heavily in

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public transport (Chung et al., 2012). Investment focused on making public transport the cheaper, easier and faster option. Bus services were improved and became as fast as, or faster than, car trips (Seoul Development Institute, 2005).

A large number of stores had developed on the banks of the stream. The merchants involved were persuaded to move to a location on the edge of the city and received some compensation. The restoration of the stream also improved air quality and reduced the heat island effect and average temperature in the area.

However, there were several points of concern. The trade-offs included adverse impacts on the local population, many of whose livelihoods depended on a local flea market that had to be relocated. Many of the new design features also faced criticism, from the difficulty of access for people with disabilities to the lack of meaningful consultation with the public during the different stages of the project. Its construction was considered rushed and involved corruption and damage of cultural heritage (Marshall, 2016). Alongside the political and social troubles surrounding its construction, the project also drew criticism linked to the expense of maintaining the stream.

Despite these various concerns, the Cheonggyecheon stream is clearly exploiting synergies across several SDGs. It furthers not only SDG 9 (building resilient infrastructure) but also SDG 3 (ensuring healthy lives), and SDG 13 (combating climate change). Having become a tourist attraction as well as a cultural space and park, it is providing a variety of benefits for downtown Seoul. It has also served as a model for uncovering the city's other buried streams as well as for restoration projects in Los Angeles, whose river has been covered in concrete since the 1930s (ibid.).

#### Our assessment

- The main synergies exploited by the Seoul authorities involved the range of benefits which were created for the city (including improved environmental and health outcomes, for instance from the reduced congestion from cars, improved air quality and the switch to easier, cheaper, faster and cleaner forms of public transport).

- The main trade-offs involved the displacement of the local population and disruption of their livelihoods; the expense of maintaining the stream; and some damage to the architectural heritage of the area.
- Overall, we find that the synergies achieved with this project across a range of SDGs outweigh the trade-offs. While the project was criticised for being rushed through under political pressure and with inadequate public consultation, it has created an outstanding public amenity that provides a variety of benefits, replacing a district which had been known for its shanty-town conditions and safety and public health issues.
- The project has helped Seoul to progress towards the leave no one behind commitment by creating a space in the core of the city that improves access to the city for people from all income groups, including from the poorest communities.

### 4.3 Good intentions in Ghana and Ecuador

In this section, we present two examples from Ghana and Ecuador where governments have taken decisions with **clear positive intent** but without this being realised fully in implementation.

#### 4.3.1 For 'all' or the 'few': universal health coverage in Ghana and its National Health Insurance Scheme

Universal health coverage (UHC) is among the major policies to deliver the SDGs and the leave no one behind commitment. SDG target 3.8 calls on countries to 'achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all'. The target reinforces the objectives set out in the other SDG 3 targets. And, if implemented well, UHC can help meet these targets as well as impact positively on many of the other Goals.

However, providing an entire country's population with a broad package of health services is costly. Estimating the exact cost is

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difficult, mainly because it depends on which services are provided and the quality of these services (Nicholson et al., 2015). It also depends on a country's willingness and ability to commit the required resources.

As governments decide how to progress towards UHC, they will need to address questions such as:

- Who in the population is covered?
- What services are they covered by – and at what level of quality?
- What level of financial protection do citizens have when accessing services?

Policy-makers will recognise that trade-offs must be made across these various dimensions and that a strategy based on only one of them will not work. For example, promising free health services will be ineffective if there is inequality of access or if services are of poor quality. When thinking through these trade-offs, countries usually pursue one of two broad strategies: extending coverage to the whole population for a priority package of services, or prioritising specific population groups (for example, the poorest) and offering them a broader range of services (WHO, 2010).

This section examines the way in which Ghana has addressed these trade-offs in developing its own policies towards UHC, in particular through its National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS), and looks at the impact these policies are having on its leave no one behind commitment.

Like many other countries, Ghana has been moving towards UHC since the early 2000s. In 2003, it launched the NHIS with the aim of removing financial barriers to accessing health services, particularly for the poor and vulnerable. The scheme ultimately aims to provide universal insurance coverage to all Ghanaians.

#### Key facts

- Around 11 million people, or 38% of the national population, are active NHIS members (2016, latest year available cited in Blampied et al., 2018).
- The NHIS is designed to cover about 95% of the disease burden in Ghana (Scheiber et al., 2012). The benefits package under

it is broad, covering outpatient, inpatient, maternity care and emergency health services, and some aspects of oral health and eye care. However, there are several notable omissions, such as family planning. Little information is available on the quality of services.

- The services under NHIS are meant to be affordable for all Ghanaians and free for several vulnerable groups. Premium payments are waived for people over the age of 70; children under 18 years; 'indigents' (which should cover the poorest people as these are defined as unemployed individuals with no identifiable source of income and no abode); pregnant women; persons with mental disorders; and other categories of people with disabilities.

However, this is not the reality for Ghana's poorest citizens. Although more than 2 million Ghanaians have been identified as extremely poor (living on less than 2.17 Cedis (\$0.50) per day (GSS, 2014)), many living in poverty are not enrolled in the scheme. According to Fenny et al. (2018), less than 2% of poor citizens are covered. It will be increasingly difficult to ensure financial protection for vulnerable groups. A significant contributory factor is the policy of premium exemptions. The large number of exempt members – for example, under-18s, who comprise 45% of scheme members – cannot be sustained by the number of 'healthy and wealthy' members. With the number of exempt members growing, and the scheme offering a package of benefits that is notably broad, NHIS's expenditure is outpacing revenue. This has given rise to the current financial crisis.

Party politics in Ghana has added to the pressures on the scheme. The New Patriotic Party, who won the 2000 election campaign partly on a promise to institute a more equitable insurance scheme, rushed through the legislation that established the NHIS. Many health donors initially applauded the scheme but then opposed it on multiple grounds, including its lack of fiscal soundness, an over-ambitious timeframe for rolling it out, the lack of technical capacity and inadequate governance and institutional arrangements for successful implementation. All these concerns

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have since proved valid (Blampied et al., 2018). Furthermore, in an electoral context in 2008, a free maternal healthcare initiative was added, to be implemented through the NHIS. The scheme's present malaise, which has left it increasingly reliant on out-of-pocket payments, is therefore the result of a mix of political, financial and technical factors (ibid.).

With its current resources, the NHIS does not seem equipped to meet the leave no one behind commitment. One way of sustaining it would be to restrict its benefits to the poorest sections of society. However, the electoral benefits associated with universal coverage make such an approach politically very unappealing.

Blampied et al. (2018) recommend an alternative to the scheme, which would be to maintain the universal aspect of membership but to restrict or ration the benefits package with a heavy emphasis on preventive and primary healthcare. This would de facto skew services towards being more pro-poor and cost-effective, given the relative public health impacts per dollar of primary services compared to secondary and tertiary services.

#### **Our assessment**

- The NHIS exploits a number of synergies: SDG 1 (ending poverty), SDG 3 (ensuring healthy lives), SDG 4 (ensuring inclusive and equitable education), SDG 8 (promoting work and economic growth). With its emphasis on UHC it has also set out to address leaving no one behind.
- However, while reflecting clear positive intentions, this action does not appear to have responded adequately to the key trade-offs that arise and has led to some significant downsides. For example, the approach taken on UHC does not seem sustainable in the longer term.
- A key trade-off has been between population and service coverage. A broad benefits package may have also compromised quality.
- The scheme's financial protection aspect has also been weak: while some groups are exempt from premium payments, out-of-pocket payments are being increasingly incurred.
- It is likely that poorer groups are unable to access benefits.

#### **4.3.2 Exploiting natural resources in the name of social policy: Ecuador's environmental stance under former President Correa**

Social and economic development depends on the sustainable management of natural resources – from air to land, rivers, lakes and aquifers to oceans and seas (UN, 2015). The 2030 Agenda agrees that 'all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occur in harmony with nature' (ibid: preamble). SDG 15 specifies the need to 'protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss'.

In particular, target 15.9 calls on countries 'to integrate ecosystem and biodiversity values into national and local planning, development processes, poverty reduction strategies and accounts' by 2020. And target 15a seeks to 'mobilise and significantly increase financial resources from all sources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems'. The commitment to leave no one behind will be furthered through the empowerment of one of the groups most affected by natural resource exploitation, indigenous peoples. For countries abundant in natural resources, dependence on natural resource exploitation to fuel social development may be an obvious policy win. Left unchecked, however, the environmental and social costs of this exploitation may be high and irreversible.

As countries contemplate whether and how to use natural resource revenues to fund social programmes, they will need to consider issues such as:

- What social benefits are derived from using the natural resources?
- In comparison, what are the costs (environmental and social)?
- What are the impacts on specific segments of the population such as indigenous peoples?

Policy-makers will recognise that trade-offs inevitably arise across these environmental, economic and social dimensions. Even if their policy objective is the laudable positive one of bringing people out of poverty and of providing them with basic services to improve their quality

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of life, policy-makers must take care not to underestimate the impact that their proposed actions will have on the environment. This section examines the extent to which Ecuador has achieved a balance between these competing factors. It looks at the country's use of natural resource revenues to fund social policies and the impact these are having on its leave no one behind commitment.

In 2000, when Ecuador was experiencing an economic and financial crisis, 20% of the population lived in extreme poverty (defined as less than \$1.25 a day). Only 4% do so today. Income inequality, measured by the Gini coefficient, declined by 6 points (from 0.54 to 0.48) between 2007 and 2013 and there were considerable improvements in human development indicators, especially for the poorest (Ordóñez et al., 2015). Much of this success can be explained by increased reliance on oil resources. However, these are environmentally unfriendly and are often located on land inhabited by indigenous peoples.

Oil fast became Ecuador's chief export and source of foreign exchange following its 1967 discovery in the Oriente region, which is inhabited by indigenous groups, and has occupied this place ever since (Morley, 2016). The country's economy is highly dependent on oil exports, which represent up to 50% of total exports and up to 35% of the public budget. High oil prices helped the country to achieve economic stability and growth in a context of dollarisation. President Rafael Correa's election in 2007 brought about radical change in adopting highly redistributive social policies. These were financed through measures such as rewriting oil contracts, restructuring public debt and channelling all oil revenues into the budgeting process (Ordóñez et al., 2015). The poorest people also benefited from the expansion of a cash transfer programme and from the improved provision of health and education services, all funded by investment in oil resources. Correa decreed that the state's share of windfall oil profits would increase from 50% to 99%. Together with the global oil boom and Ecuador's dollar economy, state revenues rose rapidly and allowed Correa, among others, to double welfare payments to poor households, subsidise electricity for poor households, and make a range of investments in education, healthcare and microcredit.

While the rise in oil prices has been a key factor in pushing up social spending, the economy remains unhealthily dependent on the exploitation of mineral resources. The government promoted new investments in the oil sector, including highly controversial projects in protected areas in the Amazon region (CuencaHighLife, 2016) as well as large-scale mining projects, such as open-cast gold and copper mines.

While these policies have been labelled by some as 'petropopulism', under Correa, the government managed to secure major electoral support. In April 2009, he was re-elected as President. In 2010, the National Assembly approved legislation for servicing contracts in the oil sector, as a result of which all contracts with multinational companies operating in Ecuador had to be renegotiated. Even advocates of increased state control over oil extraction criticised the reform and renegotiation.

Correa's slogan – 'We cannot be beggars sitting on a sack of gold' – implied a prioritisation of short-term socioeconomic improvements over long-term resource conservation. Many political and civil society organisations challenged this strategy, claiming that the extraction and depletion of the country's natural resources could not be considered a sustainable redistributive strategy.

There was a short period in 2009 when it appeared the tension between advancing social goals and environmental sustainability in Ecuador might be eased. The government promised to 'leave the oil in the soil' (Eisenstadt and West, 2017) if international donors were willing to pay the foregone oil proceeds to finance the preservation of a national park and generate funds for social programmes. Although an excess of \$300 million was pledged by mainly European nations and individuals, Correa announced in 2013 that not enough money was collected from donors and that drilling would go forward. A concession was granted to a Chinese company, which extracted its first crude in 2016.

Today, the trade-off between environmental sustainability, protection of indigenous land and peoples, and the funding of social policy through natural resource revenues continues to be a real political dilemma for policy-makers in Ecuador.

## Our assessment

- Ecuador's natural resource policy has exploited a number of synergies: the government's increased socioeconomic spending, made possible by increased state revenues from the oil sector, is furthering SDG 1 (ending poverty), SDG 3 (ensuring healthy lives), SDG 4 (ensuring inclusive and equitable education), SDG 7 (ensuring access to energy) and SDG 8 (promoting work and economic growth).
- However, significant trade-offs have had to be addressed in this process. These have been between exploitation and conservation of natural resources; between the environmental and social dimensions (in that social programmes under Correa came at the expense of natural resources); and between the environmental and economic dimensions.
- The positive gains of the programmes for the poor have been offset by the rights lost by indigenous groups. The impact of the programmes on indigenous peoples, one of the most vulnerable communities not only in Ecuador but worldwide, has therefore been limited.
- This policy action was clearly based on good intentions in that it sought to fund social programmes that would benefit the poor. However, it has had limited success in addressing some of the key trade-offs.

## 4.4 Problems of balance in Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe

In this section, we look at decisions taken by Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe in furtherance of individual Goals and targets that did not balance competing considerations sufficiently and had **significant adverse impacts** as a result (though mitigating actions were taken in response).

### 4.4.1 Economic progress at the expense of female migrant workers: Sri Lanka's outward migration policies

Labour policies protecting workers' rights and allowing them a safe and secure environment in which to work are essential to deliver the SDGs and to fulfil the leave no one behind commitment.

SDG 8 promotes 'sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all' (UN, 2015). Target 8.8 calls on countries to 'protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment'.

This reinforces objectives set out in other SDG 8 targets and, if well implemented, can also impact positively on many other Goals, such as SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment, as many migrant workers are girls and women, and SDG 3 on health and well-being. However, countries do not always protect labour rights, which are often sacrificed for economic gains.

As governments consider policies to advance growth through labour migration, they need to address issues such as:

- What kind of jobs do migrant workers have abroad and what are the conditions under which they work?
- How beneficial is labour migration to the economy?
- What level of protection can the government in the country of origin give to workers, especially those whose rights may be in jeopardy in destination countries?

This section focuses on the experiences of Sri Lanka's female migrant workers who are employed in vulnerable jobs abroad and whose remittances have helped boost economic progress back home. It also looks at how the Sri Lankan government seeks to mitigate the negative impacts of outward migration on these migrant workers.

#### Key facts

- Outward labour migration has contributed to both a drastic reduction in unemployment and an increase in remittances (in the period between 1990 and 2010) (Byiers et al., 2015).
- Rising migrant earnings have led to an increase in private remittances from around 20% to over 60% of total export income (accounting for close to 8% of the country's gross domestic product in 2010) (ibid.).

- However, female migrants from Sri Lanka are largely employed as housemaids abroad: in 2012, 86% of total female migrant workers who left Sri Lanka went as housemaids (Jayasuriya and Opekin, 2015). The conditions under which women are employed abroad are extremely insecure: they often leave indebted, work virtually indentured and have almost no legal redress against sexual harassment (Waldman, 2005), imprisonment or the physical abuse they often suffer in the countries where they work. Housemaid work as a category of employment qualifies as extremely vulnerable; there is limited protection and recourse to justice since labour laws in most countries do not protect or regulate household workers.
- In many Gulf Cooperation Council countries, the main destination for Sri Lankan female migrants, labour laws cover male labourers but do not protect household workers (Gamburd, 2010). In addition, these laws are not always enforced against middle- and upper-class employers.

Outward labour migration has increased the level of female participation in the labour market.<sup>2</sup> The 2030 Agenda recognises women as a marginalised group who are at risk of being left behind in the achievement of the SDGs. Sri Lankan women who go abroad to work do so because their earnings for comparable work in Sri Lanka would be between two and five times less than what they can make working abroad (ibid.).

In recognition of the value of remittances to Sri Lanka's growth, the government has actively promoted migration abroad by refusing to impose restrictions and conditions related to age and family circumstances. It is the only country that proactively encourages female migration (compared to countries such as Bangladesh, which imposes a minimum age for female migrants).

However, widespread media reports of abuse of Sri Lankan migrant women led the government to form a Presidential Task Force

on Migrant Women in 1997 to investigate the conditions of Sri Lankan migrant women abroad (Thimothy and Sasikumar, 2012). This marked the beginning of government engagement with the welfare of its migrant workers. Since then, the process has been iterative. Like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka attempted to impose age restrictions on female migrants as well as restrictions based on whether care arrangements existed for their children at home (OHCHR, 2014).

In consultation with the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, the government rescinded the imposition of such requirements in 2014. It has, however, been increasingly conscious of the negative elements of outward migration. In 2008, with awareness of this issue growing, it sought technical assistance from the International Labour Organization for the development of a National Labour Migration Policy (Byiers et al., 2015). Under this policy, Sri Lanka undertook multiple measures to protect the rights of migrants ranging from the establishment of pre-departure orientation centres to the establishment of a centre for overseas employment, which would allow migrants to access passports, medical check-ups and police reports (Hansen, 2010). In 2010, the government started gathering data on complaints of abuse relating to registered migrant workers. Between 2010 and 2013, the reported incidents of complaints from female migrant workers decreased from nearly 12,000 to around 9,000 (Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Bureau, 2013).

#### Our assessment

- The Sri Lankan government's policy of promoting outward migration addresses several synergies in the 2030 Agenda and across the SDGs (migration as an enabler of economic growth and sustainable development, the role of remittances etc.).
- However, an important trade-off arises between promoting such migration with these benefits in mind and protecting the position and rights of Sri Lanka's migrants, especially of its female migrants abroad.

2 While 80% of males were employed prior to migration, only around 24% of female migrants had a previous job. This suggests that a large part of the drop in female unemployment may indeed relate to outward migration.

- Female migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. While the government's action since 2008 to increase the protection available to female migrant workers abroad has, to some degree, mitigated this vulnerability, the risks remain significant and have not been appreciably lessened so far.
- This has consequences for the leave no one behind commitment, which clearly includes female migrants within its scope.
- Overall, we find an imbalance between the Sri Lankan government's policy of proactively encouraging outward migration, with synergies and benefits across several Goals, and the degree of risk to which Sri Lanka's female migrant workers continue to be exposed.

#### 4.4.2 Undoing the legacy of controversial housing and eviction policies in Zimbabwe: the Harare Slum Upgrading Programme

Slum upgrading policies will make an important contribution to the SDGs and to meeting the leave no one behind commitment. SDG target 11.1 calls on countries to 'ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums' by 2030 (UN, 2015). The target reinforces the objectives set out in the other SDG 11 targets. And if implemented effectively, it can help meet these targets as well as impact positively on many of the other Goals, such as SDG 1 on ending poverty and SDG 10 on reducing inequality.

Historically, there has been a tendency in many parts of Africa for governments to adopt reactive rather than proactive approaches to the challenge of slums. Zimbabwe has been no different. Forced eviction and demolition of settlements has been very common throughout Africa and, in some countries, continues to be accepted (UNHABITAT, 2010). Such policy failures have allowed slums to proliferate and have perpetuated a vicious cycle of urban poverty.

City-wide slum upgrading programmes are relatively new in the policy discourse on housing and service provision, though operational in

some parts of the continent. There is growing realisation among some African governments that previous eviction policies have simply not worked, and this is opening new avenues to roll out and scale up slum upgrading programmes.

This section examines the Harare Slum Upgrading Programme (HSUP) in Zimbabwe against the backdrop of (1) the government's past housing and eviction policies, under which public authorities in Zimbabwe would demolish slum communities without providing any alternative means of housing or would relocate them to marginal resettlement sites; and (2) the rise of social movements in support of the homeless in response to those policies.

These movements emerged in the late 1990s and have intensified ever since. The two main actors that challenged the government's past housing and eviction policies have been the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation (ZHPF)<sup>3</sup> and the Dialogue on Shelter. Interestingly, it was their partnership with the city government under the HSUP which led to a shift away from the initial focus of the authorities on wholesale eviction. The new approach has been to mitigate matters by rolling out a profiling exercise on slums in and around Harare, and by providing new accommodation, or improving existing accommodation, within some of the slums.

#### Key facts

- While there has been no comprehensive assessment of Zimbabwe's housing backlog, it is estimated to be about 1 million units of which more than 500,000 are in the City of Harare<sup>4</sup> alone (Muchadenyika, 2015).
- The government's largest demolition campaign, undertaken in 2005, left more than 700,000 people homeless and affected the livelihoods of a further 2.4 million (Tibaijuka, 2005).
- Social movements in support of homeless people were able to thwart some planned evictions and to challenge the government's policies in other ways as well.

3 The Federation is one of 33 in the Shack/Slum Dwellers International network (Chitekwe-Biti, 2014).

4 The City of Harare is the local authority in Harare.

- Under the HSUP, a five-year participatory slum-upgrading programme (2010–2015), 66 slums in and around Harare were profiled. This was implemented through a partnership between the City of Harare and the two leading social movements, ZHPF and Dialogue on Shelter (Muchadenyika, 2015).
- The profiles have helped to create a slum database, which previously did not exist in the city records. The city government's participation in profiling improved the authorities' understanding of the concerns of the urban poor and other aspects of slum dwelling.
- Over the course of the five-year period, almost 1,400 houses were constructed within the targeted slums. The project was of direct benefit to some 480 families and indirectly provided socioeconomic and capacity-building gains to some 38,000 households living in Harare's slum areas (ibid.).

Historically, the law in Zimbabwe specified the provision of housing through a first-in, first-out waiting list system. But this largely failed to meet the growing housing demand (Chitekwe-Biti, 2009). Not only did poor urban dwellers have to wait years to be invited to an allocation interview, the City of Harare had also stopped allocating completed houses by 1996 (Chitekwe-Biti, 2014).

Local authorities had strict by-laws in place that specified what types of housing could be constructed and under what conditions (ibid.). Several statutes, including the Public Health Act and the Regional Town and Planning Acts, also regarded slums as a nuisance that should be demolished. In some instances, the authorities overlooked these laws and provided slum dwellers with lodgers' cards and levied a fee for informal construction (ibid.). In most other instances, they used the laws to evict slum dwellers and demolish entire settlements. This dichotomy between the inability to supply affordable housing, on the one hand, and to exercise the laws advocating demolition, on the other, left slum dwellers in a continual state of fear.

Social movements in support of homeless people challenged the government's housing and eviction policies. The ZHPF was formed in 1998

as a community-based organisation. Primarily, it aims to facilitate housing for the urban poor through alternative means, especially as the conventional waiting list system has not worked. In the past, it was able to thwart some planned evictions – such as one in Mbare in 2002 – by presenting to authorities the records of savings made by the communities living there in addition to the enumeration accounts detailing the scale of overcrowding at that site (Muchadenyika, 2015). As of 2014, the ZHPF had a membership of more than 55,000 households and had facilitated access to housing stands for 15,000 households in Zimbabwe's 52 local authorities (ibid). Dialogue on Shelter, also founded in 1998, is a non-governmental organisation that provides technical support to the Federation. The alliance between the two is the largest social movement in Zimbabwe advocating for housing access for the urban poor.

The entry points for the HSUP included Epworth, the largest slum settlement in Zimbabwe, as well as the Dzivaresekwa Extension. Programme activity started in 2011 in both these settlements and demonstrated viable alternatives to the state's default policy position of eviction (ibid.). Slum upgrading in Harare was steered by a Project Management Committee composed of four representatives from the City of Harare, two from Dialogue on Shelter and two from the ZHPF. The Committee operated at both project and city level, bridging the gap between city authorities and the urban poor. Slum dwellers' understanding of city governance also improved under HSUP as the urban poor took ownership and responsibility of city programmes.

#### **Our assessment**

- The HSUP has helped the government to address a number of SDGs (e.g. SDG 1 on ending poverty and SDG 10 on reducing inequality) and to exploit the synergies between these.
- Pressure from civil society forced the government to mitigate the negative impacts of its past slum demolition operations by introducing a policy shift that would improve existing accommodation in slum areas with a view to providing better living conditions.

- The previous housing and eviction policy decisions taken cannot be said to have demonstrated a clear commitment to leaving no one behind, an objective which would amply embrace the interests of people rendered homeless. (It should be noted, of course, that without the rise of social movements to represent the slum dwellers, these people would have been further left behind.)
- While a deliberate policy shift in recent years on slum upgrading at city level has mitigated the negative impacts of the past to some degree, Zimbabwe's poorest citizens still face the consequences of a significant housing backlog and the challenge remains formidable.

## 4.5 Trade-offs with adverse impacts in Viet Nam

In this section, we examine decisions taken by the Government of Viet Nam that were **generally negative** in their impacts and had no discernible mitigating elements.

### 4.5.1 Environmental and human welfare in jeopardy: Viet Nam's coal-powered growth

Universal access to energy is one of the major policies to deliver the SDGs and the leave no one behind commitment. SDG 7 calls on countries to 'ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all'. SDG 8 promotes 'sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all'. Energy policy enabling increased access to rural electrification for the poor in developing countries can help improve their economic conditions and fuel economic growth. However, if that policy relies strongly on non-renewable sources, such as coal, rather than renewable sources, the cost to the environment and to human health is high.

As countries shift towards sustainable and modern energy, it will be important for governments to mitigate negative impacts this may have on their citizens and on the environment, and to adopt corrective policies at an early stage. They will need to consider such issues as:

- What are the energy choices available to them?
- What risks does the choice of source pose to the environment and to human health, especially that of the poorest and most vulnerable?

Policy-makers will recognise that trade-offs must be made across these dimensions. For instance, if the intention is to provide the entire population with electricity, and if it is costlier to use clean technologies, a country may opt for cheaper and less efficient energy sources. However, when using such sources without robust environmental and health accounting, the real cost of provision may be underestimated.

This section examines the extent to which Viet Nam has considered such trade-offs in developing its own coal-powered energy policy to fuel economic growth, and the impact this is having on the country's leave no one behind commitment.

#### Key facts

- Between 1990 and 2010 the proportion of the population with access to electricity increased from about 14% to 97%. By 2010, all but 3%–4% of Viet Nam's population had access to electricity (Scott and Greenhill, 2014).
- The country saw a tenfold increase in electricity production between 1990 and 2010, and outpaced other countries at a similar income level in providing access to electricity (ibid.).
- This access improved the quality of life for the great majority of people (ibid.).
- However, Viet Nam's per capita carbon emissions quintupled in the period from 1990 to 2013. In 2016, up to 12 gigawatts of coal-fired power plants were under construction, equivalent to approximately 12 nuclear power reactors (Baker, 2017).
- By 2030, of all Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, Viet Nam will be the one that is most affected by coal pollution in terms of the premature mortality rate, with almost 20,000 excess deaths per year (Nguyen, 2017).
- Coal will replace hydropower as the main source of electricity generation in Viet Nam by early 2020. By 2030, coal-fired plants will generate more than half of the country's total electricity (ibid.).

- Many coal-fired power plants have been equipped with outdated, inefficient and polluting technologies from China. This may be considered a cheap investment in the short term, but it will have enormous impact on the environment and local communities in the future (ibid.).

Reasons for underinvestment in renewable energy sources range from low tariff rates on coal and hydroelectricity (compared to wind energy) to limited public understanding of the technologies behind renewable sources and low investment in them (TN News, 2014).

The government's prioritisation of economic growth and ambition to move to a socialist market economy has underpinned its energy policies (Vyuong, 2014). Electrification was a specific target for the government in its Eighth Party Congress in 1996 and led to the launch of interventions such as the rural electrification programme. The primacy given by Viet Nam's policy-makers to economic growth and poverty reduction seems to push environmental considerations into second place in policy implementation. For example, although the country has multiple laws in place to conserve the environment, implementation has been weak (Uddin et al., 2009).

The government's National Conservation Strategy commits the country to use clean, renewable and decentralised sources of energy whenever feasible. The National Law on Environmental Protection passed in 1993 (and revised in 2005) sets standards and rules for environmental protection. Yet despite the considerable potential for wind and solar energy in the country to be lower cost sources of electricity (TN News, 2014), coal remains the main basis for meeting the country's expanding power requirements. Viet Nam's Power Development Master Plans – the country's blueprint for power development – have, until recently, been criticised for only 'encouraging' social and environmental goals without provision for specific actions to shift reliance to renewable sources.

The outlook has slightly improved since 2016, when the Ministry of Industry and Trade

adopted the Viet Nam Renewable Energy Development Strategy 2016–2030 to diversify the country's energy resources. The government adjusted the 7th Power Development Master Plan (2011–2030) and re-issued it with a stronger focus on renewable energy and targets for energy from biomass and solar power. The adjusted Plan projects 1.5% lower economic growth than the initial Plan issued in 2011. This would, in itself, reduce the demand for electricity generation (Nguyen, 2016). Consequently, the government envisages a reduction in coal consumption of almost 30%, decreasing from the baseline value of 76 gigawatts to 55 gigawatts by 2030 (ibid.).

But this assumption seems questionable. By 2030, it is estimated that there will be almost 20,000 excess deaths per year in Viet Nam due to coal pollution, or a fivefold increase from the calculated number for 2011, which is 4,252 excess deaths (Nguyen, 2017). Moreover, in 2017 the government announced its decision to scrap an ambitious plan to introduce nuclear energy to the country, citing a lack of demand and financial issues (Nguyen, 2016). Now, the 6,000 megawatt capacity that was previously projected for nuclear power up to 2030 will be replaced by fossil fuel power plants using coal and liquefied natural gas (Nguyen, 2017).

Hopefully, Viet Nam's decision-makers will recognise the need to eliminate dirty coal-fired power plants and explore cleaner options for electricity generation – even if politically or economically challenging – to safeguard the health of the Vietnamese people and support the achievement of many of the SDGs.

#### **Our assessment**

- The main synergies are with SDG 1 (ending poverty), SDG 3 (ensuring healthy lives), SDG 7 (access to energy) and SDG 8 (promoting economic growth and work).
- The main trade-off has been between: (1) the choice of energy sources to expand electricity access as a means to promote economic growth; and (2) the impact of that choice on environmental sustainability and on human health, especially in terms of premature deaths from coal pollution.

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- The decisions taken are not in keeping with the leave no one behind commitment, which includes protecting the poorest and vulnerable populations from health risks. The focus on rural electrification, though, is an indication of partial alignment with the commitment.
  - There is no evidence of specific mitigation measures having been introduced: the government proceeded with energy plans that rely heavily on fossil fuels and paid little attention to other potential energy sources.

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# 5 Recommendations for governments

As will have been apparent from the preceding chapter, governments will often face difficult choices in implementing the SDGs. A policy action that they are contemplating in the service of one Goal may open up the possibility of synergistic benefits across several others. But the same action may also have detrimental impacts on their efforts to achieve still other Goals. Any decision they take could have a mix of positive and negative consequences and defy neat categorisation in terms of synergies or trade-offs.

Reconciling conflicting pressures and finding a balanced and coherent way forward will be a major challenge for policy-makers. The extent to which they can manage trade-offs, to mitigate the more harmful impacts and keep their countries on track in overall terms, will have a significant impact on whether or not the 2030 Agenda is realised.

## 5.1 National coordination

By now, most governments have put in place national arrangements for oversight and coordination of the policy decisions they have been taking, or will take, to implement their commitments to the 2030 Agenda. More than 100 UN Member States have, to date, presented VNRs of their performance in implementing the SDGs. A further 40 or so are expected to do so in 2019, joined by around 10 who will be reporting for the second or third time.

In UN DESA's annual analyses of the VNRs, certain broad trends emerge. While coordination arrangements vary from one Member State to another, the oversight function is frequently situated in the centre of government – that is, in the president's office or the prime minister's office. (An OECD Survey on Planning and Coordinating the Implementation of the

SDGs draws attention to the role of centres of government: in 19 out of 31 countries surveyed, the centre of government is helping to steer and coordinate SDG implementation (OECD, 2016).) However, finance, planning, foreign, development or environment ministries are also used, sometimes in combination. A further important attribute of coherent policy-making arrangements is that governments should strengthen existing mechanisms for horizontal coordination across ministries and agencies at national level and for vertical coordination between the national, subnational and local levels. National sustainable development councils bringing governments into partnership with civil society and other stakeholders have also been set up in many countries.

The evidence from the VNRs presented to date indicates that governments recognise at the level of principle at least the implications of an integrated agenda. They have been emphasising their commitment to the policy coherence required across all organs of decision-making if the 2030 Agenda is to be implemented successfully. They have, of course, already committed themselves to this in target 17.14 of the 2030 Agenda. However, while there are many examples of national coordination arrangements with coherence as the avowed objective, the VNRs provide little detail on specific mechanisms that may have been created within governments to ensure that this dimension receives systematic attention within the machinery of everyday decision-making.

In particular, there is limited evidence of concrete institutional arrangements being put in place to enable governments to identify opportunities for synergies or to anticipate and manage trade-offs in implementation of the SDGs. Some useful pointers can be gleaned from the OECD's 2018 PCSD,

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which draws attention to institutional practices and mechanisms in 19 countries that correspond to 8 elements from the PCSD framework developed by the OECD in 2016. Austria has recently created an inter-ministerial working group, which takes domestic and international objectives related to the SDGs into consideration to identify potential trade-offs. Information and objectives are exchanged among the SDG focal points in Austria's ministries, allowing for trade-offs and synergies to be identified (OECD, 2018). Luxembourg has an inter-ministerial committee for development cooperation that meets six times a year to identify and discuss trade-offs and synergies and formulate non-binding recommendations to the government regarding PCSD (ibid.). In the Netherlands, the recently renamed Ministry of Economic Affairs and Climate Policy is tasked with avoiding trade-offs and strengthening synergies (ibid.).

Various good practices which have been developed elsewhere may also be noted. Greece and Germany, for example, require that all draft legislation be accompanied by indications of how the proposed law will affect SDGs implementation. Guatemala has undertaken various analyses of the wider impact of its actions to implement its national priorities under the SDGs. Norway and Germany have designated SDG coordinators within each ministry who report to a committee of senior officials charged with oversight of overall SDGs implementation. These coordinators liaise collectively on Goal implementation, including on targets falling outside their own remits. Some countries – the United Arab Emirates, the People's Democratic Republic of Lao and Sudan, among others – have established committees to oversee work on sustainable development initiatives that straddle several sectors. However, it would appear that relatively few countries have yet developed stand-alone institutional arrangements with the specific mandate of identifying potential synergies and trade-offs and advising governments on how to navigate these.

## 5.2 Handling synergies and trade-offs

We suggest that a dedicated standing mechanism at the heart of government would help to ensure that issues around synergies and trade-offs receive collective and systematic attention

at cabinet level in each government and that the best possible guidance is provided for the political decisions that must be made on them. Several major balances will need to be struck. For instance, that between domestic and international policy pressures, which may be perceived to be conflicting. Or between short-term needs, often driven by political or electoral considerations, and longer-term considerations involving intergenerational equity. Another consideration will be the potential negative impacts of a particular decision beyond a country's own borders. And another will be the balance to be achieved – and explicitly committed in the 2030 Agenda – between the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. While some of the judgements required will be straightforward, for example where positive synergies and the potential gains are immediately apparent, many others will be challenging, with a range of pros and cons to be weighed carefully.

In preparing the ground for such discussions, decision-makers will need to consider possible mitigating measures to offset the detrimental effects of a proposed course of action. If there is a trade-off which a government feels it must live with, there may be steps it can take to reduce the negative impact of this trade-off – for example, by providing compensatory support in other areas for immediately affected populations or by committing to a time limit of some kind for the trade-off. Deviations from one or other of the policy paths set out in the SDGs may become necessary, for short-term political or economic reasons. However, if this happens, the government must demonstrate its determination to get back on track as quickly as possible and to resume a balanced onward journey. Meanwhile, the government must mitigate as far as possible the detrimental effects of the trade-offs. Creative and innovative solutions must be found to these and to the many other dilemmas and challenges of SDGs implementation.

The VNRs to date demonstrate widespread recognition of the interlinkages across the Agenda and of the value of actions that address several Goals and targets. Both in these reports and in other fora, countries such as Bahrain, Canada, Colombia and Senegal have reported interventions

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that have influenced more than one sector. Others – for example, Albania and Sri Lanka – mention complementary actions they have taken in the social, economic and environmental spheres. Others, including Ecuador, Guinea and Mexico, have observed that the multidimensional nature of poverty provides a framework for exploiting a range of interactions between the Goals. Mongolia reported using (on a trial basis) a tool developed by the Stockholm Research Institute to learn about potential interactions between Goals and targets. However, very few countries have given specific examples of synergies that they have pursued or trade-offs with which they have had to contend. One survey of the 2018 VNRs noted that, insofar as interlinkages are mentioned at all, these tend to be only the positive synergies; ‘trade-offs, negative effects or possible bottlenecks are – with the exception of few countries, among these the Dominican Republic – never addressed’ (Partners for Review, 2018: 19).

The VNRs show that some Member States have decided to link SDG implementation closely to their budget planning processes. As part of their annual bids for budgetary allocations, ministries in these governments are asked to indicate how their proposed actions will impact on achievement of the Goals. Such initiatives are very welcome, as they draw attention to the cross-governmental responsibilities which all line ministers have in ensuring that their country achieves the SDGs. They also reinforce the good practice of ministers considering how an action they are proposing may impact, whether positively or negatively, on SDG-related measures which their cabinet colleagues may be taking or planning.

It is possible to imagine incentives being created in the budgetary context to promote implementation of the SDGs. For example, a certain portion of government spending might be explicitly reserved for activities which exploit synergies across a number of Goals and enhance, therefore, the contribution which the country is making to implementation of the SDGs.

Some Member States have developed, or intend to develop, ‘road-maps’ for implementation of

the SDGs. A cross-governmental lens of this kind is another helpful tool for drawing attention to the interlinkages between individual Goals and targets, including potential synergies and trade-offs. It could be, of course, that governments will not extend this lens to the entire Agenda but (as some VNRs indicate) will focus simply on a set of national priorities which they have defined. Even if only a few interlinkages are highlighted, it is still valuable for governments to train themselves in this way to think through the implications of a joined-up agenda.

A particular obligation imposed on all governments is to leave no one behind, as implementation of the SDGs gets underway, and to try to ‘reach the furthest behind first’. This is a cross-governmental responsibility spanning a number of portfolios which, the evidence from the VNRs suggests, has not yet been prioritised by Member States to the extent envisaged in the Agenda. While all Member States have subscribed firmly to the principle of leaving no one behind, few, if any, have reported on specific institutional arrangements to track systematically how they are implementing this pledge. Synergies and trade-offs between various Goals and targets are of particular significance when considering how to protect the most vulnerable and marginalised communities (who have most to lose from trade-offs). A systematic focus on the implementation of this key part of the Agenda will help to ensure that it gets the priority attention which has been universally promised.

Some Member States have indicated that their parliaments have a role in promoting coherence. In some instances, parliamentary committees have been established to oversee and scrutinise all draft legislation which is relevant to SDGs implementation. Many parliaments also have a role in approving budgets and there is evidence that some countries now flag SDG-relevant budgetary proposals. Norway, for example, has arranged that its Ministry of Finance collates reports from all ministries relevant to individual Goals and forwards a consolidated report on SDG implementation to Parliament.

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## 5.3 Recommendations

1. Governments should consider establishing a unit or mechanism, ideally in or close to the office of the president or prime minister, that would:
  - receive advance notification of all potential government decisions relevant to implementation of the SDGs
  - examine the implications of each from the perspective of either synergies or trade-offs and identify, consequently, opportunities or risks arising
  - alert the coordinating ministry and all other ministries to these ahead of the relevant cabinet discussions
  - carry out impact assessments of various potential scenarios, in particular, measuring the distributive impacts with reference to the poorest and most vulnerable communities
  - undertake medium-to-longer-term strategic planning exercises regarding the country's SDG implementation and propose, as necessary, adjustments to its national SDGs implementation plan
  - make recommendations as to how the potential synergy or trade-off might be handled and, in the case of the trade-off, mitigated
  - ensure there is coherence between whatever decisions are taken by the national government on the issue in question and those which are taken (or being considered) by a sub-national administration on similar issues
  - monitor the implementation of all decisions and report back regularly to the cabinet on all developments in this regard
  - prepare reports for public dissemination at regular intervals on how interlinkages across the 2030 Agenda have been addressed and, in particular, how synergies and trade-offs have been handled
  - find ways of ensuring that the views of the poorest and most marginalised communities are taken into account in assessing these issues.
2. In addition, governments should ask ministers who are proposing policy decisions to:
  - certify that the actions they are proposing are consistent with, and will advance implementation of, the 2030 Agenda
  - confirm that they have considered the impacts – positive, negative or a mix – that these actions will have on other Goals and policy areas, and defend the judgement they have come to
  - in the event of negative impacts, indicate what mitigating measures they are proposing.
3. Governments should also consider proposing to their parliaments – if the latter have not themselves taken the initiative in this regard – systematic consideration of SDGs implementation. Existing sectoral committees will have a role, but the government may wish to consider creating a dedicated SDGs committee with an oversight function. Such committees have been formed in Germany, Finland, Romania and Latvia. Given the role of parliaments in approving budgetary proposals, an SDGs sub-committee to the Budget Committee might also be considered.
4. Governments should include in their VNRs explicit mention of: (1) the linkages they have experienced between individual Goals and targets; and (2) particular synergies they have been able to exploit as well as trade-offs they have had to manage. They should also note: (3) any wider impacts that such synergies or trade-offs may have outside their own jurisdictions; and (4) any dialogue or cooperation they have had with, for example, neighbouring countries on these issues.
5. Governments should also provide publicly available reports at regular intervals on follow-up to the commitments made in their VNRs and in related exchanges with other Member States, civil society and other stakeholders.

Much of the transformative potential of the 2030 Agenda relies on governments and other stakeholders realising the opportunities for

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synergies across the Agenda and exploiting these fully. The obverse is that trade-offs between various parts of the Agenda will inevitably arise, as complex interactions and interdependences become visible. Unless such trade-offs are efficiently managed, these have the potential to slow implementation significantly. It is important that governments put arrangements in place – such as the mechanism recommended in this paper – to enable them to handle both synergies and trade-offs in a planned and systematic way.

As they do so, countries will be in a position to support each other through mutual learning on this challenging subject and examples of best practice. Examples of actions that, for instance, address multiple Goals and targets, or of measures that have good mitigating effects on difficult trade-offs, will be of great value to all governments going forward. It can be anticipated indeed that there will likely be much common experience with synergies and trade-offs. There will, of course, also be potential trade-offs across borders that require careful management and international cooperation.

## 5.4 Opportunities for influence

### 5.4.1 High Level Political Forum

The HLPF could play a key role in this regard. Over the next year, a debate will get underway on how the HLPF has operated so far and whether some reforms are needed to help it to discharge its mandate more fully. In this context, consideration should be given to new formats for facilitating collective discussion of, and learning from, the major challenges encountered to date in implementing the 2030 Agenda.

A weakness of the arrangements for the annual HLPF meetings under the auspices of the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) is that there has been little cross-regional, or even intra-regional, discussion of implementation. Understandably perhaps, there has been heavy emphasis in the first few years of implementation on the presentation by individual Member States of their national reviews, with very little reference to experiences which other countries, perhaps immediate neighbours facing similar challenges, have had. And, while the annual meetings have included debates on

individual Goals and on general themes about the Agenda, they have been less successful in highlighting the profound interconnectedness of all the Goals and targets, issues of a cross-cutting nature and the practical implications for policy-makers of a wide-ranging and integrated agenda, which affects virtually the entire spectrum of governmental decision-making.

Voluntary discussion by groups of countries, within regions or cross-regional, on specific challenges they have faced would be a valuable means of ensuring that the mutual learning potential of HLPF meetings is fully realised. One such challenge is how to deal with difficult trade-offs; another is how to ensure that the commitments relating to leaving no one behind are honoured. Others would include the cross-cutting commitments made on issues such as human rights and gender equality. The ‘thematic review’ part of the annual HLPF meetings could, for example, be remodelled so as to put less focus on the individual Goals and more on cross-cutting challenges of this kind. Mutual learning would be the main objective but there are of course potential benefits in exposing countries, particularly poor performers, to peer pressure in a collective setting.

It would also be valuable for governments to be able to explain and to communicate to other stakeholders, both at the HLPF and in a national context, the challenges around policy trade-offs. This should include interaction with the mechanism proposed above.

### 5.4.2 The 2019 SDGs Summit

The meeting of the HLPF under the auspices of the General Assembly (the ‘SDGs Summit’), which will take place in New York in September 2019, will be a key moment for implementation of the 2030 Agenda. It will be the first opportunity since the Agenda was adopted for heads of state and government to take stock of progress, to consider lessons learned so far and to provide guidance on the way forward during the remaining 11 years of the Agenda.

In the four years since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, there will of course have been numerous changes of government across the globe (in themselves a challenge to the policy coherence required for successful implementation of the Agenda). It will be important to use the summit

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to ensure continuing support from Member States at political level for implementation of the Agenda. The heads of state and government will no doubt also consider the main challenges which have arisen. There would be real value in a frank discussion which, on the one hand, would highlight the importance of seeking, and acting on, synergies across the Goals and targets and, on the other, would facilitate mutual support and guidance to governments about the challenges of the trade-offs which will inevitably occur.

With an interconnected agenda of this breadth and complexity, there will be dilemmas and difficult choices as well as opportunities. Policy-makers will often find themselves in the

most agonising of predicaments. Governments must recognise, face up to and manage these challenges in ways which will mitigate, to the greatest extent possible, adverse impacts on wider implementation of the Agenda. The declaration to issue from the SDGs Summit in September 2019 will be a moment when heads of state and government could examine this aspect of implementation and encourage mutual sharing of best practices and lesson-learning in this regard. A further opportunity will arise at a summit likely to be held a year later to mark the 75th anniversary of the foundation of the UN, an event at which implementation of the SDGs is expected to be a major focus of attention.

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