SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Leave no one behind

The 2030 Agenda pledges to leave no one behind:

"As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognising that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first."

But what does this mean in practice for cities?

Cities Alliance and ODI developed this background paper to explore what is new about the principle of leaving no one behind, and how local and national governments can act in a way that enables national progress to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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Defining leaving no one behind: what's new?

The commitment to leave no one behind is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda and one of its most distinctive features, compared to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While the MDGs made significant progress in reducing overall poverty – defined both in terms of income and more widely in relation to health, education and living standards – often the poorest and most marginalised groups did not benefit at all or enough (Bhatkal, et al., 2015; Ravallion, 2016). The commitment to leave no one behind addresses this issue.

The 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) outcome document sets out an illustrative list of the groups who are left behind: "…children, youth, persons with disabilities (of whom more than 80 per cent live in poverty), people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants" (UN, 2015). Elsewhere, the text also refers to women and the income poor as marginalised.

In an analysis of the 2030 Agenda's outcome document (UN, 2015), Stuart and Samman (2017) define what it means to leave no one behind:

- Ending extreme poverty in all its forms, and reducing inequalities among both individuals (vertical) and groups (horizontal);
- Stopping the group-based discrimination that has resulted in unequal outcomes for some disadvantaged or marginalised populations (e.g. based on social identify or geography), including a focus on how multiple dimensions of disadvantage interact; and
- Reaching the furthest behind first.

In the spirit of the 2030 Agenda, Stuart and Samman's definition is not meant to be prescriptive. Instead, it leaves scope for implementers to adapt the goals most relevant to their context and specificities. The definition sets out broad parameters that offer implementers concrete suggestions for approaches to take.

For example, where high levels of absolute deprivation persist, an appropriate focus is likely to be ensuring that people living below the poverty line – in income or other dimensions of well-being – can attain minimum living standards, with an emphasis on the poorest of the poor (the specific markers and structural barriers for these groups, such as ethnic group, location, and gender, are context specific). Where minimum standards are fulfilled, relative considerations will be more relevant. The bottom line is that the SDGs are unlikely to be achieved unless progress is made faster for the most marginalised groups.

Cities play a crucial role in the implementation of 2030 Agenda and its commitment to leave no one behind. They concentrate large proportions of the population and are sites of deep inequalities. Local urban stakeholders have responsibilities related to the delivery of many of the agenda's goals – up to 65 per cent of SDG targets are at risk if local urban stakeholders are not involved (Cities Alliance, 2015). Moreover, in many developing countries in Africa and Asia, urban areas are growing rapidly, with large sections of the population living in informality. Unless this process is managed in an inclusive way and basic services are provided for the most vulnerable populations, they are likely to be to be left even further behind.

BOX 1 We had 'equitable', 'resilient' and 'inclusive' cites. What's new about 'leave no one behind'?

The 'leave no one behind' commitment draws on existing concepts of inclusive growth, poverty and inequality that have been studied for many years by development experts and urban specialists, both in terms of income and the broader dimensions of well-being including employment, health, education outcomes, and access to housing. Its most radical contribution is an emphasis on the need for progress to happen first and fastest for those furthest behind. It is a recognition that with significant progress made on eradicating extreme poverty, further progress can only be achieved if we sharpen our focus on the most marginalised groups.

Here is a summary of what's new about the principle to leave no one behind, with implications for cities:

What's New with Leave No One Behind	Implication for Cities
It is the first time that the UN member governments have agreed to such an ambitious principle.	With the SDGs in the implementation phase, this means coordinating actions to leave no one behind between central and sub-national governments, including city governments (the extent/type of coordination will depend on different governance arrangements/decentralisation systems).
There is a commitment to follow up on progress on this principle (UN Stats, 2016), which means that SDG outcomes need to be monitored for different marginalised groups (these are context-specific) and for the entire distribution – not just reported as averages.	Cities also have to monitor the SDGs and disaggregate data for left behind groups within the city, largely living in informal settlements. Members states are reporting on SDG progress at the UN each year in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). However, references to the commitment to leave no one behind in the VNRs have often been rhetorical rather than providing concrete examples of strategies to implement this commitment (CDP Subgroup on Voluntary National Reviews, 2018) and/or disaggregated data identifying groups most left behind. This suggests that further work is needed to turn this commitment from promise to action.
It emphasises group-based inequalities and intersectionality (i.e., when different markers of group-based inequalities overlap) as the barriers that entrench certain groups in structural poverty.	There is a need to assess the depth of poverty (e.g. distance to the poverty line and overlap of multiple deprivations) and the characteristics of the poorest groups within the city – to a large extent living in slums – to gain a better understanding of the drivers of exclusion (e.g. group-based inequalities based on ethnicity, gender, age, neighbourhood). Further, integrated urban development can play an important role in addressing the intersection of multiple deprivations effectively.
It emphasises inequalities beyond income.	Inequalities are more commonly analysed as income measures. The commitment to leave no one behind requires cities to look at outcomes in other areas (such as education, health, access to basic services) and break down performance for different groups by gender, disability, ethnicity, neighbourhoods, etc. and focus on reducing gaps.
It requires prioritising the most marginalised and reaching them first.	In the context of the city this requires drawing on evidence on the spatial aspects of marginalisation, with many urban poor living in informal settlements, as well as a better understanding of their priorities and needs (e.g. how they access basic services). Where are the most marginalised groups located in the city? And what are their needs? This is an essential first step to prioritising and targeting the most marginalised first.

Leaving no one behind in cities: a step-by-step guide

Identifying those left behind

The first step is to identify and define the groups that are considered part of the "left behind" population. When setting a baseline for the SDGs at the city level, this means disaggregating SDG outcomes for different marginalised groups, such as by ethnic background, age, gender, location (e.g. living in informal settlements), and income/wealth quintile.

Take the example of Nairobi and the SDG target on access to electricity. If current trends continue, Nairobi is projected to be close to achieving universal access by 2030. However, this projection of average rates of progress masks huge differences within the city. Projections for slum settlements alone show that only 22% of this population would have access to electricity by 2030 (Lucci et al., 2016) – illustrating the importance of disaggregating SDG monitoring for vulnerable groups within the city.

This means that national statistics offices and local governments need to collect data in an ethical and sensitive way that allows for disaggregation and measurement of results, outcomes and impacts for marginalised groups as distinct from the city average. 'Leave no one behind' requires monitoring outcomes on different areas for the whole income/wealth distribution as well as for different specific groups (markers of marginalisation such as ethnicity, gender, age, disability, whether living in an informal settlement will be context-specific). Further, existing datasets are often limited in the level of disaggregation that they offer. As such initiatives that integrate those left behind in the process of data collection, such as Slum Dwellers International's Know your City Database, can offer alternative sources of information on populations that often remain invisible in official statistics.

Developing a leave-no one-behind M&E system would be a key next step, which in most cases requires strengthening data systems and capacities within municipalities. Good data is essential to better understand the specific situation of different vulnerable groups, guide better policies, and hold governments into account.

BOX 2 Improving data to monitor leave no one behind: The case of Belo Horizonte

The United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (UNSDSN) Local Data Action Solutions Initiative (LDA-SI) was established to promote methods to monitor SDGs at the local level that facilitate action on the leave no one behind principle. One of the projects that the initiative is supporting includes a collaboration between the Metropolitan SDG Observatory (METRODS), Nossa BH Movement, the Metropolitan Agency of Belo Horizonte, Newton Paiva University and other local partners to collect data and conduct analysis of 80 indicators focusing on SDG11 achievement in the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Area. The indicators will allow the development of a long-term, practical tool to inform decision making and development investment. The initiative also seeks to raise awareness with civil society so that they can understand and follow development conditions in the area.

In line with the implementation of the principle to leave no one behind, this initiative will offer an innovative model for including marginalised areas, as the geographic focus incorporates peripheral areas of the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Area and aims to reduce localised inequalities through a strategic approach to data collection, analysis and dissemination.

Source: UN SDSN (2018)

Targeting policies to reach left behind groups first

After identifying left behind groups, implementing the principle of leaving no one behind highlights the need for action to reach these groups first. Studies have shown that policies that meet the needs of the most marginalised include improving access to basic services, labour market participation, and institutional and legal reforms to protect rights and promote freedom from violence and discrimination (Stuart et al., 2016).

Within service delivery, improving the inclusivity and quality of universal health coverage, enabling previously excluded children to attend school (including preschool), and implementing social protection initiatives are some examples of areas identified as critical pathways to leave no one behind. Public information campaigns to change opinions or reduce discrimination and exclusion, and piloting policies and programmes for marginalised groups to access labour markets and entrepreneurial opportunities, are highlighted among anti-discrimination policies. Ensuring balanced representation in key institutions features as a priority for institutional and legal reforms (ibid.).

At a programmatic level, a 'leave no one behind' focus would involve specifically evaluating outcomes to see how they have fared in improving equity (depending on the intervention, this could mean looking at differences of income, gender, social group access before and after the intervention in the context of the disparity that already exists in the city). It also requires strengthening approaches to ensuring that the views of the poorest and most marginalised communities are included in policy dialogue, National Urban Policies, and city development plans and strategies.

BOX 3   Actions to leave no one behind: cash transfers in Brasilia and Campinas

A wealth of evidence over the last 15 years shows that social protection programmes such as cash transfers play a key role in reducing poverty and the vulnerability of the poorest people. Cash transfers (as implemented in Latin America) are often conditional upon meeting certain social requirements: children attending school, having regular health check-ups, among others, driving additional positive outcomes.

These types of programmes started as city-level innovations in Brazil in the 1990s. The first were implemented in Brasilia (*Bolsa Escola*), as well as in Campinas (Guaranteed Minimum Family Income Programme) with the aim of reducing poverty and inequality (Lindert et al., 2007). Political circumstances also help explain the emergence of these programmes. In the case of Brasilia, they were part of the political strategy of the Workers Party, PT, then opposition (Cole, 2014). Later, it was taken to scale and implemented in the whole country as *Bolsa Familia*, Brazil's well-known social protection programme that was replicated in other countries.

Evidence of the impacts of cash transfer programmes include increasing household expenditure on food and other basic needs, better diets, improving access to health care and education (particularly family investment in girls' education), and reducing child labour, as well as improving household productivity and labour market participation (Glewwe and Maralidharan, 2015; Mathers and Slater, 2014; Bastagli et al., 2016 in Stuart et al., 2016).

There is now an increasing focus on the broader effects of social protection and its contribution to addressing the structural inequalities that affect the most marginalised. Emerging research suggests that the context-specific factors that drive marginalisation need to be fed explicitly into social protection programme objectives, design, and implementation, and that linkages from social protection to other sectors are crucial (Babajanian et al., 2014 in Stuart et al., 2016). Take the example of programmes targeted at women's social and economic vulnerabilities. Through an integrated approach (for example raising awareness of women's rights as well as transferring cash), these can support women's economic empowerment and start to tackle discriminatory social norms (Holmes and Jones, 2013 in Stuart et al., 2016).

Sources: Bastagli et al., 2016; Cole, 2014; Lindert et al., 2007; World Bank, 2001; Stuart et al., 2016.

Financing policies and geographical areas targeting marginalised groups

Implementing the commitment to leave no one behind requires ensuring that spending plays a role in equalising opportunity by allocating more resources to the less advantaged. This means investing in sectors and initiatives known for their impact on leaving no one behind, such as those mentioned in the previous section.

Targeting left-behind groups also means ensuring that the geography of public spending allocations is positively associated with need. In the case of city governments, one way of doing this is to estimate the financing gap facing each district/neighbourhood with respect to the provision of key basic services. That gap could feature a needs assessment in financing formulae (Watkins and Alemayehu, 2012). Often, budgetary allocations follow historical trends, mark-ups on past budgets, and political incentives rather than need-based criteria.

At the heart is the critical question of the availability and capacity of city governments to finance leave no one behind interventions, which are typically non-profitable infrastructures funded publicly. The evidence points towards the importance of strengthening fundamentals – improving the intergovernmental environment, coherent decentralisation (fostering autonomy through particular discretion over budgets, services, and financing), and improving the administration of core revenue sources such as property taxes (Nixon et al, 2015).

Ultimately, political economy considerations will underpin financing decisions and prioritisation. Greater accountability through publicly accessible SDG and leave no one behind reporting can play an important role in this. Further, donors' support for CSOs representing left behind groups in cities as well as for campaigns to raise awareness of this critical SDG commitment, can also help to address some of the political economy constraints.

BOX 4 Prioritising investment for marginalised groups: an example from Medellín

'Proyectos Urbanos Integrales' (Integrated Urban Projects, or PUIs) have dominated the city's work on slums since 2002 (Jaitman and Brakarz, 2013). PUIs have focused on improvements in local mobility, housing, public spaces, and the promotion of public education and culture.

In the 1990s Medellín was one of Latin America's most dangerous cities, which was a key driver for decisive action and investment to tackle deep-rooted social and economic challenges including marginalisation, poverty, violence and drug trafficking (Urban Nexus Case Study, 2014).

The first PUI took place in northeast Medellín, featuring the completion of the city's famous cable car, Metro Cable (Drissen, 2012). The city invested in a comprehensive upgrading programme in the areas served by the cable car lines (involving housing, increased public space, new libraries and schools, and economic support to residents in the form of training and employment in public works). This has had a wider impact on residents' quality of life beyond transport improvements.

A case study by UN-Habitat (2011) describes the economic and social impacts of PUIs. Private investment and trade in the area increased, with the creation of a commercial boulevard. Surveys also showed a significant reduction in rates of violence and insecurity, evidence of stronger social and community organisations and increasing levels of citizen participation. Another celebrated PUI project has been the network of escalators taking people easily across the steepest parts of Comuna 13, one of the most dangerous settlements in the city.

A large share of total capital investment in the city has been specifically devoted to neighbourhoods with the lowest living standards. In fact, investments in new transport and roads have targeted the poorest neighbourhoods, moving 'sequentially' from the most in need to the better off (Rojas, 2010). The PUIs were almost entirely funded by the City of Medellín, with the remainder of financial support granted by international agencies for specific projects (Urban Nexus Case Study, 2014).

Sources: Lucci et al. 2015; Rojas, 2010; Urban Nexus Case Study, 2014; Jaitman and Brakarz, 2013; Drissen, 2012.

Conclusion: towards mainstreaming the commitment to leave no one behind

The building blocks of the commitment to "leave no one behind" may not be new. However, the fact that UN governments signed up to this ambitious principle, including the prioritisation and fast-tracking of action for most marginalised groups, is new and radical. If cities are not involved in its application, this promise cannot be realised.

As a key principle of 2030 Agenda, the commitment to leave no one behind should underpin all aspects of SDG implementation by city governments – similarly to gender mainstreaming, but extending the concept to other vulnerable groups too, particularly slum dwellers, often amongst the most marginalised in cities. Critically, left behind groups should be involved in decision making or at least be consulted on their priorities. City data systems should disaggregate information to assess the extent to which left behind groups are making progress, policies to achieve SDGs (and the financing underpinning these) should be challenged to assess the extent to which they target the most marginalised first and evaluations should check the extent to which this has happened.

But ultimately the decision to prioritise action for leave no one behind at the city level is a deeply political one. It is here that the global nature of the SDGs is vital: the international scrutiny and pressure that they bring makes it harder for governments to neglect the needs of a sizeable share of their citizens.

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