



Four actions to drive and deliver SDG progress: lessons from ODI research

High-income countries

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Key findings

- **Focus on five goals that are moving the wrong direction:** To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), high-income countries (HICs) need to act on goals and targets that are moving in the wrong direction around the world.
- **Implement national SDG strategies that support leaving no one behind globally:** HICs should implement national policy frameworks coherent with global goals – particularly relevant are policies on migration, trade and climate.
- **Direct partnerships in developing countries toward marginalised groups and regions:** As donors, HICs should engage not just with national governments but also with local government and civil society organisations to support the poorest and most marginalised, funding policies that are likely to fulfil the commitment to leave no one behind.
- **Share good practice to strengthen the global data ecosystem:** HICs should take on global lessons for their own statistical systems and invest in lower and middle income country data on the same principles.

Summary

With their universal agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require reform in high-income countries (HICs) as well as in middle- and low-income countries (MICs and LICs). The SDGs will not be met if progress continues to elude the poorest and most marginalised people. The longer governments take to act, the greater the difficulty of meeting the targets for everyone by 2030.

This policy brief provides an overview of research by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) on the SDGs and the role of HICs in achieving the goals both domestically and internationally. The brief highlights SDG areas where current trajectories need to be reversed to meet the targets. It goes on to discuss some of the policy areas in which HICs must urgently undertake actions both domestically and internationally to meet the SDGs by 2030.

1. To achieve the SDGs, HICs need to act on goals and targets that are moving in the wrong direction around the world

ODI research (Nicolai et al., 2015) has shown that HICs have already achieved or are on track to achieve many of the SDG targets at their current rates of progress. For instance, near universal access is projected for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries on the sanitation target (SDG 6). Similarly, forest cover is set to increase in OECD countries in line with progress on the goal of halting deforestation (SDG 15). However, on the following five goals, current trends will need to be reversed to start making progress globally: reduce income inequality (SDG 10), reduce slum populations (SDG 11), reduce waste (SDG 12), combat climate change (SDG 13) and protect marine environments (SDG 14).

For instance, ODI research (Nicolai et al., 2015) shows that if current trends continue, OECD countries will have the most unequal growth (along with East Asia and the Pacific region) and be unable to meet Target 10.1 on reducing inequality. HICs therefore need to take measures to reduce inequality between different economic groups domestically.

Also, emerging and developed economies (Brazil, Russia, India, Indonesia, China, South Africa and OECD countries) will continue do the most environmental damage, driving the negative global trajectory on targets on reducing waste (SDG 12) and carbon emissions (SDG 13) and therefore need major shifts in their current trends to achieve the SDGs (Nicolai et al., 2015). Greenhouse gas levels are very high in OECD countries and these countries need to rapidly reduce these gases to make the target of carbon emissions achievable at a global level. Similarly, the total amount of solid waste generated is projected to almost double from 3.5 million tonnes a day in 2010 to 6.1 million tonnes a day in 2025 (Nicolai et al., 2015) and

levels of waste generation are very high in per capita terms in OECD countries.

2. HICs should implement national policy frameworks coherent with global goals – particularly relevant are policies on migration, trade and climate

While issues of inequality within these countries need significant attention in order to meet leave no one behind commitments, the global nature of the SDGs also obliges HICs to address issues that impact on progress for their neighbours and across the developing world. A holistic policy coherence approach is vital for addressing the multiple aspects of inequality globally. While a range of actions are important here, ODI research has explored three specific policy areas which are strategic for HICs to act on in leaving no one behind both domestically and globally: migration, trade and climate.

Migration

The 2030 Agenda promotes safe and orderly migration (SDG 10) and the expansion of legal and effective social protection coverage (SDG 1 and 10). ODI research argues that these goals and targets are intrinsically linked and that migration affects the implementation of several SDGs, and that these cannot be met effectively if these links are not considered (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2017). Both refugees and international labour migrants constitute vulnerable groups within HICs. Only 17% of those migrating from LICs or MICs to HICs are covered by a bilateral or multilateral social protection agreement on eligibility or portability for social protection (Hagen-Zanker et al., 2017). For example, just 0.5% of Mexico's 1.1 million emigrants, who migrate largely to the US, are covered by social protection. Moreover, remittances from migrants abroad play a vital role in supporting health, education, food security, and livelihoods more generally, in developing countries (Watkins and Quattri, 2014; Hagen-Zanker and Himmelstine, 2014). In fact, the average annual remittance sent by an African migrant from the OECD in 2009 was greater than average annual per capita income in sub-Saharan Africa (Watkins and Quattri, 2014). Yet, the poverty reduction potential of remittances can be reduced because of high transfer charges (Watkins and Quattri, 2014). HICs therefore need to both increase eligibility of migrants for social protection through new agreements protection and ensure that the practices of money transfer operators are reviewed.

Trade

Furthermore, the role of HICs in regulating global economic flows extends to the promotion of 'universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system' (SDG 17). Research by ODI

and partners (Akman et al., 2017) has recommended that countries in the G20 play a significant role by supporting the World Trade Organisation, strengthening the multilateral system and opposing any form of protectionism. Additionally, they should foster alignments between trade and investment and Agenda 2030 by supporting LICs and MICs through implementing the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

Climate

A recent ODI analysis of 10 European countries found that they all continue to subsidise coal even though to meet the Paris Agreement target on limiting increases in global temperature to 2°C, coal-fired-power plant emissions in Europe must fall by 80% by 2030 (Whitley et al., 2017). HICs need to increase transparency and accountability to meet current G20 and European fossil fuel subsidy phase-out commitments with all governments embarking on regular annual reporting. HICs must also ensure that mechanisms with the stated focus of supporting the energy transition do not support coal or other fossil fuels – for example, ending support for coal under the EU’s Emissions Trading Scheme and capacity mechanisms. Whatever subsidies remain in the energy sector must be used to assist pro-poor transition for workers and communities.

3. As donors, HICs should engage not just with national governments but also with local government and civil society organisations to support the poorest and most marginalised, funding policies that are likely to fulfil the commitment to leave no one behind

HICs, now more than ever, need to commit to the target of allocating 0.7% of their GDP to aid (Greenhill, 2017). Donors need to reverse recent declines in overall Official Development Assistance (ODA) to least developed countries and ensure that ODA is increasingly targeted at the poorest areas within countries. For example, ODA to health, education and reproductive health, three policy areas vital for countries to deliver on their commitment to leave no one behind, increased during 2008-2011 – from 18.6% to 20.7% – but then fell over the following two years, reaching 19.2% in 2014 (Greenhill et al., 2015).

Donors should support and fund policies key to a critical path on leave no one behind. HICs can provide financial and technical support to developing countries for:

- better services such as universal health coverage, social protection and connectivity,
- greater public awareness, such as creating environments where all girls are expected to go to school, and

- institutional and legal reform, including the extension of a minimum wage to informal workers, or the introduction of women’s land rights.

However, ODI analysis (see Greenhill et al, 2015) of resource requirements to fund universal health coverage, education and social assistance, showed that, compared to potential government revenues, LICs and lower middle-income countries (LMICs) face an overall financing gap of \$83 billion in meeting leave no one behind commitments. One method of achieving commitments to assistance enshrined in SDG 17 is by improving the delivery framework ensuring donors make a long-term commitment, participate in the risk sharing and be adaptive – in both speed and design – to the political and local environment.

While supporting government-led policies is important, not all governments prioritise the needs of vulnerable groups, and some have legal or constitutional provisions that actively discriminate against certain groups and areas (Stuart et al., 2016). Focusing entirely on ownership and alignment behind government-owned plans is unlikely to be effective in these cases and a two-track approach is needed:

- engaging governments in pro-equity policy dialogue and challenging discrimination and structural barriers to empowerment on one side, and
- working to support empowerment of the marginalised, build the capacity of civil society and support decentralised levels of government on the other and make information about aid publicly available at a more granular level (Greenhill 2016).

For instance, ODI research (Blampied et al., 2017) in Nepal found that donors played a significant role in reinforcing inclusive health policies. In 2003, 10 donor organisations framed a set of Basic Operating Guidelines which recognised the importance of inclusion of marginalised groups in the health sector. However, an ODI study (Desai and Greenhill, forthcoming) looking at sub-national aid allocation in recipient countries, shows that international aid is not as well focused on and correlated with need as it should be. In only Honduras and Nigeria did this study find a positive, statistically significant relationship between either general aid and poverty, while two saw the correlation go in the opposite direction out of the four countries examined (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Honduras, and Nigeria).

Substantial investments in data are necessary not only to monitor progress across all SDGs and related targets but to also achieve the goals by informing policy-makers about the needs and priorities of the poorest and marginalised groups in all countries. In HICs this can be problematic because of issues of knowledge and power that can push marginalised people further away from the state. For

instance, when members of the New Zealand Data Futures Forum first talked to Maori leaders, they found concerns about how collection, storage and use of data often occur in ways that do not respect Maori *tikanga* – the guidelines for daily life and behaviour in Maori culture. To meet the leave no one behind agenda, HICs need to invest in procedures that not only collect data on vulnerable groups but also safeguard their rights and well-being in their interactions with government processes and procedures.

In their role as donors, HICs can often undermine coordinated country-led data collection. Stymied by the absence of domestically generated data, donors (and NGOs) commission surveys that answer their monitoring and evaluation questions at a time convenient for their own budget cycle. This can occur at the expense of domestic statistical capacity, as staff from national statistics offices are commonly hired to conduct the surveys as consultants, undermining their already-stretched capacity

(Stuart et al., 2015). Donors also have a role to play in supporting technical improvements in data collection both domestically and in partner countries.

Donor behaviour can therefore further the data revolution by:

- ensuring the coordination of major internationally comparable surveys, such as the DHS, MICS, and LSMS, within partner countries and that they include questions relevant to marginalised populations,
- facilitating improvement of civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) in LICs,
- supporting experiments to link survey and administrative data, and big data in partner countries, and
- ensure they collect data on their own marginalised groups.

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