Foreword

by

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Leaving no one behind is a radically new level of ambition for governments and societies worldwide, for it implies that the Sustainable Development Goals will only be achieved if they deliver results for everyone and especially the furthest behind. By embracing the pledge in 2015 to leave no one behind, United Nations member states signed up to and entered a new era: one bound by the commitment to universal, equitable and sustainable development for all. Delivering on this agenda will require fundamental refocus and reform of systems, institutions and policies, from the global to the local level.

Delivering on this central promise of the 2030 Agenda means lifting at least 730 million people out of extreme poverty – those who despite two decades of strong economic growth remain trapped in poverty, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa and in fragile contexts. It also means addressing inequalities, discriminations and fragilities. According to the World Inequality Lab, inequalities leave less than 9% of global income to the poorest 50% of the world’s people. Intersecting discriminations and disadvantages afflict women and girls, minority groups, and vulnerable populations around the world. An estimated 27% of humanity is expected to live in fragile contexts by 2030 due to the borderless reach of conflict, forced displacement, pandemics, violent extremism, famine and natural disasters. Yet, time may already be running out: in some areas we are actually backsliding – for example, 40 million more people went undernourished between 2014 and 2017.

Reaching people trapped in a complex web of deprivations is all the more difficult in situations where governments and private actors are amongst the world’s most under-resourced. In order to support them in the most efficient way, governments, international partners and providers of development co-operation have to carefully examine the strengths and weaknesses of their policies, investments and other instruments, including our rules-based multilateral system, to ensure they are fit to meet this pledge with benefits for citizens everywhere.

Indeed, in 2017, as it revised its mandate, the OECD Development Assistance Committee affirmed its commitment to “supporting developing countries in their efforts to improve the lives of their peoples, leaving no-one behind […]”. That call echoed the 2030 Agenda’s clear, unequivocal and unprecedented pledge to meet the Goals for all – all countries, all people.

Providers of development co-operation and official development assistance (ODA) have a unique role to play: their polices and concessional resources are designed to improve the welfare of citizens in developing countries which in turn contributes to global welfare in our interdependent world. The purpose of ODA, the agreed measure of development co-operation, is not to seek immediate financial or commercial returns: it can focus on longer-term results, invest patiently in contexts where public revenues grow irregularly and slowly, and advocate for and reach groups and areas that are less accessible or less of a priority in national development strategies.

But as this edition of the Development Co-operation Report shows, providers of development co-operation need to adapt their approaches in the face of this new ambition: First by renewing their narratives, to make the case that focusing on those left behind worldwide is essential to the well-being of citizens at home, as it also feeds into key strategic interests such as economic growth, peace and security. Second, providers must
mainstream inclusiveness, universal access and equality of opportunity across the whole portfolio of their activities, systematically identifying who is furthest behind and where, and tracking progress for them. Finally, they must scale up official finance for sustainable development and improve the way this finance is allocated in order to reach the countries and sectors where needs are greatest.

This report aims to support reform of development co-operation: it frames the challenge of leaving no one behind from the points of view of a variety of actors, documents dozens of examples of good practice so far, and highlights priority areas for action. Importantly, it provides a starting point for renewed dialogue, peer learning and accountability, which the OECD is proud to host and facilitate.
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