Executive summary

In 2015, UN member states approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – a transformative global agenda that integrates the economic, social and environmental pillars of development within 17 intricately interdependent Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Central to the 2030 Agenda is a pledge to meet the Goals for all, leaving no one behind, and endeavouring to reach the furthest behind first. The Development Co-operation Report 2018 unpacks the meaning of this pledge with a specific focus on the unique role and added value of development co-operation and official development assistance (ODA). This report responds to demand from members of the OECD Development Assistance Committee for greater clarity on how to answer the pledge.

In a global context of rising income and wealth inequalities within and between countries, alongside more frequent climate-related shocks, hard-won development gains are under threat. More visible and urgent risks to development and the environment are pressuring governments, the international community and development partners to respond and adapt. They are facing a clear need to renew strategies and investments in eradicating poverty, curbing inequalities, and tackling the drivers of these threats to sustainable development, which have consequences globally.

So what does committing to leave no one behind mean in practice? Recognising that there is no single response to this question and that every UN member state is responsible for delivering the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs for all, this report provides a comprehensive view. It uses the latest evidence, data and analysis from a range of governmental, academic and non-governmental experts and policy makers on what it means to be left behind and strategies that work. It also takes a fresh and critical look at the readiness and capacity of development co-operation and official development assistance to support developing countries and communities to achieve the SDGs for all.

It is clear that the pledge to leave no one behind entails a substantive shift in the narrative on sustainable development in all countries – to consider and include the people who are not benefiting from progress for often-intersecting political, social, economic, environmental, cultural and structural reasons through inclusive, equitable and sustainable development in developing countries. Chapters and case studies from Benin, Indonesia, Kenya, Latin America and West Africa show how more inclusive social, economic and environmental policies backed with the right data and evidence, can make a real difference towards equitable and sustainable development.

Part I of the report provides evidence of why leave no one behind matters along with data and analysis on what it means to be left behind. Chapters zoom-in on eight critical issues that need to be tackled to achieve the SDGs for all: ending extreme poverty in countries most in need; tackling rising income inequality; addressing fragility; enabling inclusive governance; the imperative of climate action; making progress towards gender equality and women’s economic empowerment; including the world’s 1.2 billion young people; and ensuring persons with disabilities are no longer left behind.

Part II investigates leaving no one behind in practice. Chapters shed light on the potential impact of more integrated policies, budgets and programmes across sectors and between levels of government in reaching the most vulnerable. Achieving the SDGs for all relies on data and diagnostics that count everyone and are disaggregated by factors like income, sex and gender, geography, age, and disability.
National statistical systems still need to develop these data capabilities. Ensuring the right enabling environment for civil society to deepen its grassroots role of representing the marginalised is also crucial. Other local forces for inclusion are micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. Such enterprises can play a larger role if they have sufficient access to affordable finance, one of the areas in which development co-operation can contribute.

Part III, building on responses by DAC members to a survey on their policies and approaches, discusses ways forward for development co-operation policies, financing and programming to be fit for purpose in leaving no one behind. The final part of the report (Part IV) contains the individual aid profiles of all members of the DAC as well as 13 other providers that report to the OECD in a sufficiently granular manner, and private development finance from 2 foundations. It also includes estimates on development finance for ten countries that do not currently report to the OECD.

The Development Co-operation Report 2018: Joining Forces to Leave No One Behind makes a strong case for the unique role of development co-operation in supporting countries and the global community to achieve the 2030 Agenda. However, to keep the collective promise of achieving SDGs for all, leaving no one behind, and reaching the furthest behind first, business as usual development co-operation will not suffice. Providers need to make new deliberate, systematic and co-ordinated efforts to adapt their narratives, management practices and financing to maximise individual and collective impact. This report calls for providers to update development co-operation frameworks in three ways:

1. a new narrative spelling out the mutual benefits of leaving no one behind for everyone
2. deliberately mainstreaming the objective of inclusive, equitable and sustainable development through development co-operation portfolios, and harnessing agents of change, innovation and data
3. a smarter use and allocation of ODA as an integral part of broader efforts to increase the volume of financing to achieve the SDGs for all.
Please cite this chapter as:


DOI: https://doi.org/10.1787/dcr-2018-4-en

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