

Accountability for the Post-2015 Targets on Violence against Children

Executive Summary



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The role that existing monitoring, reporting and accountability mechanisms for international and regional commitments can play in the implementation of the forthcoming Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has been highlighted by a range of actors, including the UN Secretary General. These mechanisms offer the opportunity to access existing systems that can support the review of progress against the new Sustainable Development Goals and would be complementary to any other mechanisms that are specifically created at the national, regional and global levels for this purpose.

This paper considers the case of the SDG targets on violence against children and the potential to use existing monitoring and reporting mechanisms to:

- track progress on the SDG targets on violence against children
- involve a range of stakeholders in doing so and
- provide accountability for the promises made to children in this area.

Violence against children issues have been included in the SDG framework in a number of ways, both as an issue in its own right and as a range of more specific issues such as early marriage and violence in schools. Given the importance of these issues for children it is imperative to ensure that progress on them is properly tracked so that adjustments can be made where necessary as implementation moves forward. Fortunately a range of existing human rights and other mechanisms exist with the potential to provide open, accessible, participatory and inclusive review of progress on these targets. These reflect the fact that the proposed targets correspond to existing obligations already accepted by most governments under international and regional human rights law.

Nevertheless, although States have assumed legal obligations to end violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect of children by ratifying a wealth of international and regional human rights treaties, the daily reality of children remains bleak and commitment not sufficient. It is estimated that between 500 million and 1.5 billion children experience violence annually.¹ Around 120 million girls under the age of 20 (about 1 in 10) have been subjected to forced sexual intercourse or other forced sexual acts at some point in their lives.² Every year, roughly 6 in 10 children between the ages of 2 and 14, or nearly a billion children worldwide, are regularly subjected to physical punishment by their caregivers.³

The MDGs did not include targets to protect children. Violence undermines child survival and development, causing broader economic damage and trapping children into cycles of violence they may not escape as adults. Ambitious post- 2015 commitments on children's education, health, and wellbeing cannot be met as long as so many children experience violence. These targets are central to creating a post-2015 world fit for children. They have the potential to become a signature issue that will resonate with the public – and with children – around the world⁴.

The paper looks in detail at the way in which the individual SDG targets link to legally binding commitments already made under various human rights treaties. The link to these treaties provides the opportunity to use the range of reporting mechanisms set up under these treaties as complementary mechanisms for both collecting data and other evidence on progress and for then reviewing the effectiveness of - and any gaps in- implementation.

The paper concludes that existing human rights mechanisms can indeed strengthen post-2015 accountability for the SDG targets on violence against children:

¹ United Nations Children's Fund, 'Monitoring Progress on Major Conventions, Declarations and Plans for Children' and 'UNSG Study on Violence against Children: What are the limitations of the existing data and how can they be improved?', UNICEF, New York, October 2006 (internal documents) quoted in UNICEF, Progress for Children, A Report Card on Child Protection, September 2009, p. 7

² UNICEF (2014), Ending Violence Against Children: Six Strategies for Action (p. 7)

³ *Ibid.* (p. 4,7)

⁴ David Steven, *If not now, when? Ending violence against the world's children*, Centre on International Cooperation, New York University, October 2014

- 1) Any accountability mechanisms for the Post-2015 agenda should review development performance by States in light of human rights principles.** The targets on ending violence against children included in the current proposal for the Sustainable Development Goals are closely aligned with existing international human rights standards. Key human rights principles such as universality, interdependence, and equality must be taken into account. Targets on violence against children are not voluntary commitments as they correspond to existing obligations that are legally binding for almost all States. These binding commitments have corresponding obligations to report to human rights accountability mechanisms.
- 2) Ensure an accountability mechanism for the post-2015 agenda that would allow for effective civil society and children's participation.** Some of the existing human rights mechanisms allow for some good degree of participation by civil society and children and young people, amongst other stakeholders. This helps to ensure a comprehensive, independent and balanced assessment of violence against children in a State. This would provide the post-2015 accountability mechanism with objective information sources based on a transparent and inclusive process. The post-2015 accountability mechanisms should be themselves participatory and inclusive and draw on the good existing practices as well as information collected through human rights mechanisms.
- 3) Include in the accountability framework a specific reference to working in close cooperation with international and regional human rights treaties and mechanisms.** The post-2015 accountability framework should ensure a systematic flow of data, analysis and recommendations on violence against children between the human rights and the post-2015 accountability mechanisms. A specific reference on working in close cooperation with human rights bodies and mechanisms should be included in the accountability framework and the working methods should set out modalities as to how this will occur.
- 4) An accountability framework should be based on reliable and validated disaggregated data.** Human rights mechanisms collect a wealth of data and information on violence against children. Data collection and analysis have the potential to determine the extent to which legislation, policy and practice are in compliance with human rights obligations. Strengthened data collection systems could provide human rights mechanisms with a reliable, validated and disaggregated means of measuring progress that could assist in the monitoring of the post-2015 targets.
- 5) An accountability framework should evaluate progress, identify implementation gaps and make recommendations for follow-up action.** Recommendations from human rights mechanisms provide States with suggestions on how to improve compliance with human rights obligations. These recommendations, derived from national level sources, are targeted and country specific and aim to assist States to better implement the targets on violence against children. The concluding observations and recommendations could provide a baseline against which progress on the post-2015 targets could be measured
- 6) The existing human rights mechanisms at regional and international level should begin to identify ways in which they could incorporate the new SDG commitments into their considerations.** The human rights mechanisms could reinforce the need to meet relevant post-2015 targets. During review processes, the review mechanisms may be able to provide country-specific recommendations on ways in which targets could be met.