



HIGH-LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM
ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Voluntary National Reviews

World Vision 

Review of HLPF 2018
Voluntary National Reviews' Main Messages
from a *Children's Rights perspective*

Overview

At the 2018 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), 47 countries will present a Voluntary National Review (VNR) in order to assess progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This paper examines the main messages of each country presenting a VNR from a children's rights perspective by identifying key references to children, youth or young people in relation to the following categories: poverty; food security and nutrition; health; violence against children; social spending, budgeting and/or investment in children; data disaggregation; child participation or consultations with children; vulnerable or marginalized groups of children; and children living in fragile contexts.

Among the 47 countries reviewed, there are no references in relation to the above categories by 17 countries, namely ***Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Benin, Colombia, Guinea, Ireland, Malta, Mexico, Paraguay, Republic of Congo, Romania, Spain, State of Palestine, Switzerland, Togo and Uruguay.*** Relevant key references in relation to the above categories in the main messages of the other 30 countries are summarized below.

Summary of Key Messages

Australia's main messages emphasize that Australia's youth "play a crucial role given their potential to deliver on the SDGs into the future and their stake in the realization of the Goals." Although the main messages state that Australia continues to grapple with challenges such as improving the health, economic, justice and well-being outcomes for its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) peoples, ATSI children are not mentioned specifically.

Bahamas' main messages state that 13% of its population live in poverty with 25% of these being children between the ages of 5-14. There are also challenges in the public education and health care systems leading to less than optimal results. Youth unemployment remains high – rising to as much as 30% in 2015. The main messages emphasize the importance of strengthening the resilience of groups and communities that are marginalized including youth at risk. A pilot project to alleviate poverty in a traditionally marginalized region in the Bahamas – including programs focusing on youth and the elderly – is highlighted. Bahamas also stress that strengthening the country's statistical capacity for the production of high quality, timely, reliable and disaggregated data is critical to SDG implementation and review.

Bahrain's main messages state that healthcare is free and universal with maternal mortality and under-five child mortality dropping to 28.6 deaths per 100,000 live births and 9 deaths per 1,000 live births

respectively. Basic education is also free and compulsory with the net enrollment ratio for primary and secondary levels at 100% and 86.4% respectively, while enrollment in KG2 (kindergarten) is 82%. Bahrain's main messages highlight the vast financial and training support that the Labor Fund (Tamkeen) has provided to SMEs and individuals including youth.

Bhutan's main messages emphasize that its population is increasingly urbanized, young, and educated with half the population below 28 years. Bhutan highlights a number of challenges such as high youth unemployment (11%) and the need to address the needs of vulnerable groups through targeted interventions, although children are not mentioned specifically. Promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls is noted as one of Bhutan's 16 national key result areas. Bhutan's main messages also state that initiatives to improve the quality of education will be undertaken.

Cabo Verde's main messages state that its graduation to Middle Income Country status in 2007 was due to a number of factors including its investment in sexual and reproductive health and its particular emphasis on maternal-child health. Although disaggregated data is not referred to explicitly, Cabo Verde emphasizes its commitment to strengthening its statistical system as a necessary condition for operationalizing the principle of "Leaving No One Behind".

Canada's main messages emphasize that a number of groups – including Indigenous peoples, youth, the LGBTQ2 community, newcomers to Canada, and persons with disabilities among others – are more likely to face poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion. Canada states that it is responding to these challenges through concrete actions to reduce poverty, advance gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, narrow the socio-economic gaps that exist between different groups, foster inclusion and celebrate diversity, and improve equality of opportunity for all. At the global level, Canada believes that promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls is the most effective way to eradicate poverty, build a more peaceful, inclusive and prosperous world, and drive progress on all the SDGs. Canada's main messages also note that data is key to ensure that no one is left behind.

Dominican Republic's main messages state that unemployment has been reduced however; a high rate of informality still persists with unemployment affecting youth, women and low-income households. The national employment policy should thus emphasize these populations.

Ecuador's main messages do not refer to children or youth in the narrative however, a graph highlighting "emblematic interventions" (i.e. specific actions to guide national planning to achieve the 2030 Agenda) includes interventions for vulnerable groups such as those in early childhood, children and youth. Interventions for those in early childhood and children generally include Misión Ternura which seeks to improve child development of children less than 5 years of age, with an emphasis on the first 1000 days of life, through the design and implementation of public policy mechanisms and inter-institutional coordination.

Egypt's main messages state that its growing population consisting mainly of youth represents both a challenge – in terms of needing to scale-up the country's infrastructure and housing units especially for low-income groups – and an opportunity if young people obtain adequate quality education and training that prepare them for the fourth industrial revolution.

Greece's main messages highlight eight National Priorities for adapting the 17 SDGs to national needs and circumstances including: addressing poverty and social exclusion, and providing universal access to quality health care services; and providing high-quality and inclusive education. Policy priorities focus on addressing urgent gaps related to unemployment, particularly for youth and women, social inequalities, and the inclusion of immigrants and vulnerable population groups.

Hungary's main messages state that besides the government sector, a number of strategic stakeholders – including the Office of the Ombudsman for Future Generations and youth – gave their contributions to Hungary's VNR.

Jamaica's main messages state that its National 2030 Agenda Oversight Committee (NAOC) includes representatives from a range of stakeholders including youth. The main messages also note that the revision, formulation and implementation of several critical social policies and strategies to address the changing demographics in Jamaica will be pursued to harness the demographic bonus, although no further details are provided.

Kiribati's main messages highlight significant advances in school enrolment rates, basic literacy, and numeracy, particularly for girls and young women. The main messages also recognize Kiribati's stark health challenges including high maternal mortality and under-five child mortality, malnutrition, non-communicable diseases, water issues and Tuberculosis.

Lao People's Democratic Republic's main messages state that it is projected to benefit from the demographic dividend as a result of its young population. Overall progress in a number of areas including poverty reduction, net enrolment in primary schools and health care is highlighted. Challenges include widening inequality and income disparities with challenging infant mortality and school dropout rates, and the unavailability of updated data, especially disaggregated data.

Latvia's main messages highlight a number of challenges in relation to reducing inequalities including increasing access to health care – including maternal and child health care – and decreasing the share of pupils (i.e. school children) with low competencies.

Lebanon's main messages state that challenges due to the Syrian crisis have not halted the government's efforts to create a better environment for all through pursuing national programs that enhance social assistance packages for the most vulnerable Lebanese (such as the National Poverty Targeting Program) and its efforts to provide education for all through the Reaching All Children with Education Program.

Lithuania's main messages state that although some progress has been made in terms of poverty, social exclusion and income inequality, challenges remain. Lithuania is implementing a number of significant reforms including to create more favorable financial conditions for families. In relation to education, Lithuania is giving considerable attention to the accessibility and quality of early childhood education and to improvements in general education, learning outcomes and inclusive education development. Lithuania intends to implement an extensive reform of the education system including pre-school, primary and general education.

Mali's main messages state that the Government's drive to "leave no citizen behind" has strengthened synergies in the formulation and implementation of development policies such as the "Zero Hunger" Initiative.

Namibia's main messages recognize progress on gender equity and equality however, there are almost no references to girls except in relation to school retention rates which remain low for both girls and boys. Other aspects of education such as progress, poor retention and repetition rates, and the quality of instruction are highlighted including in relation to poor and remote and rural areas. Regarding health and nutrition, Namibia's main messages note challenges with stunting (24%), anemia (48%) and neonatal mortality (20/1000 live births). Strategies to address challenges include reaching out to all districts countrywide for immunizations of all types.

Niger's main messages state that major issues include the financing and capacity of the national statistical system to produce disaggregated, comprehensive and quality data for measuring and monitoring SDG indicators at national, regional and local levels.

Poland's main messages emphasize its participatory approach to its VNR, noting that a special team was appointed to prepare Poland for its VNR which consisted of a number of different representatives including youth.

Qatar's main messages – in relation to Goal 11 – highlight that it has built an advanced infrastructure including schools, hospitals, health centres, playgrounds, parks and green areas.

Saudi Arabia's main messages state that several challenges, such as the need to strengthen the participation of youth and women in the labour market, are at the forefront of the government's reform effort and are an important part of the Saudi SDGs agenda.

Senegal's main messages state that key challenges include ensuring the monitoring of SDG indicators, taking into account their level of disaggregation.

Singapore's main messages state that its policies have always been designed with sustainability in mind in order to achieve its vision of a clean, green and sustainable Singapore in which its people and future generations can lead healthy and fulfilling lives. In preparing for its VNR, Singapore's Inter-Ministry Committee on SDGs consulted a range of stakeholders including youth organisations in order to obtain an accurate and holistic picture of Singapore's progress on sustainable development. Singapore's main messages also highlight areas of success such as ensuring accessible and good quality education for its children.

Slovakia's main messages state that sustainable development is its duty towards future generations. Slovakia contributes to sustainable development at home and abroad through three main principles of implementation including the principle that "individual commitment and cross-generational engagement is vital." Slovakia recognizes that its dedication to the 2030 Agenda is not sufficient to achieve sustainable development and that the effort must be shared by all – women or men, young or elderly.

Sri Lanka's main messages highlight that its free education and health policies have resulted in high life expectancy and high youth literacy rates. In relation to health, maternal mortality, under-five child mortality and neonatal mortality have reduced remarkably. In relation to education, Sri Lanka notes that it has achieved near universality in its youth literacy rate, school enrolment and primary education completion. A number of challenges remain however, such as improving the quality and relevance of education.

Sudan's main messages state that discussions with population groups, especially women and youth groups, have taken place as part of the Government's activities. The main messages also emphasize that the Sudan is experiencing a demographic dividend that must be harnessed through investment in education, especially girl's education, in health and in the creation of jobs and employment opportunities.

United Arab Emirates' main messages state that broad stakeholder engagement is an established part of policymaking processes and includes consultation with various stakeholders including youth groups. The UAE appointed a Minister of State for Youth Affairs in 2016, signaling its ambitions to involve youth to determine the future direction of the country. The Emirates Youth Council and seven emirate-wide Local Youth Councils have been launched and are involved in the official deliberations concerning the implementation of the SDGs.

Vietnam's main messages state that it has paid particular attention to vulnerable groups such as the poor, people with disabilities, women, children and ethnic minorities through a number of policies aimed at promoting social equality to ensure that no one is left behind. Vietnam is also confident that it will succeed in implementing the 2030 Agenda for current and future generations.

Conclusion

Based on a review of the main messages of the 2018 VNR countries, a number of trends emerge.

First, countries tend to highlight "youth" and/or "young people" much more frequently than children especially in relation to participation in consultations or preparatory processes for the VNR. There are no references to child participation or engaging children in VNR consultations. While a country's definition of "youth" may in fact overlap with some children aged 0-18 years, it is unclear from the main messages whether this is the case.

Second, there is a tendency to focus on children much more in relation to previous MDG areas such as health and education with little focus on other issues such as child poverty or violence against children. Notably, there is not a single reference to violence against children in any of the main messages which is troubling. There are also very few references to social spending, budgeting and/or investment in children.

Third, despite the pledge to "leave no one behind," there are few references to vulnerable or marginalized groups of children in the main messages. Children are identified as a vulnerable or disadvantaged group in only a handful of main messages with only "girls" identified as a specific target population. Further, there are no references to children living in fragile contexts.

Finally, there are a handful of main messages which highlight the need for disaggregated data or improved data to ensure that no one is left behind. As disaggregated data is key to achieving the SDGs for all economic and social groups, it is surprising that more countries have not referenced the status of or challenges with data disaggregation.

In conclusion, while the main messages do not necessarily reflect a country's prioritization of or investment in children, they are indicative that children tend to be overlooked as a population group when reporting on the SDGs in VNRs. Consequently, all VNR countries should make greater effort to ensure that children are more visible in reporting on SDG progress, including in VNR main messages and reports at the HLPF.

**World Vision International
Global Executive Office**
Waterview House
1 Roundwood Avenue,
Stockley Park
Uxbridge, Middlesex UB11
1FG
United Kingdom

**World Vision International
New York - United Nations
Liaison Office**
919 2nd Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York
www.wvi.org

**World Vision Brussels &
EU Representation**
18, Square de Meeûs
1st Floor, Box 2
B-1050 Brussels
Belgium

**World Vision International
Geneva - United Nations
Liaison Office**
7-9 Chemin de Balaxert
Case Postale 545
CH-1219 Châteline
Switzerland

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