



The Irish Association of Non-Governmental
Development Organisations

LEAVING NO-ONE BEHIND

TOWARDS A COMMON UNDERSTANDING

In 2015, the Irish government co-led a process that delivered a new set of international commitments that aim to end poverty and secure a sustainable future within a generation. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets it contains – set an ambitious agenda for people, planet, prosperity and peace.

Arguably, the most transformational aspect of the 2030 Agenda is the cross-cutting pledge to ‘leave no one behind’ (LNOB); the commitment that all goals and targets will be met for all nations, peoples and segments of society, and that the furthest behind will be reached first¹.

The SDGs apply to all countries, so to ‘leave no-one behind’ demands that governments make policy choices, not just individual agencies and donors. The LNOB principle demands therefore that national public policy and budgets, and that international cooperation, focuses primarily on tackling exclusion and inequality both within countries and reducing inequalities between countries.

LNOB, and its complementary principle “Reaching the furthest behind first”, will mean that Ireland has to do things differently at a policy and programming level. Globally, at least 1.4 billion people – the men, women and children who make up the poorest 20% of the population, are being left behind.² Urgent and specific targeting, and innovative approaches to reach these people are required in order for the global upholding of the commitment to eradicate poverty in a sustainable way, by 2030.

This short briefing note outlines the key principles and values that Dóchas and its members believe should underpin the policies and practice of government actors and non-government actors, as we move towards the first 1,000 days since the world committed to Leave No-One Behind.

¹ Agenda 2030 (2015) Paragraph 4, <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>

² Development Initiatives (2017), <http://devinit.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/P20-Initiative-baseline-report.pdf>. This ‘P20’ figure includes those currently living below the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day, plus the people who are most vulnerable to falling back into extreme poverty.

Who are those left behind?

Who are we talking about when we talk about leaving no one behind? Who are the excluded and what, and who defines them? Definitions of LNOB tend to focus on the marginalised, the vulnerable, the poorest of the poor, and those who are “invisible” or not reached by government or NGO services. They may include;

- The approximately 700 million people globally living below the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day³
- The 1.4 billion people represented by the ‘P20’ measure of those currently living below the international poverty line, plus the people who are most vulnerable to falling back into extreme poverty
- Those who are excluded from full social and economic participation because of age/race/gender/LGBTQI status/physical or intellectual disability/economic or migrant status/stateless status
- Those who are affected by humanitarian crises or are falling into crisis
- People living in Least Developed Countries, fragile states - countries or regions already in conflict or slipping into conflict or humanitarian crisis, or Small Island Development states – countries particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.
- People living in countries with the least progress towards the SDG indicators.

Identifying those most left behind is the first critical step in facilitating policies and programmes to reach them. The very process of identifying those left behind is politically and culturally challenging. Civil society organisations, donor agencies, research bodies, and community and indigenous groups should play a vital role in the process, in close collaboration with governments and other stakeholders. Further work is required to adequately resource and strengthen data collection and analysis in order to determine who should be targeted.

It is important to recognise that many vulnerabilities ‘intersect’ with each other, compounding inequalities and posing challenges for identification. For example, the intersectionality of older women with disabilities, or the additional burden of mental health issues to those experiencing exclusion, adding extra burdens of stress and shame, making empowerment and participation more difficult. Inequality compounds cases of vulnerability and exclusion. Reframing policies and practices to focus on Leaving No one Behind - and Reaching the Furthest Behind First - therefore inevitably requires tackling structural inequalities and barriers and power relationships.

There is currently no common or agreed approach for identifying those left behind, and given the challenges of intersectionality, it is therefore important to consider a combination of approaches to identification, including:

- Disaggregated data, while patchy, can help to compensate for the averaging effect of GDP per head, which does not reflect the real situation in many countries⁴. Tools such as multidimensional poverty indices can help to identify groups that suffer from severe, multiple or overlapping deprivations. A collaborative approach to data disaggregation is being employed in the UK

³ World Bank, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/measuringpoverty>

⁴ Measuring progress through averages captures a country’s progress as a whole, masking inequalities between people living in that country. Aggregated data and the resulting averages fail to capture the unevenness of progress which is at the heart of the need for LNOB principles

where DFID have produced their own 'Data Disaggregation Action Plan'⁵ whilst also supporting the 'Leave No-One Behind Partnership'⁶ who facilitated the P20 initiative

- Low Human Development-ranked countries and/or regions (such as Sub-Saharan Africa) in the Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index⁷, countries affected by chronic/cyclical humanitarian crises, and/or those rated as 'fragile states' (though the latter may be more politically contentious)
- SDG indicators could be used as the basis of a 'leave no one behind assessment framework', which includes income, health, education, nutrition, protection, and civil and political rights indicators. Analysis of results should focus on who the results are being achieved for, not just what the results being achieved are. Analysis of contributing factors should look at all levels, including immediate, household and community, as well as structural and institutional factors. The OECD Development Cooperation Division Results Community are currently exploring how to integrate LNOB indicators to adequately capture who the results are being achieved for into results based frameworks for the SDGs⁸
- Bottom up definition: include local population, asking them who is furthest behind. The voices of the vulnerable need to be heard and empowered.

It is important to acknowledge that reaching the most left behind can be particularly challenging due to the costs of programming, and problems of access.

⁵ Data Disaggregation Action Plan, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/582315/Data-disaggregation-action-plan-Jan-2017.pdf

⁶ Leave No-One Behind Partnership, <http://www.project-everyone.org/case-studies/leave-no-one-behind/>

⁷ Inequality-Adjusted Human Development Index, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/inequality-adjusted-human-development-index-ihdi>

⁸ <http://www.oecd.org/dac/results-development/docs/results-key-messages-workshop-apr-2018.pdf>

Pathways to Leaving No-One Behind

This section sets out a series of policy recommendations for policy makers in Ireland in order to develop a shared understanding of who is being left behind. While this paper has been formulated by civil society working on overseas development and humanitarian action, we believe these recommendations equally can be applied to policy and programming in Ireland.

1) Develop a shared understanding of Leave No One Behind

Government departments must work with civil society, partner countries, multilateral partners and communities to develop a shared understanding of what leaving no-one behind means for Ireland's international development co-operation, and indeed, for domestic policy-making. This should involve developing guidelines on how to define LNOB and developing a baseline to understand 'the most marginalised in Ireland', paying particular attention to the intersectionality of vulnerability and exclusion, as well as a shared approach to how data will be disaggregated, the definition of vulnerable groups and the principles underpinning policy and practice. It is also necessary to develop a shared understanding of the concept in the context of Ireland's international development policy and how this analysis can be applied to partner countries.

2) Commit to putting Leave No One Behind at the heart of government policy

The SDGs and LNOB are not just a matter of overseas aid policy or foreign policy. Ireland, which played a key role in the negotiation of the SDGs, is also committed to achieving them at home. Achieving the SDGs demands policy coherence and a "whole of government approach" to implementation.

Real progress towards the SDGs means ensuring there is Policy Coherence for Development, in other words that Ireland's actions in all areas of government, including as climate, trade, agriculture and taxation, do not contribute to inequality and exclusion.

Credibility is important; how we include migrants and refugees at home, or negotiate emissions reductions abroad and implement them in practice, speaks volumes about our commitment to the SDGs and LNOB. As Ireland aims to grow its global footprint, it should ensure that all its actions contribute to the realisation of the SDGs, and that economic expediency does not compromise principles.

3) Promote participative approaches to combat exclusion

By definition those who are left behind are often the most marginalised and face the greatest degree of social exclusion. They also face the significant barriers in examining and influencing government decision-making. The responsibility for facilitating meaningful participation rests on states and the importance of participatory decision-making is recognised in the 2030 Agenda (see in particular target 16.7). States should seek to actively engage vulnerable and marginalised groups when assessing the principle of Leave No One Behind and in its integration into public policy-making. The inclusion of marginalized groups and communities is essential to the achievement of sustainable and inclusive development. We must also consider the psychological aspects of exclusion, shame and disempowerment, and ensure that the language and behaviour used around vulnerability and marginalisation does not make the situation worse.

Countries also need to establish robust mechanisms in order to share progress in an open and transparent way, not just during the Voluntary National Review Process, which takes place as part of the High Level Political Forum at the UN. Civil society, communities and the private sector should be included in this process and given sufficient time and opportunity contribute to progress reviews and suggestions for progress. It is through this collaborative process that we will see the results of what is a transformative agenda.

4) Promote the concept that a rights-based safety net is for everyone, not just high-income countries

Implementing social protection programmes and safety nets present a huge opportunity to improve lives globally. In low-income countries, only 1 in 5 of the poorest are covered by safety net programmes⁹. Extending these programmes improves health and education access, reduces poverty, and strengthens resilience in the face of crises and disasters. Policy makers must work with developing countries to design and implement social safety nets which will meet the needs of those left the furthest behind immediately and to ensure they remain sustainable in the long term.

5) Integrate LNOB into all external policy and political dialogue

Ireland has an influential role to play, based on its international reputation for supporting the world's poorest and most vulnerable people, in promoting the principle of LNOB at global and international fora to reduce inequalities not only within countries but between countries. Irish Aid in particular has a clear role to play within its Development Cooperation Programme through its key partner countries.

Policy makers should aim to embed best practice in terms of governance, anti-discrimination, inclusion and empowerment at policy and programme levels in international organisations and mechanisms with which it engages, as well as the partner countries in which it operates. It should also be willing to learn from civil society and the governments who are making progress towards implementing the SDGs through a LNOB approach.

6) Incorporate Leave No One Behind into financing frameworks

Ireland's untied aid programme is highly regarded internationally. Ireland should ensure that the financing arrangements to which it contributes (especially multilateral programmes and those involving the private sector) adopt the principle of LNOB. The latter is especially important in the context of blended finance programmes, which are more likely to involve middle-income countries and may not target or reach the most excluded or vulnerable people and groups within them.

Programming with a LNOB focus is likely to take time to produce results and multi-annual flexible funding will be a priority. It is clear though that taking this approach brings about returns. According to ODI, evidence suggests an additional dollar invested in high-quality pre-schools delivers a return of anywhere between \$6 and \$17 (Engle et al., 2011). Recent research by the World Bank (Olinto et al., 2014) and the

⁹ The State of Social Safety Nets 2018 Report:
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29115/9781464812545.pdf?sequence=5&isAllowed=y>

International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Dabla-Norris et al., 2015) suggests a pro-poor growth agenda helps to improve overall growth levels¹⁰.

7) Recognise that Leave No One Behind is not the easy option – but be willing to make hard choices for long-term gains

A focus on LNOB will throw up some difficult choices. Policy makers may have to consider the benefit of working in some countries as they move towards middle-income status. If they decide to stay, they should focus on the most vulnerable and on embedding the LNOB principle into the policies, governance and services of those partner governments.

It is also important to recognise that some LNOB programming, particularly involving fragile states, may not offer any immediate wins or deliver on explicit national self-interests. The principle of LNOB demands that someone looks after those who everyone else has left behind.

Inequality and exclusion hamper poverty reduction, sustainable economic growth and can be a driver of conflict and instability¹¹. Adopting a LNOB approach offers long term benefits. Analysis from Save the Children, for instance, shows that pursuing an equitable pathway to reducing child mortality is associated with 6% faster progress over the course of ten years, on average¹².

8) #LeaveNoOneBehind - Bring the Irish public with you

The Irish government should be willing to make the case that LNOB is not just the right thing to do; it is also the *smart* thing to do. Human potential goes to waste, and economic growth suffers when millions are excluded from full participation in society.

Dóchas believes that the government should embark on a major project to communicate the SDGs to the public, and to build support for their achievement and for an increase in ODA to reach the commitment of 0.7% of GNI before 2030.

This should incorporate Ireland's own SDG commitments and progress to date, as well as the role being played by Ireland abroad. It should also make the public more aware of their own responsibilities and choices and show the linkages between actions at home and implications abroad.

9) Monitoring progress and accountability

September 2018 will usher in the first 1,000 days of the SDGs. It is imperative that governments have by then, set out a clear strategy with ambitious and measurable targets as to how they will reach the 'furthest behind first' both in their own countries and through their development cooperation programmes. It is also imperative that governments allow themselves to be held to account for the achievement of those targets.

¹⁰ <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/10692.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9938.pdf>

¹² Save the Children (2015). The lottery of birth: Giving all children an equal chance to survive. London: Save the Children UK.

https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/The_Lottery_of_Birth2.pdf