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Making the HLPF More Inclusive | No. 3, 2021

# Ensuring Children's Inclusion in the High-Level Political Forum

Participation and agency to achieve the SDGs

Dragica Mikavica

“I will always remember the feeling of knowing that many important people were listening to me, such as the Minister of Education of Colombia and others, and that they were also paying attention to the important things I was going to say. On the same day as I took part in the event, I shared my experience with my family and friends. Everyone congratulated me or said ‘Wow, really?’. I think that I said what had to be said. Knowing that the Minister of Education of Colombia listened to me makes me think that the government can make good decisions. Because how do you solve something if you do not know about it?”

—Marly, 16, child advocate from Colombia, on HLPF 2020<sup>1</sup>

The United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) is one of the only institutionalised spaces in which children can participate in global-level policymaking. However, despite the HLPF’s mandate to directly involve children and account for their views in measuring progress and discussing challenges in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the practice of involving children is still largely missing.

Six years after the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ensuring the participation of children, such as 16-year-old Marly from Colombia, in processes such as the HLPF is relegated to the few child-focused agencies (including Save the Children) directly campaigning and advocating for and with children. Why is there still such a wide gap between policy commitments and practice?

Children’s inherent, legal right to be heard is enshrined in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) and in General Comment 12.<sup>2</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1 pronounced children as critical agents of change committing to ‘channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world’ and in pursuit of the SDGs.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding UN Member States’ legal obligation to facilitate safe and meaningful participation of children in all decisions that directly affect their lives, it is to their advantage to invest in children by cultivating leadership potential of future generations. While certain governments persistently continue to challenge children’s agency in the multilateral sphere, experts with decades of experience working with children and youth across child rights, peacebuilding, transitional justice, and other fields, have shown the integral benefits of their inclusion to home in on that leadership potential.<sup>4</sup>

Simultaneously, the structures entrusted to civil society and the UN, such as the Major Groups and Other Stakeholders (MGoS) – the mechanism for civil society’s collective engagement in the follow-up and review process – operating within the sustainable development space, continue to suffer from common paralysis resulting from the fear of doing harm to persons under the age of 18 by including them in

forums such as the HLPF. According to this argument, potential harms might include inadvertently exposing children to physical and other threats to their safety by disclosing their identity, among many other and more complex examples. This fear arises from the lack of proper expertise, as well as a lack of policies, procedures and practices that facilitate an environment of safety for the child (also called child safeguarding). In addition to these concerns, the structures also suffer from significant resource and time constraints, which limit their ability to pursue meaningful child participation.

While institutions catch up, children are taking agency into their own hands. In September 2020, a group of six children and youth from Portugal broke precedent by filing the first ever climate change lawsuit with the European Court of Human Rights, charging 33 European countries for their failure to act on climate change.<sup>5</sup> The action manifested children’s and young people’s sense of urgency on this issue. The onus is on decision makers to create an environment in which children feel empowered to express views and recommendations and claim their rights in accordance with the UN CRC and other international instruments and commitments. The UN’s sustainable development space is an optimal environment for their inclusion, not least because of the international community’s promise to *leave no one behind* while implementing the SDGs.

Against this backdrop, now is an opportune moment to take stock of how the HLPF can work even better for children in the final Decade of Action and Delivery for Sustainable Development, tapping into their agency and participation to facilitate implementation of the SDGs.

## The important and the urgent

Even before COVID-19, many countries were not on track to reach the SDGs for all groups of society, with progress stalling in areas such as vaccine coverage and reversing in others such as preventing hunger.<sup>6</sup> Since the beginning of the pandemic, child rights groups have expressed fears that the final Decade of Action will become a lost decade for children.<sup>7</sup> They have termed the learning crisis resulting from the measures to curb the pandemic a global education emergency. Specifically, it has caused worldwide school closures, compounding the lack of access to education millions of children experienced even before the pandemic.<sup>8</sup>

The resultant economic crisis pushed families already on the brink further into poverty, with projections that as many as between 122 and 140 million additional children would live in monetarily poor households in 2020 alone.<sup>9</sup> Some estimates suggest that an additional 90 to 117 million children living in poverty could lead to between 7.0 and 9.7 million more children dropping out of school.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the economic impacts

of COVID-19 could put an additional half a million girls at risk of child, early or forced marriage by 2025; when before the pandemic around 12 million girls were already married off each year.<sup>11</sup> For children growing up in conflict, the pandemic increased their risk of being subjected to grave rights violations (including recruitment and use for military purposes, sexual violence and ill-treatment in detention) while curtailing delivery of the protection services required in 2020.<sup>12</sup>

These are just some of the harrowing figures related to the secondary and tertiary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on children, including the most vulnerable. Considering this context, it is an understatement that children have a vested interest in measuring and contributing to their countries' sustainable recovery and overall development in the post-COVID-19 world. The COVID-19 crisis is a children's crisis too.

## Children as agents of change and leaving no one behind

In the lead up to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, advocates galvanised support from Member States and other key partners to secure language on children as agents of change to explicitly recognise that children are rights holders and important partners in implementing the SDGs, in line with the UN CRC and other relevant instruments. Responsibility was thus placed on Member States, the UN and others to ensure that platforms exist for children's engagement. Furthermore, Member States were mandated to facilitate children's understanding of the relevant processes through age-appropriate information and intentional activities that support and build their capacities for engagement in a safe and inclusive manner. As a matter of fact, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) and others facilitated national and international consultations with hundreds of children in the development of the SDGs, including children living in the most vulnerable situations.<sup>13</sup>

The implicit empowerment lens is further complemented by the cross-cutting principle of leaving no one behind. Children continue to be among the most marginalised groups and those living in vulnerable situations. To achieve SDG progress, they must be accounted for through intentional application of an age- and gender-transformative lens that detects and prioritises specific groups of children furthest left behind, such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex (LGBTQI) children and youth, girls, and children living in extreme poverty or situations of displacement and conflict, among others. Therefore, in the final Decade of Action, it is critical that Member States engage and consult the most marginalised children and those living in vulnerable situations in order to gather better data on their needs

and solicit recommendations on creating appropriate and sustainable solutions, particularly in the context of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the outset of the pandemic, children have directly led efforts in their schools and communities to curb the spread of the virus by organising themselves and their groups, thus demonstrating their agency and contributions. There are numerous examples worldwide of children organising and coming up with creative activities to raise awareness of the risks and of the impacts the pandemic has had on them. For example, in South Africa during lockdown, child advocates prepared short video clips, exchanged them on WhatsApp and sent them to social media and the press. To take another example, a 17-year-old child rights activist publicly shared children's reflections and recommendations on the impact of the pandemic on their education.<sup>14</sup> From these micro-efforts to more macro-level actions such as filing the climate change court case at the European Court of Human Rights, and with appropriate support from adults to which they are entitled, children and young people have indeed been 'channelling their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world' they will inherit.<sup>15</sup>

## Two proposals for strengthening the inclusion of children at the HLPF

Practitioners trained in child participation have proactively contributed to facilitating children's inclusion in the HLPF since 2015. As this multi-stakeholder platform evolves, particularly in the context of the remote engagement that has occurred since 2020, there is greater scope for conducting meaningful consultations and involving children as key stakeholders in different aspects of the HLPF. This is a welcome opportunity.

At the same time, years of experience in children's participation at HLPF have also highlighted persistent challenges and emerging gaps that need to be addressed if the HLPF is to be a positive space for children's inclusion. The mandates and the imperative of interested actors are there and Member States have been demonstrating increasing interest in supporting innovative ideas, but the ad hoc nature of children's involvement persists nevertheless. What can be done?

### 1. Empower the Major Group on Children and Youth

In the complex web of the UN's sustainable development architecture, one entity includes in its name and its mandate the word 'children' as a distinct and separate category of stakeholders. A part of the larger MGoS structure, the Major Group on Children and Youth (MGCY) originated through the Agenda 21 outcome of the first UN Conference on Environment

and Development, the 1992 Earth Summit.<sup>16</sup> Thus, as a formalised rights-holder group within the larger stakeholder context of MGoS, its mandate derives from UN General Assembly resolutions referencing MGoS.<sup>17</sup> MGCY has formalised ties within the UN system through bilateral agreements and terms of reference. As a group, it is intended to channel the participation of civil society – in this case, children and youth – in UN activities pertinent to sustainable development. In a document last updated in July 2020, MGCY states that its mission is ‘to act as a bridge between children and youth and the UN system in order to ensure that their right to meaningful participation is realized’.<sup>18</sup>

In reality, both at the national and global levels, the most active members of the group continue to be young people above the age of 18, and as a result of a confluence of factors, the group is not accountable to the constituency it is mandated to represent: children. This problem is endemic but not necessarily intentional, and MGCY can be empowered to own up to its mandate by taking several concrete steps.

### ***MGCY should develop policies providing explicit support for children’s participation***

The first point to address is the lack of infrastructure within MGCY to support children’s participation or participation of persons under the age of 18. Experience has shown that many parts of the UN system – as well as actors mandated to facilitate children’s inclusion across different processes – shy away from engaging children on the account of costs and complexities linked to child safeguarding. MGCY is no exception.

MGCY’s democratic and voluntary self-organising processes are skewed towards the inclusion of youth who do not require the kinds of extra protective measures to which under 18s are entitled, such as chaperones. Moreover, unlike child participation, youth participation does not require any additional age-appropriate information and capacity building to build up their basic understanding of the processes that they are entitled to engage in as rights holders.

Child-focused agencies have been developing and innovating safeguarding protocols and procedures for years and have published a plethora of practical guidance as a result.<sup>19</sup> The CRC, in General Comment no. 12, elaborated to Member States the Nine Basic Requirements of Child Participation that should and do guide all the work of all institutions engaging directly with children.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, where there is political will, meaningful participation can be facilitated safely.

MGCY needs to develop a policy of its own to guide participation of under 18s. It should be developed in consultation with trained practitioners with decades-

long experience, including those who have facilitated participation of children in international human rights processes, such as Universal Periodic Reviews and the reporting of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Concretely, MGCY could form a taskforce composed of agencies working and advocating with and for children, and child-led groups themselves, to support development of safeguarding policies and associated training materials. Older members of MGCY could be trained in safeguarding protocols as an entry point to enabling the participation of under 18s.

### ***MGCY should pursue joint projects to guarantee resources***

The second issue is one of resourcing, both human and financial. In reality, the cost of one week of travel to the UN in New York for one child and one chaperone is around US\$ 6,000. Since 2015, institutional funding for the MGoS has been cut and they have since become dependent on fundraising for their work. The result is an uneven capacity among the groups that comprise the MGoS to raise funds and therefore organise better.

MGCY’s voluntary nature has cascaded into a lack of capacity to intentionally plan, resource and track participation and activities. Furthermore, as is all too familiar to those engaging children on an ongoing basis, child participation requires intention, long-term planning, and tools to make it a meaningful reality, all of which is challenging with limited resources.

If the MGCY builds on safeguarding policy creation, resources would follow. Designing a joint project with a trained partner funded by an interested Member State would help guarantee systematised space for under 18s to participate in the group. If the safeguarding policy and resources are there, the intentional nature of creating an enabling environment and seeking out children to participate proactively would follow.

### ***MGCY should plan and implement outreach to networks of children***

Prior to issuing an open call for organising around a specific policy issue, MGCY should plan an outreach activity to networks of children. This would increase transparency and the space to build capacities and create networks intentionally. Without this, children would not come forward (although youth certainly would). Currently, the group has no system for tracking its members’ ages and therefore it is difficult to establish the participation status of under 18s in local groups.

However, it is notable that at the global level MGCY does not facilitate opportunities for under 18s to speak, for example by delivering formal statements in the formal spaces of the HLPF process. Currently,

representatives of MGCY need to proactively solicit a recommendation from child-focused agencies in order to seek out a qualified child for a speaking opportunity. This would ensure a child would be representative of their peers and other children in their community and country, particularly the most marginalised and left behind.

In recent years the UN and its Member States have preferred to focus on youth inclusion and participation, rather than child participation. However, there is an opportunity for MGCY to intentionally reverse course and refocus its attention and resources in favour of all its constituencies. With the right infrastructure in place, partnerships with trained actors, and political will, MGCY can exemplify what inclusion means for children and focus on reaching the most marginalised and those living in situations of vulnerability first.

If implemented with careful planning and through the inclusion of the right partners for children, the digital engagement that will continue to be a mainstay long after the pandemic is over could expand the diversity of participating voices and allow children to seize the opportunity of the spaces provided by HLPF.

## **2. Empower Member States and the UN**

In addition to the institutionalised space for child participation through the MGoS, a number of positive practices supporting children's inclusion in HLPF processes have emerged, some of which help bypass or overcome the basic logistical challenges confronting the UN Secretariat and agencies engaging children.

### ***Include children as members of official government delegations***

Minors have not generally been allowed to physically access the UN grounds for security reasons. During the 2018 HLPF session, the Government of Mexico set a new precedent by including a 15-year-old girl advocate, Michelle, in its official delegation. While many Member States are known to include youth in their delegations, this was an entirely new practice for children. The process of identifying a child representative through children's groups, and facilitating her visit to New York, involved a collaboration between the Government of Mexico and Save the Children. Save the Children worked directly with the child-led network Red Paz Mex in Sinaloa, Acapulco and Chiapas states in Mexico, which Michelle represented. In reaction to her experience, Michelle wrote on her blog:

“I think it has been a great event that has allowed me to generate connections with other people, authorities and youth groups in many parts of the world. It is incredible to know that there are youth in everywhere promoting their

rights, living in violent contexts and proposing solutions. I realized that I'm not the only one living this situation and not the only one working on this. I think we can make a great movement. I do believe that we have helped to create reflection among the governments that attended the HLPF, about the importance of having the voices of children and adolescents in this kind of events. Moreover, I have created alliances that can strengthen the work of young people and I have taken many lessons that we will use in Red Paz Mx to continue promoting our participation as agents of change.”<sup>21</sup>

The following year, at the 2019 HLPF session, the governments of Indonesia and Lesotho followed suit, registering child delegates aged 14 and 17, respectively, as part of their official delegations. This was done in collaboration with an expert organisation, World Vision International.<sup>22</sup> The registration meant that the child delegates obtained their own UN blue badge, enabling them to access the UN grounds during the session as long as they were accompanied by an adult. This type of access is rare for civil society in general; organisations bringing children to the UN spaces with ECOSOC accreditation are not allowed to register children directly.

Including children in official government delegations is the ultimate way towards children's inclusion in the formal HLPF process. It means children not only officially attend the forum, witnessing their country's Voluntary National Review (VNR) from the podium and participating in official side events, but also meet with other delegations to share their recommendations within the remit of the UN grounds and their delegations' work, truly representing their government.

Indonesia, Lesotho and Mexico showed the political will to include children. They partnered with relevant organisations with connections to child-led networks and groups to democratically identify and nominate representatives from their countries. Each government depended on the expertise of these organisations to jointly help create an environment that was accessible, safe and meaningful for children's participation in accordance with the Nine Basic Requirements. Such partnerships and practices are welcomed and should be considered by other governments, especially those speaking in favour of child participation at the UN, such as the 61 members of the Group of Friends of Children and the SDGs.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Secure children's access and make hybrid engagement the norm***

Member States can do more to facilitate children's inclusion in the HLPF space. For instance, while negotiating modalities for meetings and conferences, Member States can explicitly indicate their wish to have children participate. This, in turn, would make it easier for the UN Secretariat to deal with logistics, such as security constraints and minors' access to the UN

grounds. Moreover, during the next review process of the resolution mandating the format and organisational aspects of the HLPF (A/RES/67/290), language outlining the participation of relevant stakeholders could be further specified to explicitly include children.

The virtual engagement resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns has inadvertently expanded opportunities for child participation and inclusion of diverse voices from remote and marginalised backgrounds, which are no longer dependent on approval of visas and UN ground passes. But what will future restrictions look like when the UN reopens for business and children come with chaperones?

Most probably, limitations on the capacity of persons to enter the UN grounds will be in place for quite some time. Therefore, the rich experiences stemming from including children in virtual HLPF processes should serve as best practice for future engagements. In addition, hybrid models of participation (combining in-person and virtual participation) should be considered as normal rather than an exception when it comes to participation. Member States and the UN Secretariat should therefore collectively look to digital means to ensure the meaningful participation of stakeholders.

In early 2021, the CRC adopted General Comment 25 spelling out children's rights in relation to the digital environment, specifically encouraging the States parties to 'utilize the digital environment to consult with children on relevant legislative, administrative and other measures and . . . ensure that their views are considered seriously' while also cautioning 'that children's participation does not result in undue monitoring or data collection that violates their right to privacy, freedom of thought and opinion'.<sup>24</sup>

### ***Empower children to become authors of their own HLPF contributions***

In 2020 the Government of Zambia included a child representative as part of its 'virtual' delegation to the HLPF. Setting a new precedent, Save the Children and its local partner, Panos Institute Southern Africa in Zambia, supported children in developing their own child-led report informing the government's VNR process. The report contains recommendations based on a methodology designed by children and carried out themselves via consultations with over 900 children in four provinces.<sup>25</sup> The children presented and shared the findings of the report directly with government officials. Their 16-year-old representative, Precious, appeared in Zambia's official VNR presentation video, outlining the recommendations in the children's report.<sup>26</sup>

Children have the potential not only to be advocates for the SDGs but also to act as critical sources of data on

the issues affecting them. In an official VNR Lab hosted by the UN Foundation in July 2020, another young representative of the Zambian children's group, Kamuti (aged 18), was nominated by the network to share lessons from putting together the report. Emulating the positive example of child-led reporting to the VNRs, children in Indonesia are currently drafting a report ahead of their government's VNR presentation in July 2021 with the support of these organisations. Notably, children's participation occurs at the national level through VNRs, as well as at the global level in the HLPF.

Just like Indonesia, Lesotho and Mexico, the Government of Zambia demonstrated its commitment to meaningful inclusion of children as partners and stakeholders in measuring SDG progress in the country. It did so by dedicating space for children to speak as part of their official presentation, but also to speak substantively to the recommendations from their shadow report, which set a new powerful precedent. There is much potential, especially in the digital environment, for more dedicated parallel spaces in which governments can hear directly from children. In order to make the HLPF accessible and meaningful for children, these spaces should be more intentional and systematised, and eventually institutionalised.

## **Concluding thoughts**

The proposals outlined in this paper constitute a non-exhaustive list of ideas for better facilitating children's inclusion in HLPF and related processes. They outline some critical entry points for overcoming logistical and political challenges to children's inclusion, as seen from recent practitioners' experience.

The world is moving towards a state in which children's activism cannot be sidelined or silenced, particularly when it comes to sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. Children's participation must be normalised. In addition to mere mentions of children's and youth participation, Member States, the UN and other stakeholders should craft and institutionalise spaces, processes and structures which allow that participation to occur. In other words, the mandates are already there in the context of the 2030 Agenda. Now, the focus should be on implementing those mandates.

In the longer term, the UN should review, standardise and allow procedures for the registration of children. In the interim, the structures that already exist should be empowered to function better in accordance with their mandates, such as the MGoS, and good practices on the part of Member States should be supported and encouraged through appropriate partnerships. In the often-used slogan reiterated by 17-year-old Luis from Chile at the time of his participation in the 2019 HLPF in reference to children: 'Nothing about us without us'.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Save the Children, 'Children take centre stage at HLPF', 12 August 2020, <<https://www.savethechildren.net/blog/children-take-centre-stage-hlpf>>. For child safeguarding reasons, only children's first names are used in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child, entered into force 2 September 1990, <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>>; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'General Comment 12 (2009): The right of the child to be heard', 20 July 2009, <<https://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/AdvanceVersions/CRC-C-GC-12.pdf>>.

<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly, resolution 70/1 [The 2030 Agenda], A/RES/70/1, 21 October 2015, para. 51, <<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>>.

<sup>4</sup> See eg Clare Feinstein and Claire O'Kane, *Adults' War and Young Generation's Peace: Children's participation in armed conflict, post conflict and peace building* (Oslo: Save the Children Norway, 2008), <<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/global-report-adults-war-and-young-generations-peace-childrens-participation-armed-conflict>>.

<sup>5</sup> *Duarte Agostinho and Others v. Portugal and 32 Other States* (no. 39371/20). For more information on the case see Jonathan Watts, 'Portuguese children sue 33 countries over climate change at European Court', *The Guardian*, 3 September 2020, <<https://theguardian.com/law/2020/sep/03/portuguese-children-sue-33-countries-over-climate-change-at-european-court>>.

<sup>6</sup> UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), 'Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, Report of the Secretary-General' [advance unedited copy], April 2021, <[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27610SG\\_SDG\\_Progress\\_report\\_2021.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/27610SG_SDG_Progress_report_2021.pdf)>.

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<sup>9</sup> Oliver Fiala and Enrique Delamonica, 'Children in monetary-poor households: COVID-19's invisible victims', UNICEF and Save the Children, 11 December 2020, <<https://blogs.unicef.org/evidence-for-action/children-in-monetary-poor-households-covid-19s-invisible-victims>>.

<sup>10</sup> Wagner and Warren (note 8).

<sup>11</sup> Gabrielle Szabo and Jess Edwards, 'The Global Girlhood Report, How COVID-19 is Putting Progress in Peril', Save the Children, 1 October 2020, <<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/global-girlhood-report-2020-how-covid-19-putting-progress-peril>>.

<sup>12</sup> Office of the Special Representative to the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, 'New Study on Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Children Affected by Conflict Shows

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<sup>13</sup> See eg UNICEF UK, 'The world we want to live in: UK children and young people's views on the post-2015 development agenda', March 2013, <<https://www.unicef.org.uk/publications/the-world-we-want-to-live-in>>.

<sup>14</sup> Nsuku Valentine Shivambu, 'COVID-19 is denying us access to education', *Voices360*, 5 May 2020, <<https://www.voices360.com/education/covid-19-is-denying-us-access-to-education>>.

<sup>15</sup> UN General Assembly (note 3), para. 51.

<sup>16</sup> Major Group on Children and Youth (MGCY), 'How it began', <<https://www.unmgcy.org/history>>.

<sup>17</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution 67/290, 23 August 2013, paras. 14, 15 and 16, <<https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/67/290>>.

<sup>18</sup> MGCY, 'Processes and Procedures', July 2020, <<https://www.unmgcy.org/governance>>.

<sup>19</sup> See eg Save the Children, 'Our Commitment to Safeguarding', <<https://www.savethechildren.net/about-us/our-commitment-safeguarding>>; World Vision International, 'Child and Adult Beneficiary Safeguarding', <<https://www.wvi.org/safeguarding>>; ChildFund Alliance, 'Child Safeguarding Guidelines', <<https://childfundalliance.org/images/zdocs/Child-safeguarding-guidelines-WEB.pdf>>.

<sup>20</sup> UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (note 2), p. 26.

<sup>21</sup> Michelle González, 'Putting voices of children and adolescents first', Save the Children, 30 July 2018, <<https://www.savethechildren.net/news/putting-voices-children-and-adolescents-first>>.

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<sup>25</sup> Save the Children and Panos Institute Southern Africa, 'Implementation of the Sustainable Goals in Zambia: A Children's Perspective Shadow Report', July 2020.

<sup>26</sup> The presentation was broadcast on UN Web TV on 16 July 2020, <<http://webtv.un.org/search/part-1-2020-high-level-political-forum-on-sustainable-development-hlpf-2020-16th-meeting/6172259437001>>.

## Making the HLPF More Inclusive

Stakeholder engagement and inclusion of those left furthest behind are key principles of the 2030 Agenda. According to UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1, follow-up and review of its implementation is supposed to be ‘open, inclusive, participatory and transparent’, ‘support the reporting by all relevant stakeholders’ and ‘be people-centred, gender-sensitive, respect human rights and have a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable and those furthest behind’ (paragraph 74).

The annual High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) is the main United Nations platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). 2019 saw the completion of the first four-year cycle of HLPFs, leading to the first review of the modalities of the Forum itself in 2020. These modalities include two resolutions codifying the structure and operational rules that govern the HLPF, as well as the thematic focus for each year of a cycle. The review also provides an opportunity to discuss improvements to guidelines and practices that are not regulated by resolutions but still have an impact on the HLPF’s form and function.

This paper series aims to promote reflections on how the HLPF process can become more inclusive of a broad range of stakeholders and more purposefully focused on the implementation of the principle of *leaving no one behind*.

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