Intersectionality in policy and practice:
A tool for operationalising the Leave No One Behind principle

Hybrid Side Event at the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development | 27 March 2023
Summary Note

The Regional Forum on Sustainable Development was established by the Economic Commission for Europe at its sixty-seventh session in April 2017, with the aim to create "a regional mechanism to follow-up and review the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (E/ECE/1480, Decision B (67)). The report of each Regional Forum provides the region's official input to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, the UN's central platform for follow-up and review of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the global level. As part of this process, side events provide an additional space for various stakeholders to share their experiences with regards to specific issues, related to the main themes of the Regional Forum.

Summary

To advance the determination envisioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to Leave No One Behind (LNOB), the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation organized a side event at the UNECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development focused on the operationalization of LNOB, seeking to better understand the root causes that leave particular groups of people marginalized. Intersectional analyses and approaches can help identify the interconnected nature of social categories and how they can create multiple systems of disadvantage and exclusion. Representatives of the UN –from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the UN Resident Coordinator's Office in Kenya—shared insights into how the UN is applying intersectionality in policy, programming, and project implementation. Both OHCHR and RC Office in Kenya provided examples of how UN country teams can work with local civil society actors and governments to collect data and to perform an LNOB analysis and to better understand what groups are most vulnerable and how to design more effective programmes that address their needs. The Inclusive Data Charter shared insights on how intersectional data approaches can help identify structural inequalities and, by embedding equity and inclusion at the center of data systems, contribute to efforts to live up to the commitment to leave no one behind.

The following key points emerged from the discussion:

1. **Crucial information is needed at the country level not only to assess who is being left behind but also who is deliberately being pushed behind.**

Major global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change and the ongoing war in Ukraine as well as conflict in other parts of the world have reversed progress in achieving the

Sustainable Development Goals. The consequences of these crises are disproportionately affecting groups that are experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination, such as women and girls, and also often exacerbate their marginalization. Examples include the rise in forceful evictions of vulnerable groups from land and property, as well as austerity policies that disproportionally affect poor and marginalized populations.

Within the UN System, agencies, funds and programmes try to apply an intersectional analysis to identify these multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination. Mechanisms such as the UN Interagency review of Common Country Analyses (CCAs) for example move beyond looking at who is left behind to also analyze the causes of why some groups are left behind or even completely absent from these analyses. Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) also include analyses on state practices on inclusion and how they can improve.

Whereas LNOB is a policy commitment, equality and non-discrimination are legal commitments articulated in international human rights instruments that UN Member States have subscribed to. These are obligations that can be leveraged to design policies and to enforce data collection and disaggregation.

2. **Common Country Analyses (CCAs) can show how inequality affects population groups differently and be used to increase LNOB- sensitive programming .**

The UN Peace and Development Advisor (PDA) in Kenya presented insights from UN Kenya's CCA process aiming to enhance LNOB-sensitive programming. It was noted that it is necessary to move beyond macroeconomic indicators such as GDP, which often presents a misleading picture since it fails to show how inequality affects different groups [1]or sub-groups. The LNOB study assessed five intersecting factors - discrimination, vulnerability to shocks, governance, socioeconomic status, and geography - to identify groups left behind.

LNOB indicators are necessary to generate insights into which groups are left behind and why, and to better understand intersectional risks and vulnerabilities. The use of the LNOB analysis to inform the CCA in Kenya highlighted that countries need to collect more disaggregated data on marginalized groups and that there needs to be political will to act upon the analysis of this data. Advocacy efforts from the UN can also lead to centering the needs of marginalized groups in UNSD Cooperation Frameworks[2].

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[1] Leave No One Behind Peace and Conflict Analysis: Through the eyes of those at risk of being left behind, p. 8, https://kenya.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/Leave%20no%20one%20behind%20report%20_Kenya%20March%202022_1.pdf.

[2] The UN CCA serves as the analytical foundation of the UNSD Cooperation Framework. It is the UN system's independent, impartial and collective assessment, and analysis, of a country's situation for its internal use in developing the Cooperation Framework. The Framework's emphasis on partnerships also offers an opportunity to engage with relevant stakeholders in the UN CCA process to address inequality and exclusion. Link: https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-06/UN%20Cooperation%20Framework%20Internal%20Guidance%20--%201%20June%202022.pdf

3. **To live up to the promise of LNOB, an intersectional approach should be applied across the full data value chain.**

The lack of intersectional data continues to hinder progress in assessing who is being left behind at the local level. The Inclusive Data Charter (IDC) emphasized that an intersectional data approach should be applied to the whole data value chain: analysis, collection, publication, uptake and impact. We need to ask critical questions about context, practices, systems and structures that are involved in the production of data. Who is invisible in data and why? Is it deliberate or are these groups reluctant to participate? Are the data producing institutions within countries themselves inclusive? How do marginalized people want their data collected? IDC claimed that without these critical questions, it will not be possible to make any meaningful progress.

In the case of Europe, more national statistical offices are applying an intersectional lens. For example, in 2020, the UK Office for National Statistics asked the Inclusive Data Taskforce to make a systemwide assessment of intersectionality of UK data in broader statistical systems. Their recommendations led to an implementation plan to foster change. In a different example, the National Department of Statistics of Colombia (DANE) created an inclusion guide focusing on the analytical aspect of intersectionality aimed at better understanding marginalized groups.

However, statistical offices often encounter difficulties when trying to implement intersectional approaches. The IDC noted that intersectional data collection is resource intensive in terms of time, cost, and expertise. Additionally, statistical offices are often stretched for resources. Privacy issues are also a concern. Making data accessible and allowing users to download data sets may entail privacy challenges. Due to disclosure control, to avoid identification of individuals, there may be restrictions on the amount and nature of characteristics that can be made available in data. This highlights a potential limitation of intersectional data, especially as the groups studied get smaller and smaller as the data is more and more disaggregated.

Recommendations

- Advocacy efforts and reports on LNOB approaches to intersectional data can help to explain the value of this data with the aim to **create more awareness and to direct needed financing to such efforts**. Kenya's approach to counting groups left behind[3] and OHCHR's guidance on a human rights-based approach to data[4] can move the

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[3] *A Human Rights Based Approach to Data - Leaving No One Behind in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Guidance Note to Data Collection and Disaggregation* | OHCHR https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/tools-and-resources/human-rights-based-approach-data-leaving-no-one-behind-2030-agenda
[4] https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2019/11/counting-groups-left-behind-stellar-step-inclusion-kenya

needle in the right direction. The use of open data can also improve data collection practices where data is limited.

- **Political accompaniment at the national level is crucial to supporting groups being left behind.** UN Resident Coordinators' Offices play a crucial role to advocate for better intersectional data. Member States have also subscribed to international instruments that create human rights commitments against discrimination and inequality. These are obligations that can be leveraged to design policies, and to enforce data collection and disaggregation. The SDG Summit in September 2023 and the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights can also contribute momentum to advocate for LNOB and intersectional data.

- **The importance of using data collection methods that empower disadvantaged communities.** Communities and national offices should jointly decide which factors are most relevant in different contexts and prioritise collecting that information and, to the extent possible, make it publicly accessible. OHCHR, for example, worked in Serbia with the Roma community during the COVID-19 response to assess their immediate needs. The application of tools such as questionnaires and advocacy efforts with the government of Serbia led to the implementation of of an LNOB analysis to drive policy change. In Uruguay, OHCHR designed indicators that captured the reality of people of African descent and made all this data available on a website as reference.

- **Increased collaboration between the UN and national statistical offices and national human rights institutions should be further explored**. The efforts of OHCHR to encourage and to support such partnership in Kenya and in the Philippines for example could be used as examples and replicated in other contexts. Finally, UN Special Procedures and treaty body reviews could be more fully utilized in designing country strategies. Their reviews offer a wealth of knowledge in terms of data, analyses and recommendations on intersectionality that could be operationalized. This, however, requires dedicated and intentional international effort.