1 LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND: HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, INEQUALITIES AND EVALUATION

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, 193 countries united to adopt the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for a better world by 2030. At the centre of this agenda is the call to leave no one behind, not only to eradicate poverty in all its forms, but to end discrimination and exclusion and reduce inequalities and vulnerabilities that undermine the potential of individuals and of humanity as a whole.[1] It has been the premise of the National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) conferences since 2015 that the implementation of the SDGs can be accelerated globally through evaluation, a powerful tool that improves public accountability and contributes to positive development change. The NEC Conference 2019 gave particular focus to the question of what "leaving no one behind" means for evaluation in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Ever since the international community endorsed the SDGs, a key question for many has been, how will we know if we are achieving these goals? And this naturally translates into questions and debates about choices and definitions of indicators and targets, as well as the availability of data to measure progress against those indicators. A related question is, how do we know if we are leaving anyone behind? Do we have appropriate disaggregated data and the ability to measure inequalities with respect to the multiple dimensions of the SDGs?

Furthermore, data alone are not enough. Actors across the world are asking, *how* do we reach the SDGs? *How* do we ensure that we are reaching the furthest behind first? What if the data suggest that development is still not reaching the poorest and the most marginalized? What needs to change? This points to the need for evaluation, to the systematic inquiry into what works, why, under what circumstances, where and for whom. Key questions at the NEC Conference were thus: What is the role of

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1   United Nations Sustainable Development Group, "Leaving No One Behind: A UNSDG Operational Guide for United Nations Country Teams", Interim Draft, March 2019. https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Interim-Draft-Operational-Guide-on-LNOB-for-UNCTs.pdf

evaluation in ensuring that no one is left behind? How do we ensure that the evaluations we commission, the evaluations we design, the evaluations we conduct, leave no one behind?

The Human Development Report 2019, *Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century*, provided a starting point for the discussion.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, INEQUALITIES AND EVALUATION

The first Human Development Report, published by UNDP in 1990, opened with statement by the then Administrator, William H. Draper III, that we were living "in stirring times" and were "rediscovering the essential truth that people must be at the centre of all development".[2] This first report highlighted issues of inequality, pointing out that average improvements over the preceding 30 years concealed "considerable inequality within countries and mask[ed] the continued severe deprivation of many people."[3] In 2019, shortly after the NEC Conference, UNDP published the twenty-seventh Human Development Report, *Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century*. The first key message of the report is that "disparities in human development remain widespread, despite achievements in reducing extreme deprivations".[4] Nearly 30 years after the publication of the first Human Development Report, this latest report acknowledges that the "challenge of reaching those furthest behind persists".[5]

Why did UNDP choose the topic of inequalities for the 2019 report? According to Pedro Conceição, Director of the Human Development Report Office and the lead author of the report, speaking at the conference, people across the world and across the political spectrum are increasingly calling for greater equality. This may, he notes, at first view seem surprising. The Human Development Index shows tremendous progress and the last several Human Development Reports have reported reductions in poverty rates. Underlying this latest report is the question, why is there a disconnect between, on the one hand, the recognition that there has been progress on many fronts, and on the other, an increasing appeal for greater equality? As work on the report began, the authors put forward three hypotheses as to why people put such an emphasis on equality.

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2   UNDP, Human Development Report 1990, New York, 1990, p. iii.

3   Human Development Report 1990, p. 20.

4   UNDP, Human Development Report 2019. Beyond income, beyond averages, beyond today: Inequalities in human development in the 21st century, New York, 2019, p. 7.

5   Human Development Report 2019, p. 35.

Firstly, it was postulated that people are not only interested in inequalities with respect to resources or income, but inequalities in other dimensions as well. And so the report looks "beyond income." Another suggested reason for this interest is that the measures that economists and other development experts rely on to account for inequality are, in a way, averages that hide complex dynamics about which people are concerned. Thus, the report takes us "beyond averages." And thirdly, the authors supposed, people are less concerned about what has happened in the past and more worried about what is going to happen in the future. For this reason, the report also explores what may happen to inequalities in human development in coming years, looking "beyond today".

What were the authors' findings? Looking "beyond income", the message is simple. Using the language of the human development framework, two trends emerge with respect to "capabilities," or what is necessary for people to lead lives in the way they value. On the one hand, there is a narrowing of inequalities in basic achievements, such as progress that has occurred in the headcount poverty rate, extreme poverty rate, child mortality and primary school enrolment. However, at the same time, the report documents widening gaps in new dimensions of human development, dimensions that are likely to be more empowering – or disempowering – and more important for people over the course of the twenty-first century. For example, there are stark divergences in terms of access to advanced knowledge and technology. According to the report, the proportion of the adult population with tertiary education is growing more than six times faster in very high human development countries than in low human development countries, and fixed broadband subscriptions are growing 15 times faster.[6] New anxieties are emerging in response to new dimensions of inequality.

The report also advocates going "beyond averages". Inequality in income is typically described with summary measures, such as the Gini coefficient. However, the Gini coefficient masks differences between income groups. For example, in Brazil, between 2000 and 2018, the incomes of the bottom 40 percent grew 14 percentage points more than the average, and the top 1 percent also experienced higher than average growth. However, middle-income groups (between the bottom 40 percent and the top 1 percent) were "squeezed" with lower than average growth.[7] Despite overall growth and an overall decrease in inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient, there are groups who are seeing reductions in their incomes, which colours their perceptions of inequalities.

Another dimension of the analysis "beyond averages" examines what is happening below the poverty line. Are people below the poverty line making progress? Are they getting closer to the line or are they remaining at the bottom? Evidence suggests

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6   Human Development Report 2019, p. 10.

7   Human Development Report 2019, p. 107.

that the poorest of the poor are in fact "stuck" at the bottom. While many people have moved out of poverty, for others nothing has changed. This is extremely important in the context of the SDG framework where development efforts should "reach the furthest behind first." The power and the value of looking beyond averages is thus particularly evident.

The third part of the report looks "beyond today" at trends that may impact the fight against inequalities over the course of the twenty-first century. Two key trends are climate change and technological change. Climate change has asymmetrical impacts across countries and across segments of the population. Climate change will likely exacerbate existing inequalities, with poorer countries and poorer people hit earliest and hardest,[8] as elaborated in subsequent papers in this volume. Technological change has been and is continuing to reshape the world of work, offering both potential of reducing inequality and raising fears of even greater inequalities.

What are the implications of the findings of the 2019 Human Development Report for evaluation? The report illustrates that leaving no one behind is a challenge that manifests itself in myriad ways. In our societies, many people are either objectively being left behind or feel in some way that they have been left behind. We can draw on the power of evaluation to learn how to better address the challenge of leaving no one behind.

UNDP has developed a framework to operationalize the concept of leaving no one behind, which postulates that to understand who is being left behind and why, and to shape effective responses, five key factors should be assessed:

- Discrimination
- Geography
- Governance
- Socioeconomic status
- Shocks and fragility[9]

These five dimensions are relevant for evaluators seeking to ensure that they leave no one behind. For example, with respect to discrimination, going beyond averages is essential to understand how different social groups are faring. To cite only one example, distinctions between men and women are hidden behind averages. While all are aware of the sharp inequalities that exist when it comes to gender, the Human Development Report documents another aspect of gender equality: backlash. There has been notable progress in terms of gender equality. For example, parity has almost been attained in

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8   Human Development Report 2019, p. 175.

9   UNDP, "What does it mean to Leave No One Behind? A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation", UNDP, New York, 2018. https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/what-does-it-mean-to-leave-no-one-behind-.html

Does geography matter?

REFLECTIONS FROM JUHA UITTO

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"Geography matters, whether we are talking about leaving no one behind, or about evaluation, or both.

"What do we mean by geography? Geography is both physical and human. It is about how human activity is organized spatially and how we interact with the environment. Geography refers to the actual topography. What is the lay of the land? Is it hilly or is it coastal? Geography also refers to where people live. There is a huge dimension of inequality in where people live. We know that in urban centres, many settlements are unplanned. Typically, people come to the city from the countryside and create informal settlements, generally in areas where other people don't want to live. This may be on steep slopes, or in flood zones or in coastal zones. This renders people vulnerable. Often the poorest people are also the most vulnerable in terms of where they live.

"The SDGs remind us that everything is interconnected. The human environment and the natural environment are connected. Adaptation to climate change, which we have been talking about during the conference, is essentially about geography. Evaluators are usually social scientists. Thus, as evaluators, we pay a lot of attention to the social and economic aspects of the SDGs, to human rights, to gender, to inequality, all of which are important. But if anything is left behind, it is often the environment, the natural environment. And by doing so, we leave behind a lot of humans, people, who are living in hazardous and disadvantaged environments.

"Let's take a concrete example, that of our host country, Egypt. Egypt contributes less than 1 percent of the global greenhouse gas emissions, but it is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to the consequences of global warming. The Nile basin supplies approximately 95 percent of the freshwater resources for Egypt. This narrow strip in the desert, the delta and the narrow valley of the Nile, comprises 5.5 percent of the area of Egypt, but is home to 95 percent of its people and its agriculture.[10] Little changes in climate will influence what happens to people's welfare. Any decrease in the total supply of water will have drastic impacts. Biodiversity is declining while there are risks of increased vector-borne diseases. Rising sea levels are resulting in increased floods in the coastal areas, for example, threatening Alexandria.

10   https://www.adaptation-undp.org/explore/northern-africa/egypt

On a positive note, the Egyptian national strategy for adaptation and disaster risk reduction is closely linked to its national strategy for development.

"What can evaluation do? How can evaluation integrate geography? One of the most fundamental things that we have to understand is that it matters where things happen. We have to be aware of how development activities, how environmental change, affects people in different places differently. In the GEF Independent Evaluation Office, we have been developing several geospatial methodologies to look at these environment-human interactions.

"For example, satellite imagery helps us track what happens over time. Using satellite images, it is possible to track how settlements are growing, how the environment is changing, how land use and land cover are evolving. This can be used as an evaluative tool to see actual change. At the same time, one needs to understand why things are happening, and this is not necessarily visible from the sky. As evaluators, we thus still have to rely on more traditional methods of actually talking to people and understanding what human motivations are, how they change the environment in which they live, and how the environment that they live in affects their lives.

"Mixed methods are thus essential. In one recent evaluation, we looked at sustainable forest management in Uganda. To begin with, we used satellite imagery to see environmental changes taking place over time. Then we used night lights data, which is a very good proxy for economic activity. Wherever you see light at night, there are humans who are doing something. We matched this information with the forest cover information and the locations of GEF project interventions. We further correlated this with household survey data from the World Bank, which was quite new and also geocoded. These three sources of data provided evaluative evidence as we sought to understand whether the projects and programmes were making some headway when it comes to both environmental improvement and socioeconomic improvement. In the Uganda case, we were able to show that there was a correlation between sites with sustainable forest management programmes and socioeconomic development. While recognizing that correlation does not mean causality, we were able to generate some very useful evidence regarding changes in the environment and socioeconomic development."

average primary school enrolment rates, and legal barriers to gender equality have been removed in most countries.[11] However, analysis of data from the World Values Survey shows that there has also been an increase in biases against women over the last decade. The authors' interpretation of these trends is that when progress starts to touch on power, societies sometimes experience backlash. Women are still being left behind, in some cases, paradoxically, as a result of or in reaction to some of the progress that has been made. Sukai Prom-Jackson expands on these issues of inequality and the implications for evaluation (See box, page 23). Gender- and human rights-responsive evaluation, as discussed in greater depth in Tateossian and Negroustoueva's paper in the present volume, can help countries to identify structural causes of inequalities through deeper analysis of power relationships, social norms and cultural beliefs.

Averages also blur spatial inequalities. Geography matters: people are left behind and left open to vulnerability and inequity when denied social and economic opportunities and/or quality public services simply based on their place of residence.[12] In rural areas, people may be excluded from development by distance or difficult terrain. In urban areas, slum neighbourhoods are often poorly served by infrastructure and social services.[13] Juha Uitto, Director of the Independent Evaluation Office, Global Environment Facility (GEF), elaborates on these ideas in the box on page 21.

Both the Human Development Report and the UNDP analysis of what it means to leave no one behind highlight the importance of governance and the interplay between inequality and the dynamics of power.[14] Evaluation itself is a governance tool that influences funding decisions and design of strategies, programmes and projects. Evaluators need to be aware of power dynamics at work around the object of evaluation as well as around the evaluation itself, as discussed in other papers in this volume.[15]

Shocks – whether violent conflict, natural disasters or even health shocks, such as epidemic outbreaks – disproportionally impact those already left behind and may leave new groups behind. As the UNDP paper points out, fragility, multidimensional poverty and inequalities mutually reinforce each other, as fragility and conflict can lead to the absence of public services, intolerance and limited access to resources,

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11   Human Development Report 2019, p. 149.

12   UNDP, 2018, p. 12.

13   Kabeer, Naila. 2016. "'Leaving no one behind': the challenge of intersecting inequalities". World Social Science Report 2016, UNESCO and the ISSC, Paris, pp. 55-58. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245935

14   Human Development Report 2019, p. 11; UNDP, 2018, p. 13.

15   See part 2, chapter 2, Aisha Jore Ali and Dugan Fraser, "Formulating Guiding Principles to Make Sure Evaluation Leaves No One Behind"; chapter 3, Florencia Tateossian and Svetlana Negroustoueva, "Gender-Evaluative Evidence: A Blind Spot In SDG Reporting?"; part 3, chapter 1, Indran Naidoo, "Architecture For Evaluation Effectiveness"; and Bagele Chilisa, "Reflections on the Revised DAC Criteria" (page 143).

which in turn can provoke grievances resulting in mistrust and conflict.[16] The Human Development Report also examines these issues, looking at the interrelationships between inequalities, violent conflict and environmental shocks. Evaluation may be more challenging in crisis-affected contexts but it is all the more important to ensure that interventions are effective and doing no harm. These discussions were taken forward during the conference, and Suddhi-Dhamakit and Rieper share the challenges and opportunities of strengthening monitoring and evaluation in the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan.[17] Khadka and Foran also demonstrate that data collection is possible in some of the world's most challenging circumstances, which is essential to understanding how development interventions affect citizen's livelihoods in fragile contexts.[18]

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In conclusion, it is crucial to mobilize evidence to help learn how to reach the furthest behind. The people furthest behind are often the most difficult to reach and those for whom the marginal impact of effort is actually going to be much smaller than the marginal impact of effort on people who are already close to the poverty line. In our world where there is constant pressure to obtain results, there is a tendency to invest resources in such a way as to maximize the marginal effort. However, in doing so, this may result in those who are the furthest behind, the furthest below the poverty line, being left there. Thus, today and in the years to come, it is imperative to mobilize the power of evaluation to enable us to learn how we can effectively reach the furthest behind so that we fulfil the pledge of the 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind.

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16   UNDP 2018, p. 17.

17   See part 4, chapter 2, Kwanpadh Suddhi-Dhamakit and Helge Rieper, "Transformative Change of Moving M&E FROM 'ME' TO 'MorE'".

18   See part 4, chapter 3, Prabin Khadka and Rose Foran, "Somalia: Evaluation in a Crisis Context: Measuring SDG 16 in Fragile Environments".

Inequalities and evaluation

THOUGHTS FROM SUKAI PROM-JACKSON
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How should or can evaluation be inequality-sensitive? What role can evaluation can play in helping to ensure that development policies and programmes leave no one behind?

"Inequality is a heavy agenda. Inequalities include gender and race. Inequality is associated with age and with disability, whether physical disability or learning disabilities. There are many other forms of inequalities. It is extremely important to look at the **intersections** of multiple inequalities. This is extremely challenging, particularly in the context of the evaluation function. Evaluators tend to break things into segments and analyse them separately. This is how we have conquered the world. This no longer works. Everything is interdependent and multidisciplinary.

"In looking at the role of evaluation, another challenge in bringing the lens of inequality to our work is a recognition of the **different histories** of the various actors involved. As an African woman, the histories that I hold might be quite different from the histories of other women who might be white or of Arab origin. As evaluators, we have to be very clear about what we mean when we mention inequalities; we cannot simply jump on a bandwagon.

"What kind of **transformative role** can evaluation play? What is the role of evaluation in addressing the imperatives of our current times and imperatives of the 2030 Agenda? The imperative is transformation. Transformation is a different kind of change. It's not just developmental – where we seek to improve a situation. It's not transitional – where we think we know where we want to go and we can pretty much address the challenge at hand. Transformational change typically means we have an idea, we have a vision, but we're not really sure how to achieve it. The knowledge systems we have no longer suffice to tell us how we should address these problems. Transformation requires a certain mindset, a holistic view.

"**Another imperative is inclusion**. There are many other imperatives that evaluation needs to address as well. We are living in a world that is volatile. A world that is unpredictable, that is in constant change. Evaluators often use 'heavy', time-consuming methods, whereas the world is changing very quickly. How do evaluators position themselves with respect to the media, to policy researchers, to statisticians? Evaluators need to define evaluation's strategic niche and demonstrate where and how it adds value in looking at inequalities.

"**Evaluation is a practice of critical inquiry.** When looking at related practices, such as audit, the question arises, what are we as evaluators doing? We never include this question in an evaluation because we assume we know and assume there's a structure to our world, but in this changing world, this is no longer the case. We have to start with the first question about the development intervention being evaluated: What are we doing? And the second question for evaluation: Are we doing the right things? Thirdly, are we doing things right? Are we making a difference? This is an important point, because our field is a field of critical inquiry. It is not a field that simply reports on progress from point A to point B. This mode of critical inquiry needs to play a major role in how we begin to look at inequalities.

"Another advantage of evaluation is its contribution of **highly impartial or objective knowledge.** Structural independence is important, for example for an evaluation office. Independence and impartiality have to be part of how an evaluator carries out his or her work. I think that's something we should never lose sight of, but we must not be held captive to actually sticking to a level of independence that's not balanced with validity, because a major function of what we do is to consider how valid what it is that we do. Validity has to do with **accuracy**. If we as evaluators are not accurate in what we say and what we do, tied to the judgments that we make, I think there's a big danger we bring to the world.

"When talking about transformative evaluation, when looking at leaving no one behind, when examining and interpreting the vast inequalities that exist, it is important for us to think with great accuracy on what it is we talking about, to think with responsibility and integrity on our profession that privileges us to make a judgment of value and worth and about truth. How are we interpreting inequalities? How are we actually assessing them? How are we defining what is of value? And how are we making recommendations for policymakers and other decision makers and for accountability of what's done? How are we enhancing learning and change?

"How do we frame what we do as a profession in moving forward? My message is that, as we address these imperatives, we really reflect on the question, what is the value we're adding? What are we doing? What do we actually seek as a profession to add value?"