

# Executive summary

## An agenda for change

**In 2015, the UK and 192 other countries signed up to the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These ambitious goals include a global commitment to end poverty, reduce inequality and address climate change by 2030. Each year at the UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF), governments and other stakeholders come together to review international progress on the SDGs and undertake Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) of each country's progress. The UK government is currently preparing its first VNR for the HLPF in July 2019.**

The UK government played a central role on the global stage in developing the SDGs. However, when it comes to the implementation of the goals, there are critical gaps in the UK's own policy, programming and political commitment, which mean the UK is lagging behind compared to other countries.

In 2020, the world enters the "decade of delivery", which requires urgent action and investment to make meaningful progress towards achieving the SDGs. The recommendations in this report are intended to be read in the spirit of collaboration between the UK government, international civil society and other stakeholders. Not all of them address the policies and measures we would expect to be in place only four years into the process.

However, all these issues need to be addressed as soon as possible to ensure the success of the agenda by 2030. Our recommendations are relevant for a future UK SDG Implementation Plan that we hope will be forthcoming following the VNR. Such a plan should cover all the targets, as well as resourcing, timelines and departmental responsibilities, and ensure coherence between domestic and international activities. Civil society and other stakeholders should also play their critical role in supporting the delivery of this plan.

## The UK's progress from an international perspective

In this report, the Bond network analyses the UK's global contribution to the SDGs and highlights where we believe attention and investment are most needed. We assess progress and gaps for each goal and the collective agenda. We also look at specific targets in detail and provide key recommendations to the UK Government and other related institutions. This report is a tool to guide and strengthen policy and advocacy work in the run up to the HLPF and beyond. It should be a basis for continued collaboration and analysis.

The report covers three specific international dimensions of the SDGs:

1. Official Development Assistance (ODA).
2. The impact of other relevant international policies.
3. The international footprint of domestic policies.

The report presents a perspective from civil society organisations working primarily in the international development sector, though other stakeholders have also been included. However, it does not claim to speak for the whole of UK international civil society. Similarly, as a UK network we do not speak for civil society in other countries. The UK must do more to ensure the content of its own VNR and any actions following the HLPF are directed by the perspectives and approaches of local civil society, especially in the Global South where the UK is investing the most to deliver the SDGs.

## Analysis and recommendations for 17 goals

Individual SDG chapters can be found through the following links, along with a full list of recommendations:

- Leave no one behind
- Goal 1: No poverty
- Goal 2: Zero hunger
- Goal 3: Good health and wellbeing
- Goal 4: Quality education
- Goal 5: Gender equality
- Goal 6: Water and sanitation
- Goal 7: Affordable and clean energy
- Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth
- Goal 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- Goal 10: Reduced inequalities
- Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities
- Goal 12: Responsible consumption and production
- Goal 13: Climate action
- Goals 14 and 15: Life below water and on land
- Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions
- Goal 17: Partnerships for the goals

## Cross-cutting issues

The analysis in this report reflects cross-cutting themes that apply to many SDGs and the UK's ability to support the delivery of the agenda as a whole. Examples include:

- Across a range of areas, the UK government is not doing nearly enough to transfer its commitments on leave no one behind into policy or put them into practice. This will require greater investment in human development for all, gender equality and women's rights, and social equality, in direct collaboration with relevant communities and civil society (see chapter on **Leave no one behind** and **Goals 1, 2, 5, 10, 11** and **17**).
- The UK government's approach to privatisation, delivering development "in the national interest" and spending aid through government departments other than the Department for International Development (DFID) has shifted UK ODA's focus away from its primary purpose of poverty eradication and negatively affected the UK's potential impact on the SDGs (see in particular **Goals 1, 3, 8** and **17**).
- The UK government should be playing a much more proactive role towards reforming the international tax system and supporting domestic resource mobilisation, so nations can deliver the effective, inclusive and gender sensitive public services necessary for achieving the SDGs (see in particular **Goals 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10** and **17**).
- Climate action and environmental sustainability are critical to achieving not just the relevant goals but the agenda as a whole, and a great deal more UK effort is required in these areas through funding, programming and ensuring coherence across its international portfolio (see in particular **Goals 2, 7, 9** and **12-15**).
- The SDGs cannot be achieved without national and local ownership to ensure delivery is both context-specific and sustainable. This requires significantly more investment in capacity-building and empowerment programmes, and greater recognition of the critical role of both international and national civil society, trade unions, the private sector and other stakeholders in SDG implementation and accountability mechanisms (see in particular **Goals 16** and **17**).

## Policy coherence for sustainable development

Throughout this report, specific policy incoherencies are highlighted, such as the UK government's continued subsidisation of fossil fuels to the tune of billions of pounds while acknowledging the necessity for the Global South to move to greener models of energy production (see **Goal 7** and **Goal 13**).

The goals are interconnected and exist as a comprehensive framework. Unless they are considered together, progress on one goal is more likely to undermine progress against

another, or risk leaving particular countries, communities and groups behind. The delivery of the SDGs is also intricately connected to the delivery of other international commitments, which often address issues touched by the SDGs – for example, the UK's commitments to international human rights conventions, climate and environment agreements, and international labour standards.

This topic is covered in more detail with specific recommendations under **Goal 17 (Target 17.14)**. However, the importance of policy coherence for sustainable development applies to the entire report.

## UK support for national and local SDG planning

The 2030 Agenda requires national ownership and policy space, prioritising implementation and accountability by governments. Such ownership entails clear alignment of national development plans and the 2030 Agenda, as well as monitoring and budgeting processes to ensure effective implementation.

The UK could play an important role in supporting governments to develop coherent plans and processes for implementation of the SDGs, as also recommended in a 2016 International Development Select Committee Report.<sup>1</sup>

There is a crucial need for civil society and other stakeholders to engage with these planning, budgeting and accountability processes, but at present there is very little support for this. The UK government could do much more to help civil society and other stakeholders to engage with government planning, in line with the 2030 Agenda and as part of its capacity-building approach.

Devolved administrations in other nations in the UK (Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) play a vital role in delivering the SDGs in their specific nations, but also have an impact on international delivery. This is either through international programmes or the international impact of domestic actions. For example, the Scotland Malawi Partnership is a multi-stakeholder partnership in action, coordinating some 1,200 different civic links between the two countries, including schools, local authorities, churches and businesses.<sup>2</sup> The UK government should collaborate on international development much more directly, openly and willingly with devolved governments across the UK, including in the VNR process.

The same applies to national governments and authorities in the British Overseas Territories and Crown Territories. Much more should be done to assess the real situation for implementation of the SDGs in those diverse nations, and the role the UK has in supporting their delivery in full

1. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmintdev/103/103.pdf>

2. [https://www.scotland-malawipartnership.org/files/6215/3812/9354/Friendship\\_with\\_a\\_purposeV4web.pdf](https://www.scotland-malawipartnership.org/files/6215/3812/9354/Friendship_with_a_purposeV4web.pdf)

engagement with local governments, authorities and local civil society. This could be part of an OT/CT SDG plan to sit alongside or as part of an SDG implementation plan for the UK and its dependent territories.

### To ensure national and local ownership of the agenda, the UK government should:

- Support other governments, particularly in the Global South, to develop plans and processes for implementation of the SDGs.
- Support civil society and other stakeholders to engage with these plans and processes, with a particular focus on women and other “left behind” groups.
- Deliver commitments on capacity-building for civil society and other stakeholders made in DFID’s Civil Society Partnership Review (see **Goal 17**).
- Collaborate more directly and openly with devolved governments on their contribution to the SDGs internationally.
- Support the delivery of the SDGs in the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, in line with their national strategies.

## About the report

Bond is the UK network for over 400 UK organisations working in international development. The Bond SDG Group is comprised of over 150 of these member organisations. The group advocates for the full, inclusive implementation of the SDGs with a strong focus on their global impact.

The report is an extensive collaborative effort, coordinated by Bond’s SDG Group. It brings together material from across the international development sector and more widely, with direct contributions from over 49 organisations and 14 networks and working groups. Each chapter has been compiled by individuals and organisations with the relevant expertise.

The report was originally assembled as a submission for the UK’s VNR. We have not included domestic progress on the SDGs, which is already addressed comprehensively in the UK Stakeholders for Sustainable Development (UKSSD) Measuring Up report (see the **Annex** for a summary).<sup>3</sup> Our analysis complements UKSSD’s and addresses the areas where, in Bond’s view, focus and investment are most needed from an international perspective.

The report does not go into detail on the structure of the VNR itself or the process of consultation. This has been covered in prior Bond submissions to Environmental Audit Committee and International Development Committee inquiries on this topic.<sup>4</sup>

The content and recommendations in this document reflect wide consensus across the sector. However, this does not necessarily mean that all organisations, including leads for each chapter, necessarily endorse every point made. The report reflects the diversity of approaches and ways of working across the sector and Bond’s network. We hope this leads to fruitful discussion and improved collaboration between the UK government and civil society in the run up to, and beyond, the HLPF.

All the goals are interlinked, so we are also pleased this report offers us as civil society the opportunity to develop and improve our integrated approaches, including multi-sectoral ways of working.

3. <https://www.ukssd.co.uk/measuringup>

4. <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environmental-audit-committee/sustainable-development-goals-in-the-uk-followup/written/89549.html>  
<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/international-development-committee/uk-progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs/written/95870.html>

To ensure the international achievement of the SDGs, the UK government urgently needs to:

