

Call to Action: Leave No One Behind

I. Introduction

The UK Government has set out a bold agenda to create a world free from poverty on a liveable planet. Yet this ambition can only be realised if the UK, working with other Member States of the United Nations (UN), fulfils its commitment under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to **Leave No One Behind (LNOB)**.

LNOB recognises that none of the SDGs will be achieved unless the needs and rights of those furthest behind are put first.

In this Call to Action, organisations across the international development sector, whose work collectively reaches more than 100 million people, are uniting to urge the UK Government to put the principle of **Leave No One Behind** at the centre of its approach to development, humanitarian response, peacebuilding and the climate crisis. **This Call to Action outlines our proposals for how the UK development sector and UK Government can effectively work together to turn LNOB from aspiration to reality.**

II. Why 'Leave No One Behind' Matters

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development commits signatories – including the UK and 192 other nations – to ensure that global development efforts “endeavour to reach the furthest behind first” over the period to 2030. This commitment has since been enshrined as ‘**Leave No One Behind**’, and the UN has elaborated that the groups to be prioritised should include:

...people living in poverty and other vulnerable situations, including children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV/AIDS, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees and internally displaced persons and migrants.¹

As the agenda on LNOB has evolved, it has been widely recognised that it also needs to respond to multiple, intersecting forms of marginalisation and discrimination, which can be cumulative and can increase individuals’ and groups’ vulnerability.² Acting to ‘Leave No One Behind’ also requires adopting a human rights-based approach that tackles structural inequalities,³ promoting the localisation of development efforts so that resources and decision-making flows to vulnerable communities⁴ and decolonising power relations in the development sector in order to challenge power imbalances and oppose racism.⁵ Through these principles, a LNOB

¹ “Leaving no one behind.”, UNDESA, <https://www.un.org/en/desa/leaving-no-one-behind>

² Operationalising Leaving No One Behind: Good Practice Note for UN Country Teams, p14, [link](#).

³ Operationalising Leaving No One Behind: Good Practice Note for UN Country Teams, [link](#)

⁴ What Does It Mean To Leave No One Behind? A UNDP discussion paper and framework for implementation, 2018, p.4, [link](#).

⁵ Operationalising Leaving No One Behind: Good Practice Note for UN Country Teams, p7, [link](#).

approach can contribute to creating a more inclusive, peaceful, and sustainable world for everyone.

II. Enormous challenges in delivering on Leaving No One Behind

Important progress has been made on the SDGs and on the commitment to 'Leave No One Behind' since they were agreed in 2015. However even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was already faltering. The pandemic, coupled with intersecting challenges like the indebtedness of the poorest countries, hunger, and climate change, resulted in the largest reversal in human development in 30 years.⁶ These setbacks were exacerbated by the pandemic that led to development reversals that impacted the most marginalised people more acutely, and progress overall has been too slow to achieve the SDGs and deliver on LNOB. As a result, the UN is predicting that most of the SDGs are in danger of being missed by a large margin in 2030, and staggering development shortfalls remain, especially for the most marginalised groups. For example, the latest available statistics suggest that:

- **UK aid cuts have disproportionately impacted programmes addressing exclusion**, with funding for gender equality nearly halving⁷ and child-focused aid plummeting by 56%.⁸ This trend, driven by consecutive aid cuts – first by the Conservative government in 2021 (from 0.7% to 0.5% of GNI) and subsequently by the Labour government's February 2025 announcement (to 0.3% by 2027) – undermines efforts to tackle inequalities and leaves vulnerable populations more exposed.
- **The income gap between IDA countries and wealthier nations is widening**, with 2020-24 set to be the weakest half decade of growth since the early 1990s for IDA countries.⁹ This exacerbates existing inequalities and pushes millions further into poverty.
- **The pandemic has significantly worsened the situation**, with one in three IDA countries poorer than before and a quarter of the global population living in

⁶ UNDP: Human Development Perspectives COVID-19: Assessing the impact, envisioning the recovery”, [COVID-19 and Human Development: Assessing the Crisis. Envisioning the Recovery | Human Development Reports](#), Pg. 3

⁷ A report on UK leadership on gender equality globally by [Care International and Development Initiatives](#) shows that UK aid for programmes that included gender equality objectives nearly halved between 2019 and 2021.

⁸ [UNICEF UK report](#) 2024. This report found that UK child-focused bilateral aid fell by 56% between 2016 and 2022.

⁹ [The Great Reversal: Prospects, Risks, and Policies in International Development Association Countries](#), 2024.

these countries facing extreme poverty.¹⁰ These trends highlight the growing divide and the increasing vulnerability of marginalised groups.

III. The UK's response to the Leave No One Behind agenda

The UK previously had a strong track record on Leave No One Behind, reflecting British values of fairness, equality, and human rights. With cross-party support, the UK Government helped to secure the global commitment to LNOB, published a comprehensive promise to LNOB in 2016¹¹ and has embedded LNOB in current FCDO strategies on disability inclusion¹² and women and girls¹³. The UK Government has also committed to strengthening the disaggregation of data that underpins the LNOB agenda.

However, as development colleagues working with partners in in Low and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) around the world, **we are deeply concerned that the UK's commitment to LNOB has weakened and been deprioritised as a result of hugely damaging cuts to UK aid for basic services, humanitarian support and other programmes vital to reaching the most marginalised people.**¹⁴ In addition, a **comprehensive and coordinated framework for taking forward the Leave No One Behind agenda is yet to be put in place.**

Ultimately, a renewed commitment to LNOB will rebuild trust with the international community; enhance the UK's soft power, credibility, and leadership; influence global policy and improve the global economy and, crucially, protect the most marginalised. It will also help to address the root causes of challenges such as humanitarian crises and forced migration.

IV. Call to Action

The UK Government must lead by example. It should set out a plan for achieving its commitment to LNOB that puts tackling structural inequality at the forefront. **The recent 2025 Spending Review (announced June 11, 2025) provided the framework for future ODA allocations.** Subsequent FCDO annual reports based on this review (expected July 2025) outlining where the cuts will precisely fall, present critical opportunities to articulate how the UK will place LNOB at the heart of its future development efforts and set out commitments for operationalising this principle.

¹⁰ [The Great Reversal: Prospects, Risks, and Policies in International Development Association Countries](#), 2024.

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leaving-no-one-behind-our-promise/leaving-no-one-behind-our-promise>

¹² [FCDO disability inclusion and rights strategy 2022 to 2030 - GOV.UK](#)

¹³ [International women and girls strategy 2023 to 2030 - GOV.UK](#)

¹⁴ [committees.parliament.uk/publications/41098/documents/200208/default/](#)

These commitments should include the following:

1) Embedding an approach to development and humanitarian response that clearly centres the principles of LNOB

This will require:

- A framework which the UK Government adheres to which ensures a coordinated approach with clear commitments to prioritising Leave No One Behind (LNOB) within Official Development Assistance (ODA), along with a detailed delivery plan and timeline.
- Increasing the proportion of development and humanitarian funds that specifically address the needs of marginalised groups and are channelled through grassroots and locally led organisations that represent such groups;
- Ensuring funding mechanisms are flexible, accessible and adaptable;
- Requiring consultation with marginalised groups in the design, implementation and monitoring of all programmes;
- Renewing its commitment to data disaggregation, including the Inclusive Data Charter Action Plan;
- Funding participatory research on LNOB data to monitor and demonstrate effectiveness for sustainable development; and
- Developing internal guidance and training on intersecting forms of marginalisation and LNOB for all FCDO staff, in collaboration with civil society and grassroots organisations and movements working with those who are excluded from communities.

2) Committing to systematic and meaningful engagement with populations most likely to be left behind

The Government can be a champion for LNOB and facilitate rights-based, localised, people-centred participation by:

- Ensuring all UK Government country development strategies are developed in consultation with representatives from the most marginalised communities to ensure their priorities and needs are fully addressed and included; and
- Committing to resource and support groups most affected by inequality and discrimination as part of wider efforts to strengthen civic space; and

- Promoting and supporting the meaningful consultation and participation of representatives of locally led groups who have been marginalised in design, monitoring, and measurement of LNOB, and in global discussions on development issues.

3) Promoting a “whole of government” approach to LNOB

The UK Government must use all of its international policies and cooperation to support efforts to leave no one behind. This “whole of government” agenda on LNOB should articulate how all relevant government ministries will respond to, resource and report against this commitment. This should involve ensuring that:

- Promoting human rights and civic space is a core element of UK foreign policy and a priority for UK diplomatic efforts, recognising that is critical to reducing marginalisation;
- Trade and economic diplomacy don’t undermine but strengthen and ensure compliance of the rights and welfare of marginalised communities, who are the most vulnerable to abuses by multinational companies; and
- Global financial sector reforms are promoted to help provide the poorest countries with affordable finance and to create a financial system that empowers the most marginalised

It will also require establishing a cross-government mechanism to establish responsibilities for, track the efforts of and hold accountable all internationally focused departments and relevant ministries on contributing to UK efforts to LNOB.

4) Championing LNOB on the global stage

To restore the UK’s reputation, the Government must demonstrate its commitment to LNOB on the global stage. Upcoming opportunities for doing this include the Financing for Development Forum, COP30, G20 meeting and the Global Disability Summit. To demonstrate genuine partnership on LNOB globally, the UK Government should:

- All global summits agree on ambitious, concrete, and targeted actions for LNOB, and establish robust mechanisms to hold development partners fully accountable for their commitments.
- Encourage global partners to implement equity-focused policies and approaches which promote evidence-based targeting of marginalised groups, data disaggregation, research, intersectionality and meaningful participation;
- Actively champion LNOB principles in discussions about reforming the international financial architecture;

- Commit to work with and influence multilateral lending institutions to promote fair lending practices that do not lead to an increase in poverty for deprived and marginalised populations; and
- Include LNOB in Embassy and High Commission annual plans, analysis and advocacy to strengthen national legislation and policies to promote equality and inclusion.

IV. Our sector's commitment

The organisations backing this call to action are committed to LNOB. Collectively, we can work with the UK Government and with local partners in communities to offer:

- **First-hand perspectives**, learning and leadership from the people we work with around the world, including diverse marginalised groups;
- **Research** into the challenges facing specific marginalised groups, intersecting inequalities and underlying drivers of inequality;
- **Expertise** on how to design programmes that meet the needs of marginalised groups;
- **Recommendations** guided by the priorities of grassroots organisations and movements on policies and approaches to address systemic issues that entrench inequalities;
- **Equitable partnership** on initiatives and programmes to promote equality, intersectionality and inclusion internationally; and
- **Awareness-raising**, both public and political, in the UK on the meaning of the LNOB commitment and its importance to the SDGs to ensure a better, fairer and more sustainable future for all.

Together, we believe the UK's role as a global leader in international development can be elevated by renewing our commitment to Leave No One Behind, creating a world that is inclusive, peaceful, and sustainable for all.