



## Submission to the Women and Equalities Committee's inquiry on the implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in the UK.

December 2016

### Key recommendations

- The SDGs are a universal agenda which apply to all countries. They are an integrated and indivisible package of goals and targets which present a real opportunity to reduce gender inequalities in every country around the world, including the UK.
- A formal mechanism should be created to ensure there is coordination across government at the highest political level. Political leadership, underpinned by comprehensive implementation plans, is crucial to ensure effective accountability and delivery of the SDGs.
- In line with DFID's plans to publish its approach to 'leave no one behind', the UK Government should continue to show global leadership by laying out its commitment to work with the UK women's rights sector to look at who is being "left behind" and why.
- To date we are disappointed in the UK Government's response to the SDGs, and we support the analysis and recommendations of the International Development Committee (IDC) inquiry into the SDGs.

### Introduction

The Bond SDGs Group (formally Bond Beyond 2015 UK) is a civil society coalition with over 150 member organisations advocating for the full implementation of the SDGs with a strong focus on their global impact. It is convened by Bond, the UK platform for international development NGOs. The Gender and Development Network has 100 members, both organisations and individual experts, who work on gender and development internationally. We welcome the opportunity to submit evidence to this inquiry and are pleased with the approach that it is taking.

### How well understood are the Goals in the UK and what more can be done to promote them?

1. The SDGs can only live up to their ambition if there is widespread awareness of the goals, enabling people to hold their governments and other actors to account for their commitments. Public awareness of the goals in the UK and across the domestic NGO sector remains low.
2. The SDGs differ from the MDGs in their **universal, integrated and collective approach**. Governments, businesses, civil society and citizens are **all responsible** for delivering the SDGs, and all have a role in outreach and communication. Ultimately, greater awareness and understanding of the SDGs will help people become agents of change and enable them to take positive action towards achieving the Goals.

3. However, the **ultimate responsibility lies with Government** to provide leadership for SDG implementation. The UK Government should contribute to raising global awareness of the SDGs through its communications and programmes in the UK, as well as through its international development work. The UK government should use its convening, and legislative powers to:
  - Engage directly with UK civil society to raise awareness of the Goals with the public
  - Put the SDGs firmly on the national policy agenda by highlighting SDGs successes and challenges in its public communications. Ministers, including the Prime Minister, referring to the SDGs in speeches and media communications would also raise the profile of the Goals.
  - Put in place formal multi-stakeholder mechanisms that give non-governmental stakeholders a chance to input into the design of the UK's implementation plans and strategies. National dialogues to shape government planning and implementation work need to start straight away.
  - Invest in further partnerships with initiatives such as the one with "Project Everyone".
  - Work with the Department of Education to ensure that the SDGs are part of citizenship education in the UK.
  - Require all contractors, multilaterals, NGO and private sector partners to be demonstrably SDGs aligned.
4. The Government's SDGs implementation plan and the Office of National Statistics' indicators that the Government will use to report progress against the SDGs must be published as soon as possible. Both are key elements to ensure greater engagement on the SDGs from civil society organisations and across Government.

### Reporting on the Goals

5. **The UK should volunteer for national reporting at the High Level Political Forum in 2018, with a view to submitting at least 3 national reviews by 2030.** The process for preparing the report should be open, inclusive and participatory, supporting the active and meaningful engagement of citizens, with particular efforts to include marginalised groups. The [Bond SDGs group recently produced a report](#) with further analysis of best practice in reporting to the HLPF.
6. The UK should also **report annually on progress towards the SDGs at national level**, making the data submitted as part of the UN's global monitoring process publicly available. This will also help enable regular parliamentary and public debate and scrutiny on progress towards the SDGs.
7. **Parliamentarians have a critical role to play in monitoring the SDGs.** We welcome the role of the Women and Equalities Committee in holding this inquiry and believe that, as a this is a cross-government agenda, all Select Committees should consider the Government's performance against the SDGs as part of their ongoing scrutiny of Government. We support the recommendations of the IDC that there should be an annual session with the relevant Secretaries of State in advance of each High Level Political Forum.
8. We support the recommendations of the IDC that the **Liaison Committee** should question the Prime Minister annually on progress against the SDGs.

## Indicators

9. The UK should continue to lead the world when it comes to Goal 5 and other gender related targets. National indicator setting is an opportunity for it to lay out its ambitious pathways to achieving the goals in the UK as well as abroad.
10. At present the Office of National Statistics (ONS) publishes annual reports on the Sustainable Development indicators and, it is assumed, will be responsible for publishing any data on the UK's performance against the SDGs.
11. The ONS is already conducting a data mapping exercise to identify which existing indicators correspond to specific SDGs and targets, and where there are gaps. **We look forward to seeing the draft ONS indicators**, as measurement of the SDGs should avoid duplication by bringing together existing data sets across a range of frameworks and developing new measures only where necessary.
12. **UK measurement of SDG progress should also draw on non-official data sources.** For example, perception data can help us to understand directly from citizens if their situation is improving and if they are being reached by the SDGs. New technologies have created unprecedented opportunities to use lower cost, "real-time" citizen generated data for monitoring progress, especially at local and national level.
13. **Stepping stone equity targets should be set and reported on by the UK Government.** These would serve as interim benchmarks across all goal areas to ensure that disadvantaged groups, including women and girls, are on track to achieve final targets and are catching up with more advantaged groups, helping to ensure the UK delivers on its promise to Leave No One Behind.
14. The UK should, at the international level, continue to drive progress towards a finalised **Global Indicators Framework for the SDGs** that can then be implemented at the national level. An open, transparent and inclusive process is needed to ensure that all countries understand, and collect, the data needed to measure progress towards the goals with a recognition that it won't be possible to achieve the goals without reaching the furthest behind first.

### **Is there consensus across Government about what the terms used in Goal 5 mean in the UK context?**

15. While DFID has engaged in this debate and is on top of all the nuances of language and concepts used in Goal 5, this level of analysis is not found across Whitehall. The Treasury for example is one department which will need to substantially increase its understanding of some of the terminology used in the SDGs. We suggest that DFID should take a lead in defining and interpreting SDGs-related terms across Whitehall.

**What action is the UK Government taking to implement Goal 5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls in the UK by 2030? What more can the UK Government do to achieve this?**

16. As the [British Council highlighted in its recent report](#) on the implementation of Goal 5 in the UK, the UK is recognised as a beacon of good practice for Law and Policy internationally with regards to gender equality, but there are areas where much more progress could be made. For example in most areas of senior political life, leadership in business, public life and civil society, women hold less than 30 per cent of positions of power and influence[1], meaning it would be difficult for the UK to meet target 5.5 in the SDGs framework. There is also a lot more to be done in tackling the gender stereotypes prejudice which continue to underpin discrimination.
17. Recommendations from human rights reporting, including the UK's review under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, can also be a useful source of information to identify areas for action under Goal 5. For example, the concluding [observations](#) from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, published in July 2016, recommends the UK take effective measures to tackle harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, and the forced marriage of girls and boys aged 16 and 17 in some parts of the UK.

**What more do individual government departments need to do to prioritise Goal 5 targets? What practical steps need to be taken?**

18. Gender equality doesn't just sit within Goal 5; it is mainstreamed across the whole framework. **More work needs to be done to identify, in the UK context, which women and girls are most at risk of being left behind and why** - for example migrant women. This exploration should be done with specialist women's organisations and mapped to inform the UK Government's work on the SDGs which includes a commitment to reaching the furthest behind first.
19. The UK Government's approach should take into account intersectionality when implementing the SDGs and Goal 5 targets. This would require the recognition within Government departments that people affected by Goal 5 targets can face overlapping forms of discrimination, and be women, and older, and living with a disability, and poor, and educated (or not), and from a particular ethnic or migrant background. This would also require a cross-government approach to Goal 5 targets where this intersectionality is deeply rooted.
20. The effective disaggregation of data will provide all government departments with the essential tools they need to better understand how to achieve the SDGs and fulfil the Government's commitment to Leave No One Behind. We support the leadership DFID is providing to strengthen the disaggregation of data by gender, age, disability and location as an initial starting point. We encourage the Government, however, to recognise the need for disaggregating data across other categories as well.

**How effective is coordination and leadership across UK government departments on implementing Goal 5? Is a single point of responsibility preferable to delegated responsibility across departments, and who should lead?**

21. The UK Government should continue to demonstrate to the world its continued commitment to the Goals. In this respect we share with IDC the concerns that *"The Government's response to domestic implementation of the SDGs has so far been insufficient for a country which led on their development as being universal and applicable to all."*[2]

22. The Bond SDGs Group has repeatedly called on the **UK government to develop a strategic plan for SDGs implementation**. We hope the upcoming UK Government report will take on board the IDC's recommendation [3] for it to equate to a substantive cross-government implementation plan, including clear lines of responsibility for each government department for domestic and international implementation of the SDGs, as well as for it to clearly outline how the Government will ensure policy coherence across the SDG agenda.
23. We believe **high-level leadership and engagement from all government departments is essential to fulfil the government's promise to support achievement of the SDGs by 2030**. The Prime Minister should play a clear leadership role and every Secretary of State and Minister, as well as each government department should be responsible for delivering on the SDGs. That clearly includes work by DFID, in its programme and policies overseas and the work it has been doing to champion the Leave No One Behind agenda. But there is a substantial role for the Government as a whole, including the Government Equalities office, to deliver the Goals in the UK and ensure policy coherence across government.
24. We therefore fully support the IDC recommendation for a **formal mechanism to be created to ensure that coherent implementation and integration of the SDGs is discussed across government at the highest political level**<sup>5</sup>.
25. Clear lines of accountability should also filter down to every government department. **Departmental responsibilities for SDGs delivery should be clear in their Single Departmental plans to ensure ownership**, which as recommended by the IDC 'should be urgently reviewed accordingly with specific references to relevant SDGs by number.'<sup>17</sup> The Government Equalities Office should be a conduit for work on progress and implementation of Goal 5. This role would be complimentary to their role in leading the UKs implementation of and tracking of the Convention on elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women ( [CEDAW](#)).
26. Recognising the fact that many government departments will have a limited understanding of the SDGs, it is also **essential the Government resources an internal communications strategy and builds capacity across government** to understand their responsibilities and support delivery on this agenda.
27. The **process through which the UK develops its SDGs Strategy**, implementation plans, and accountability frameworks must be transparent, open and participatory. Transparency and effective channels for participation can create a critical 'reality check' on the extent to which the SDGs are being delivered on the ground.
28. Building on the inclusivity of the SDGs negotiations, the UK Government should ensure the inclusion of civil society and affected people, particularly the most marginalised, in the development of plans for the domestic implementation of the Goals. There are examples of good practice from other countries - in an effort to support mainstreaming of Gender in Nepal, for example VSO Nepal and other civil society gender partners conducted a training event for the 'gender focal points' from the 25 Government ministries about how gender equality and women's empowerment can be mainstreamed through their ministries work in line with the SDGs.

## What monitoring mechanisms are in place to measure progress in the UK against Goal 5 and how can these be improved?

29. The UK's obligations under CEDAW provide avenues for civil society to hold the UK government to account for its compliance with CEDAW as well as implementation of the SDGs. For example, civil society can collate and submit shadow reports to the CEDAW Committee when it's the turn of the UK to undergo periodic review. Civil society can also submit thematic reports related to domestic implementation and compliance as well as interrogating whether the UK is fulfilling its extraterritorial obligations under CEDAW. This would mean holding the UK government accountable for the universal nature of the commitments it has signed up to with the SDGs, through strengthened overall policy coherence which would include foreign and development policy as well as the impact of UK's domestic policy on the rights of women and girls in developing countries.

## What examples of good practice are there in the UK or abroad, for implementing and monitoring progress against these and other global targets? How effectively does the UK Government learn from such practice?

30. The first High Level Political Forum took place at the UN in July this year and was the first opportunity for countries to report on SDGs implementation progress. 22 countries submitted their national reviews, providing a good range of approaches to learn from. [Bond has analysed](#) these different approaches, highlighting best practice and making recommendations for country reporting. Some examples are available below.
31. The **German Government** has introduced a national consultation on the SDGs to develop a new national sustainable development strategy that reflects the Goals. This process is being led at the highest level by the Federal Chancellery. It has committed to producing an implementation plan in 2016. It has a Ministerial Committee on Sustainable development which ensures sustainable development is embedded across all government policy, and has established a Sustainable Development Council, consisting of senior representatives from Business, Academia and Civil Society to advise the Government on the SDGs.
32. In **Norway** each of the 17 SDGs has a coordinating ministry, which is responsible for implementation in consultation with other ministries involved in the implementation of various targets. Each ministry will report on the status of follow-up for its respective goal(s) in its budget proposal. The proposals will then be summarised by the Ministry of Finance in the national budget white paper and presented to the Storting (Norwegian Parliament) annually, along with the state budget.
33. The **Finnish** Government has committed to producing a comprehensive National Implementation Plan for Agenda 2030 by the end of 2016 [5], led by the Prime Minister's office. The Secretariat is supported by the inter-ministerial Coordination Network. It also works closely with two multi-stakeholder committees, the Finnish Development Policy Committee (parliamentary body monitoring the global sustainable development agenda) and the National Commission on Sustainable Development (Prime Minister led partnership forum tasked to follow up and review the national implementation of Agenda 2030). The institutional framework is further strengthened by an interdisciplinary Sustainable Development Expert Panel and the Society's Commitment to Sustainable Development, a public platform which facilitates civil society and business engagement with the SDGs. As part of its Implementation Plan, Finland has committed to review new modes for interacting with vulnerable and marginalised groups to ensure that no one is left behind.



34. **China** has established a domestic coordination mechanism, comprising 43 government departments, to deliver SDGs implementation.
35. **Finland**, the **Philippines** and **Uganda** all plan to develop **communication plans** to raise awareness of the goals among the public.
36. **China, Finland, France and the Philippines** have all committed to develop SDGs implementation plans. **Finland** and **Norway** have both identified national **weaknesses and challenges for the implementation** of Agenda 2030.
37. In summary, **a good national approach to implementation would include at least:**
  - an analysis of existing policies and practices to identify gaps and ensure alignment against the SDGs;
  - formal institutional framework set up to ensure that Parliament and Government Departments are actively and regularly engaged with the agenda, coordinated by the Head of Government's office;
  - clear lines of responsibility for the delivery of each goal;
  - clear mechanisms for engaging a broad range of stakeholders and the wider public to garner support for the SDGs in society at large; and
  - a planning and policy making approach which explicitly refers to the SDGs.
38. **So far the UK Government has not delivered any of the above.** The Bond SDGs Group would like to see the examples of best practice mentioned above implemented in the UK and the report from the IDC inquiry also brings makes some excellent suggestions on how to take the right steps towards implementation.

---

[1] British Council, Gender Equality and Empowerment in the UK, available at:  
[https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/gender\\_equality\\_and\\_empowerment\\_in\\_the\\_uk.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/gender_equality_and_empowerment_in_the_uk.pdf)

[2] House of Commons International Development Committee (2016) 'UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals', available at:  
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmintdev/103/103.pdf>

[3] House of Commons International Development Committee  
<http://data.parliament.uk/WrittenEvidence/CommitteeEvidence.svc/EvidenceDocument/International%20Development/Sustainable%20Development%20Goals/written/31650.html>

[4] [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10686HLPF-Bericht\\_final\\_EN.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10686HLPF-Bericht_final_EN.pdf) , Germany's report to the HLPF. Exec sum:  
[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10374GER\\_Report\\_to\\_HLPF\\_2016\\_Exec\\_Summary.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10374GER_Report_to_HLPF_2016_Exec_Summary.pdf)

[5] [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10611Finland\\_VNR.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10611Finland_VNR.pdf) , Finland's report to the HLPF. Exec sum:  
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/10164Finland%20HLPF%20VNR%20Summary%20-%20FINAL%2017.5.2016.pdf>