

# UK Voluntary National Review Main Messages

## Bond SDG Group Main Messages

We welcome the UK publishing their key messages.<sup>1</sup> The guidance from the UN is that “the Main Messages need not be a conclusive summary of the Voluntary National Review (VNR), but can contain emerging conclusions from the review. The Main Messages provide an indication of some of the principal findings of the review.”<sup>2</sup> In order to provide analysis of these main findings, the Bond SDG Group has analysed them against a set of questions developed by the Together 2030 initiative, and in line with previous recommendations to the UK VNR.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, the Main Messages lack detail, particularly compared to other countries, and should serve to increase attention on the full VNR report. In the below analysis, we identify some of the key gaps and look forward to seeing more details, and a greater level of ambition and accountability reflected in the full VNR report.

### **1. Did countries describe the consultation process leading up to the VNR, including engagement of civil society and other stakeholders?**

The process for stakeholder engagement in the VNR was never outlined, and is not addressed in the Main Messages document. There is a helpful reflection that “sustainable development depends not just upon government but also on civil society and the private sector too”, this needs to be reflected in a transparent mechanism for meaningful engagement in SDG planning, implementation and accountability. The UK government should commit to genuine, meaningful, ongoing dialogue - including funding for civil society in governance and accountability processes – and there are good examples of how to do this, including with marginalised people.

We urge the government to work with non-state actors after the UN General Assembly in September 2019 to continue stakeholder engagement about the implementation of Agenda 2030. When embarking on future VNRs, the Government should produce a detailed, publicly-available timeline as soon as the VNR is announced, including the main deliverables and deadlines. This would help focus minds across Government and enable stakeholders to engage more effectively with the process.

### **2. Did countries describe the institutional arrangements in place for governance and accountability for implementation at the national level?**

The team looking after the implementation of the SDGs is located in the Department for International Development (DFID), which is also leading the co-ordination of the VNR. The Main Messages do not reflect on these institutional arrangements, or the challenges within them. The Cabinet should take responsibility for leading and coordinating the UK government’s implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and this should be based on a cross-government strategy on delivering the SDGs. Such strategy should outline mechanisms to embed SDGs into departmental planning and operations to ensure policy coherence and better identify interlinkages between the goals and take advantage of the synergies.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/main-messages-for-uk-voluntary-national-review/uk-voluntary-national-review-main-messages>

<sup>2</sup> [https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20872VNR\\_hanbook\\_2019\\_Edition\\_v4.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/20872VNR_hanbook_2019_Edition_v4.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/FINAL-Together-2030\\_VNR-Main-Messages-Review-2017.pdf](https://www.together2030.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/FINAL-Together-2030_VNR-Main-Messages-Review-2017.pdf)

The VNR should outline how the UK Government will formally engage stakeholders in the implementation of the SDGs to 2030. For example, setting up a multi-stakeholder advisory group, with leadership from the Prime Minister and coordination by the Cabinet Office.

### **3. Did countries report on the participation and contributions of civil society in implementation of the 2030 Agenda?**

The Main Messages reference the importance of all stakeholders in SDG implementation, but there is little reflection on how the process sought to engage with civil society and other stakeholders. The VNR process included an online portal for collecting case studies, a range of roundtables and engagement events. These were variable, especially when roundtables were organised very last minute, and it is unclear how the input collected through these have been reflected in the VNR.

To ensure that the reflection on the importance of stakeholders, in the Main Messages, becomes a reality, participation and engagement must be strengthened. In the main VNR we will be looking for a reflection on the engagement process and the content that was gathered from non-government stakeholders. In the future, the next VNR needs to be meaningfully co-created with civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders, and has a clear methodology, budget and time for robust engagement.

### **4. Did countries report on actions taken to implement the 2030 Agenda, balancing social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development?**

There is a lack of detail in the Main Messages to assess whether the UK government will address in the VNR whether its actions internationally balance the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development. For example, as highlighted in the recent report by the International Development Select Committee, the government's action on climate is often incoherent with its other policies, such as through support to the fossil fuel economy in developing nations. This critical reflection needs to be included in the VNR.<sup>4</sup>

In the future mechanisms must be put in place to ensure better coherence across different policy areas. The first step is to systematically acknowledge incoherent policy making, with a cross-government planning tool to ensure different government departments (and teams within them) consider the transboundary and transgenerational effects (in terms of all dimensions of sustainable development) of existing and new policies, and their alignment with the SDGs

### **5. Did countries reference policies or programmes to target support for specific marginalized groups and/or populations, such as women, children, persons with disabilities, migrants, minority ethnic groups, young and older persons and others?**

The Main Messages document makes no reference to the principle of leave no one behind, the need to reach the furthest behind first, marginalisation, equity or equality. Since 2015, there has been progress on this, and in the governments' international agenda, DFID has sought to step up targeted interventions for specific marginalised groups/populations. In particular, the government has steadily increased its commitment both in programmatic and spending terms on disability inclusion since the Global Disability Summit in 2018; it continues to be a leader in the Global Partnership for Education; and within the Fund to End Violence Against Children. On data, DFID leads the UK's work on the Inclusive Data Charter. It has refined its approach on disability and gender mainstreaming as well as Education through the roll out of

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/international-development-committee/news-parliament-2017/uk-aid-for-combating-climate-change-report-publication-17-19/>

its various strategies<sup>5</sup>. These strategies are understandably at early stages of implementation and it will be important to keep track of progress that has been made.

In the main report, much greater commitment by all government departments to delivering the LNOB principle, addressing adverse impacts of UK policy (for example in trade and investment) on the most marginalised groups; and the opportunities to strengthen policies and programmes coherent with addressing inequalities (for example, by ending financial secrecy) and embedding equity as a criteria for financing and government programme. It will be important for UK to use lessons learned from its emerging work on data to advocate for a greater attention to the most marginalised as well as to continue to develop its work on data to better monitor progress in addressing inequalities beyond sex, age, disability and geography, as relevant in national contexts.

## **6. Did countries identify gaps or challenges in implementation?**

The Main Messages reflects upon a number of the challenges that were faced, both in the development of the VNR and in SDG implementation more widely. These include challenges of reporting across devolved policy areas, data and the challenges of implementation in the UK context. This aspect of the Main Messages is welcomed, and it will be important for these to be reflected upon in the Next Steps section of the VNR.

The reflective aspect of the Main Messages includes the statement that it has taught the UK Government “something about the kinds of pressures that these processes impose on other people’s governments.” As a high-income country with substantial resources, this reflection should be translated into a programme of support for low-income countries undertaking VNRs.

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<sup>5</sup> For more information, see [DFID’s Disability Inclusion Strategy \(2018-2023\)](#); [DFID Strategic Vision for Gender Equality](#); [DFID Education Policy 2018](#)