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‘Critical agents of change’ in the 2030 Agenda: Youth-inclusive governance indicators for national-level monitoring

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should be monitored in a way that both captures the experiences and views of youth and includes young people in processes that hold governments to account for these global commitments. The Working Group on Youth-Inclusive Governance Indicators¹ has identified a list of **national-level indicators** and **methods** for monitoring Goal 16 Targets 16.6, 16.7 and 16.10 of the SDGs. These targets were chosen for their focus on core aspects of governance – effective, accountable and transparent institutions; responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making; access to information and protection of fundamental freedoms – which if achieved, will enable progress across the sustainable development agenda. Our recommendations contribute to a ‘basket’ of Goal 16 indicators and encourage the use of multiple and diverse data sources, including civil society and citizen-generated data, to monitor progress. The recommendations seek to complement and support global-level review processes and to ensure that national-level monitoring is youth-sensitive, by **taking into account the role, position and experiences of children and young people**.²

As modalities for global-level monitoring and review are finalised, governments will need to look to their own specific context to determine which indicators will help them to develop strong implementation strategies and measure progress towards the SDGs at local, national and regional levels.³ Since contexts will differ considerably, each member state will need to choose the most effective indicators (number and breadth) to measure progress, whilst maintaining the ambition of the SDGs. This document provides suggestions for what to consider when selecting indicators, including the importance of disaggregation; proposals for specific indicators that would support youth-inclusive monitoring of these key targets; and information about the role of young people, as ‘critical agents of change’⁴, in monitoring governance commitments in the 2030 Agenda.

Background

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development outlines commitments from governments around the world to a universal, comprehensive and complex agenda to integrate economic, social and environmental development in every country. Goal 16 sets out clear and ambitious targets to ensure ‘effective, accountable and transparent institutions’ (16.6), alongside ‘responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making’ (16.7), at all levels. Combined with a target to ensure public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms (16.10), these commitments provide a valuable framework for governance accountability. Progress on Goal 16 will enhance the quality of governance and the effectiveness and sustainability of development, as well as contribute to the empowerment of all people, including marginalised groups. Goal 16 is not only a critical aspiration in its own right, but it is also an enabling goal for the entire sustainable development agenda.

¹ Active members of the Working Group on Youth-Inclusive Governance Indicators included: Plan International, Restless Development, UNDP, Children’s Environments Research Group at CUNY, Centre for Children’s Rights at Queen’s University Belfast.

² We use the terms ‘youth’ and ‘young people’ to mean those aged 15-24, in alignment with the UN definition, without prejudice to national definitions. See <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>

³ Economic and Social Council (2015) *Report of the Inter-agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators*, E/CN.3/2016/2, para 23: ‘It is expected that the global indicators will form the core of all other sets of indicators... However, additional and, in some cases, different indicators might be used for regional, national and sub-national levels of monitoring. These indicators will be developed by Member States.’

⁴ *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, para 51.

The 2030 Agenda recognises children and youth as ‘critical agents of change’ in the SDGs platform and for the ‘creation of a new world’.⁵ This recognition must translate into actions that governments and other stakeholders take to implement and monitor the SDGs, including in the selection of national-level indicators and the involvement of young people in monitoring progress. If made a reality, these commitments to listen to and act on young people’s views, including those most likely to experience discrimination and exclusion, will fulfil young people’s rights and ensure that governments develop strategies and plans that build on and learn from young people’s experiences, innovation, and expertise. Young people are entitled to hold the state and its decision-makers accountable for their duties and performance. We cannot let this opportunity slip by.

Leave No One Behind: what to monitor and how to measure it

Governments have pledged to ‘leave no one behind’ in the achievement of sustainable development. Learning from the experiences of the Millennium Development Goals, States ‘wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society’, and they ‘endeavour to reach the furthest behind first’.⁶

As governments begin to develop national-level plans for monitoring the SDGs, they will need to determine **what is measured** (indicator selection), what **methods of measurement** they will use in the review process (monitoring), and **how data reveal how different groups are affected** (disaggregation).⁷ In all cases, monitoring should enable governments and civil society, including youth, to track how development affects all segments of society. The Working Group on Youth-Inclusive Governance Indicators believes that the commitment to ‘leave no one behind’ requires States to take specific steps to ensure that the monitoring process is inclusive of the issues that affect girls/young women and boys/young men and that such processes involve children and young people as active agents for change.

Indicator Selection

Indicators provide a framework of accountability for monitoring progress at local, national, regional and global levels and **will inform implementation strategies and allocation of resources**. In general, indicators should be broad enough to capture the wide picture in society but disaggregated in a way that makes it possible to see how different groups are affected by or experience development differently. Indicators should provide specific and actionable information, which can be used to ‘**incentivize policy action** and focus attention on the people and communities who are most marginalized, deprived and discriminated against’.⁸

Each government will need to approach the SDGs in a way that is most relevant to their context, whilst staying true to the ambition and spirit of the Goals.⁹ In the 2030 Agenda, States committed to regular and inclusive review processes based on a global indicator framework, complemented by indicators at regional and national levels.¹⁰ National-level indicators will provide useful tools to assist the implementation and monitoring of SDGs commitments in relation to specific country contexts. The selection of indicators should reflect the ambition and intention of the 2030 Agenda, which states that: ‘We must not limit our vision to what we can measure now, but what we *want to measure by 2030*, to create a broad and holistic picture of SDG progress and human rights enjoyment’.¹¹

⁵ Ibid., para 51.

⁶ *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, para 4.

⁷ The monitoring and review process is a critical component of accountability for the 2030 Agenda, but there are many other ways in which young people can and should be involved in holding governments accountable for their commitments to sustainable development and their pledge to ‘leave no one behind’. See for example: Walker, D., and Perezniето, P. (2014) [Partners for change: Young people and governance in a post-2015 world](#), Overseas Development Institute, Plan International, Restless Development.

⁸ Center for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) (2015) [The Measure of Progress: How human rights should inform the Sustainable Development Goals indicators](#), Human Rights Policy Brief, October 2015.

⁹ *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, para 55: the SDGs are ‘integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable’; the goals and targets take into account ‘different national realities, capacities and levels of development’ and each Government will ‘decide how these aspirational and global targets should be incorporated into national planning processes, policies and strategies’.

¹⁰ *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, para 75.

¹¹ CESR (2015).

There are some general considerations that should be taken when selecting indicators in each national context, and some particular considerations when viewed from a youth-inclusive perspective. The following **checklist** is provided to support national-level discussions about selecting appropriate indicators for Goal 16:¹²

Measurement feasibility ✓

Data for this national-level target are available in existing data sources.	
National-level data on this issue exist and could be used to monitor progress.	
There are sufficient resources (time, funding, personnel) to develop high quality measurements.	

The concept of ‘feasibility’ is in line with the 2030 Agenda’s ambition to improve data collection over time.¹³ Some indicators are likely to require the collection of data that may not be available currently, while others may require additional analysis of existing data.¹⁴ If this is the most suitable indicator, then all efforts should be taken to improve data collection to ensure monitoring captures the full picture of development for all people in all areas.

Are the indicators... ✓

High Quality	This indicator produces accurate and complete information that relates directly to the issue or issues it seeks to measure	
Reliable	This indicator produces dependable results <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questions are clear enough that respondents understand exactly what is asked and can answer accurately • If the research was conducted again, and nothing had changed, you would expect to receive the same results 	
Timely	Data will be available at regular intervals until 2030	
Accessible	Results are available and accessible to the public	
	Language is clear enough that youth, including those with disabilities, and their advocates can understand and use the data in accountability efforts	
Actionable	Informs government action at multiple levels (e.g. national, sub-national and local)	
	Indicators measure State effort and conduct as well as outcomes ¹⁵	
Relevant	Measures the lived realities of individuals, including young people ¹⁶	
	Results contribute to a comprehensive understanding of sustainable development	
	Data can be disaggregated to include information about the structural realities or lived experiences of youth	

These **criteria** are suggested as **aspirational, but realistic with action over time**. This list is illustrative and intended to inform national-level discussions about how to select indicators that are likely to assist monitoring of, and corresponding action on, the SDGs.

Recommendations: national-level youth-inclusive governance indicators

The Working Group on Youth-Inclusive Governance Indicators has identified six indicators that will support youth-inclusive measurement of Targets 16.6, 16.7 and 16.10. In some cases, complementary or supplementary indicators are suggested where it was felt that a single indicator would be enhanced by additional information. Data will not be available for all indicators in all contexts, but once baseline data are established, these indicators would provide information that could assist the implementation and measurement of youth-inclusive governance.

¹² If a proposed indicator does not (yet) meet a specific criterion, it is hoped that the checklist will inform a discussion about improvements or modifications that will strengthen the indicator.

¹³ Target 17.18: ‘to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data’. See also Center for Economic and Social Rights (2015) [The Measure of Progress: How human rights should inform the Sustainable Development Goals indicators](#), Human Rights Policy Brief, October 2015.

¹⁴ Suggestions for including citizen generated data and building on the opportunities of the data revolution are discussed later in this document.

¹⁵ CESR (2015), p 3: ‘outcomes alone cannot give a full understanding of a State’s compliance with their human rights obligations (which encompass conduct and result). A State’s policy efforts and resource allocations, and their relationship to human rights and development outcomes, must also be monitored for a more balanced and comprehensive assessment.’ (CESR, *The OPERA Framework: Assessing compliance with the obligation to fulfill economic, social and cultural rights*, (2012)).

¹⁶ CESR (2015), p 4: ‘People living in poverty and other marginalized groups have the most immediate insights on their own experiences with sustainable development policies. For this reason, it would be beneficial for policy makers and other stakeholders to work with people living in poverty to devise indicators that reflect what they value as measures of progress.’

Our proposals include three types of indicators: **structural** (existence of institutions and policies), **process** (activities, resources or initiatives; actions taken to achieve change) and **outcome** (change in the lived experience of the target). Process and outcome indicators can be measured by survey or qualitative data, and structural indicators can be measured by conducting legislative or policy reviews.

We support the 2030 Agenda’s commitment to ensure that data are disaggregated ‘by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts’.¹⁷ With all of the recommended indicators below, measurement should include an analysis of whether and how young people’s experiences of the issue differ from the general population.¹⁸

Target 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

- **Effective:** Proportion of population satisfied with their last experience of public services, disaggregated by service
- **Accountable:** Existence of accessible individual complaints procedures in place for all public services at national, sub-national and local levels
- **Transparent:** (See proposal under 16.10)

Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

- **Inclusive/Representative:** Proportions of positions (by age cohorts, sex, disability and ethnicity) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions
- **Responsive/Inclusive/Participatory:** Percentage of population who believe decision-making is responsive and inclusive
- **Participatory/Responsive:** Existence of national, sub-national and local level policy that requires public bodies to consult with citizens in decision-making

Target 16.10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements

- **Access to information:** Existence and implementation of constitutional and statutory guarantees for public access to information, available in accessible formats

Target 16.6: Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

Effective institutions: Proportion of population satisfied with their last experience of public services, disaggregated by service¹⁹

Type: Outcome indicator	Source: Global, regional and national surveys; civil society
As a perception-based measure, this will collect data on the lived experience of individuals seeking access to and obtaining basic public services, such as healthcare, education, water and sanitation, as well as services provided by the police and judicial system. If disaggregated by age, gender and type of service, this measure will provide much-needed information on the views and needs of girls/young women and boys/young men, which can often be excluded.	
<u>Measurement:</u> Government and/or civil society may report progress on this indicator. Data are currently collected by perception-based surveys such as the World Value Survey, Gallup, Afrobarometer and the other Regional Barometers, and various National Statistical Offices (NSOs). At national level, the approach has been applied and reported by several NSOs in Africa using the Strategy for the Harmonization of statistics in Africa (SHaSA) questionnaire. ²⁰ For this indicator to be youth-	

¹⁷ *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, target 17.18 and para 74(g).

¹⁸ For example, if an indicator monitors the proportion of the population satisfied with their last experience of public services, it should be possible to determine if young people are more or less satisfied than the general population. If an indicator monitors the existence of policy or practice, the review process should assess whether young people and their experiences are included.

¹⁹ A version of this indicator (16.6.2*) has achieved widespread support and been agreed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the SDGs (IAEG-SDGs) for inclusion in a global framework of SDGs indicators. The IAEG-SDGs advice will be submitted to the UN Statistical Commission in March 2016.

²⁰ SHaSA is a joint initiative by the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Development Bank (ADB) and the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UN-ECA) to harmonize statistics across the continent. Questions on the Harmonised

sensitive, data should be disaggregated to allow for the visibility of youth, and will be necessary to include additional data sources that include respondents under age 18.

Alignment with other monitoring obligations:

This indicator links to monitoring the following SDG targets: 1.4 (access to basic services), 3.8 (access to quality, essential health-care services), 4.1, 4.2 and 4a (quality education, including facilities), 7.1 (access to affordable, reliable energy services), 10.2 (social inclusion), 11.1 (adequate housing), 16.3 (rule of law).²¹

Accountable institutions: Existence of accessible individual complaints procedures in place for all public services at national, sub-national and local levels

Type: Structural and Process indicator	Source: National laws and key legal and policy instruments
<p>The existence of complaints mechanisms is an important part of rights-compliant governance, although this will not provide a complete picture of whether institutions are accountable to children and young people. Complaints mechanisms should operate on the basis of inclusivity – providing information in age, gender and disability appropriate formats, disseminating information widely and offering support and assistance when necessary. Mechanisms should include timely and effective follow-up and referral procedures.</p>	
<p><u>Measurement:</u> Government and/or civil society can measure this indicator through a review of national, sub-national and local policy and practice in the areas of education, healthcare, housing, criminal justice and immigration and asylum. In order to capture the experience of youth, this review will need to assess: a) the existence of complaints mechanisms and procedures at all levels, b) whether provision is accessible to and inclusive of all children and young people.</p>	
<p><u>Alignment with other monitoring obligations:</u> This indicator is based on Indicator 5 of the Council of Europe (CoE) Child Participation Assessment Tool,²² which includes a model for an assessment score of 0-3.²³</p>	

Target 16.7: Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels

Inclusive/Representative decision-making: Proportions of positions (by age cohorts, sex, disability and ethnicity) in public institutions (national and local legislatures, public service, and judiciary) compared to national distributions²⁴

Type: Process and Outcome Indicator	Source: Nationally collected administrative data
<p>This indicator will measure trends on whether younger age groups (e.g. age 20-25) are hired by or elected to public institutions. At the moment, representation of youth in public institutions is significantly low, but this indicator will allow tracking of changes in the representativeness of young people alongside other groups in society. Once baseline data are established, measuring progress will be relatively easy and will provide very valuable information for youth participation at national, sub-national and local levels. Note that if based on global-level surveys, this indicator will not capture whether decision-making is inclusive of children under 18, nor will it reveal the degree of decision-making power associated with the position.</p>	
<p><u>Measurement:</u> Government and/or civil society may report progress on this indicator. Data are gathered through the following surveys: Global Barometer Study, World Values Survey, Gallup World Poll, and the SHaSA Harmonised Module on Democratic Governance. Baseline data may be needed in some areas of decision-making. At the international level, the ILO compiles data on female share of employment by occupation, by level of position, and by private/public sector. UN Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union compile statistical information about women parliamentarians, women members of cabinet and other relevant information.</p>	

Module on Democratic Governance ask specifically about rates of access to, and trust in, the following services/institutions: public service (in general), courts of justice, police, public hospitals and clinics, public schools, tax/customs authorities, social security system, state media, Parliament, army, President, Prime Minister, Mayor.

²¹ For further information, see Virtual Network of Stakeholders for the Development of Indicators on Peaceful Societies, Justice and Effective Institutions for SDG16 ‘Sourcebook on Measuring Peace, Justice and Institutions’.

²² The Council of Europe’s [Child Participation Assessment Tool](#) provides specific and measurable indicators for all CoE member States to measure progress in implementing Recommendation CM/Rec(2012)2 on the participation of children and young people under the age of 18.

²³ For more information, see Indicator 5: Council of Europe, [Child Participation Assessment Tool](#).

²⁴ This indicator (16.7.1) has achieved widespread support and been agreed by the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on the SDGs (IAEG-SDGs) for inclusion in a global framework of SDGs indicators. The IAEG-SDGs advice will be submitted to the UN Statistical Commission in March 2016.

Alignment with other monitoring obligations:

This indicator links to monitoring UN Security Council [Resolution 2250](#) (S/RES/2250 (2015)) on youth, peace and security and SDGs targets: 5.5 (women’s full and effective participation), 10.2 (political inclusion).

Responsive/Inclusive/Participatory decision-making: Percentage of population who believe decision-making is responsive and inclusive²⁵

Type: Outcome	Source: Global, regional and national surveys; civil society
Participation in public decision-making is an essential component of good governance, and a rights entitlement for children under age 18. ²⁶ This indicator is a way of measuring the perception of people of their government, focusing on 'inclusiveness' and 'responsiveness' to the population. This will assist governments to design more accurate and relevant interventions for young people and allocate resources more effectively.	
<u>Measurement:</u> Government and/or civil society may report progress on this indicator. It will require scaling up of household surveys that collect perception based data. Measurement should be disaggregated by age and gender at a minimum to track the experiences of girls/young women and boys/young men. The indicator should measure adults’ and children’s views of public decision-making at all levels, especially given children’s right to have their views given due weight in decision-making. ²⁷	
A complementary indicator to be measured by civil society could be: ‘Proportion of the public and civil society organisations that believes that the government provides them adequate time, opportunity and information to comment on policy and legal initiatives.’	
<u>Alignment with other monitoring obligations:</u> This indicator is associated with States’ reporting obligations under human rights treaties and mechanisms (e.g. the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child), including the Universal Periodic Review.	

Participatory/Responsive decision-making: Existence of national, sub-national and local level policy that requires public bodies to consult with citizens in decision-making

Type: Structural and Process Indicator	Source: Review of national and local policy instruments, qualitative data
The existence of policies requiring public consultation in decision-making is a critical aspect of participatory and responsive governance. Such policies should include reference to the inclusion of children and young people’s views and a commitment to consultation on the basis of inclusivity.	
<u>Measurement:</u> Government and/or civil society can measure this indicator through a review of national and local policy instruments in the areas of public expenditure, education, health care, housing, protection, recreation, criminal justice and immigration and asylum. National-level information is available through the Sustainable Governance Indicators (societal consultation). Survey data should be complemented by qualitative data about the extent to which young people’s views are given due weight in decision-making. ²⁸	
A complementary indicator to be measured by civil society could be: ‘the number of cases of where public policy has been developed, changed or revised based on civil society/youth feedback’.	
<u>Alignment with other monitoring obligations:</u> The proposal reflects Indicator 1 of the CoE Child Participation Assessment Tool , which includes a model for an assessment score of 0-3. ²⁹ This indicator links to monitoring UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security.	

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 12.

²⁷ Lansdown, G. (2011) [Every child’s right to be heard: a resource guide on the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child General Comment No. 12](#), UNICEF & Save the Children, p 23: ‘Due weight’ requires that decision-makers give children’s views ‘serious consideration’ and that children’s ‘concerns, perspectives and ideas must inform decisions that affect their lives’. This is qualified by taking into consideration the ‘age and maturity of the child’ (art 12), which means in practice that duty-bearers should take the ‘child’s level of understanding of the implications of the matter’ into account.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ For more information, see CoE [Child Participation Assessment Tool](#): ‘Legal protection for children’s right to participate is reflected in the national constitution and legislation’.

Target 16.10: Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements

Access to Information: Existence and implementation of constitutional and statutory guarantees for public access to information, available in accessible formats

Type: Structural and Process indicator	Source: Review of national and local policy instruments
Access to information provides the foundation for all effective, accountable and transparent decision-making. While freedom of information legislation exists in many countries, the procedures associated with timely, quality and accessible responses will determine the extent to which citizens, including girls/young women and boys/young men, benefit from such guarantees.	
<u>Measurement:</u> Government and/or civil society can measure this indicator through a review of national law, policies and practice and a range of quantitative and qualitative assessments of implementation. Assessment will include the extent to which rules restrict access to information (e.g. exemptions, deadlines for responding to requests etc.) and whether mechanisms for appeal and oversight exist to enforce citizens' right to access information. Measurement should include an assessment of implementation and accessibility of information (on the basis of age, gender and ability appropriate formats at a minimum). Data will be available through reporting and review processes of the UN treaty monitoring bodies, including the Universal Periodic Review. National-level information is available through the Sustainable Governance Indicators (access to government information), www.freedominfo.org and through Open Government Data platforms hosted by the Division for Public Administration and Development Management of the UN Public Administration Programme.	
A complementary (perception-based) indicator could be developed to capture young people's views of the extent to which they believe public information is available and accessible in appropriate formats.	
<u>Alignment with other monitoring obligations:</u> This indicator is associated directly with States' reporting obligations under a variety of human rights treaties and mechanisms. It also links to monitoring Target 16.6.	

Disaggregation

The 2030 Agenda is a commitment to all the world's people, so the monitoring and review process will need to capture all views and experiences. The commitment to 'leave no one behind' 'will require going beyond averages to target efforts towards reaching the most excluded population groups'.³⁰ Data therefore needs to be disaggregated to show how different groups in society are affected by or experience development differently. Disaggregation assists States to 'design, adapt, implement and monitor measures' to achieve the SDGs and contribute to the detection of disparities in development.³¹

The 2030 Agenda recognises that States have different levels of data collection infrastructure in place and acknowledges the current limitations in disaggregation of data globally. However, States have committed to improve measurements to ensure that data are disaggregated 'by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts'.³² In the first instance, much work is needed to ensure that youth are included in the data. Many existing measurements of governance issues overlook the experiences of children and young people.³³ Over time, it is important that disaggregation be harmonised across data sources so that information from multiple sources can be used to inform implementation and accountability for sustainable development. Disaggregation by age should move towards greater consistency between data sources (e.g. standardisation of 5- or 10- year age brackets), and reporting of results within each source should be consistent (e.g. avoid combining or splitting age brackets, such as 1-18, 19-35, 36-65, 65+).³⁴

In all cases, it is important to consider how disaggregating data can reveal much-needed information that will support the achievement of the SDGs and the commitment to 'leave no one behind'. We know, for example, that girls from ages 10-19 are more vulnerable to a number of rights violations, such as child marriage, dropping out of

³⁰ UNDG (2015) [Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Interim Reference Guide to UN Country Teams](#), United Nations Development Group, 7 October 2015, p 69.

³¹ OHCHR (2012) [Human Rights Indicators: a guide to measurement and implementation](#), HR/PUB/12/5.

³² *The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, target 17.18 and para 74(g).

³³ For example, surveys such as the Afrobarometer and World Values Survey are often limited to those aged 18 and older.

³⁴ Inconsistency between sources and within reporting restricts the capacity to use data to inform policy and action. For example, the World Bank uses 12-23 months (vaccination), under 5 years (nutrition & mortality), 15-19 years (adolescent fertility), and 15-49 years (birth control & HIV).

school, and early pregnancy.³⁵ Use of smaller age brackets for information related to children under 18 may be necessary to reveal the true picture of how children are experiencing development commitments. Efforts to improve data collection and disaggregation should work within the principle of progressive realisation, that States should take all appropriate steps to strengthen monitoring processes as quickly as possible. Current limitations in measurement should not stand in the way of improved monitoring and review of the SDGs over time.

Linking to broader reporting requirements

The 2030 Agenda sets out ambitious goals that, in order to be implemented, will span economic, social and environmental policy, planning and actions at national level. States have an opportunity, therefore, to coordinate the monitoring and review process for the SDGs into a range of on-going reporting requirements. For example, States are already involved in periodic reporting to many UN treaty monitoring bodies (e.g. the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child; Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women; Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights) and all are involved in the Universal Periodic Review process of the Human Rights Council. Where these reporting requirements align with monitoring of the SDGs, it will be useful to seek opportunities to integrate relevant data collection and analysis.

Civil Society and Citizen-Generated Data

Civil society has an important role to play in holding governments accountable for their SDGs commitments, including through the generation, aggregation and analysis of data. With a broad programmatic and advocacy reach in the most disadvantaged areas and communities, civil society has access to a range of additional data and information, often used to understand the experiences and perceptions of communities and to track the effectiveness of an implementation strategy. The addition of high-quality civil society and citizen-generated data can offer crucial, complementary information needed to understand the true context and experience where there are historic gaps in official data collection. Moreover, alternative, shadow or interim reports based on more qualitative and citizen-level data will provide an additional layer of SDGs accountability.

Citizen-generated data (CGD) is produced by individuals or organisations to monitor issues that affect them, with the purpose of driving change. Initiated by civil society, governments, international institutions and the private sector, this type of data is collected and reported by citizens as direct representatives of their own perspectives and lived experiences, to either complement or refute 'official' data. The use of citizen-generated data in the monitoring of governments' 2030 Agenda commitments offers a potential opportunity for widespread engagement of citizens, including children and young people, in assessing progress towards the achievement of the Goals, and through this, fulfilling their own rights to participation in decision-making aligned with governance targets in Goal 16. Guidance from the United Nations Development Group to UN Country Teams states that 'Serious consideration should also be given to going beyond governance as usual and pursuing participatory-based monitoring opportunities'.³⁶ Particularly in the case of governance commitments, where government-led reporting may be problematic, the inclusion of well-documented citizen-generated data is likely to enhance accountability.

Including civil society data in the monitoring and review of the 2030 Agenda will require a structured approach to integrating the multiple and varied data that currently exist. Civil society data is often sector-specific and uncoordinated across issues, which presents challenges for its use in monitoring the SDGs.³⁷ Government hosting of civil society data on open data portals may help to overcome disadvantages such as a lack of standardised data collection, methodological rigour, sustainability or accessibility to broad audience.³⁸ If coordinated well, the inclusion of civil society data may help to overcome obstacles and challenges of official data collection, as well, such as cost, availability of existing measurements and indicators and limited disaggregation. Collaboration between government and civil society, therefore, may help to develop a more robust and complete picture of progress towards achieving the SDGs.

³⁵ Plan International (2015) [The Unfinished Business of Girls Rights](#).

³⁶ UNDG (2015) [Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Interim Reference Guide to UN Country Teams](#), United Nations Development Group, 7 October 2015, p 70.

³⁷ Higgins, K. and Cornforth, J. (2015) [Civil society and SDG monitoring: harnessing civil society and citizen-generated data](#), DataShift.

³⁸ [DataShift](#), an initiative of CIVICUS, has conducted a case study of the Buenos Aires Government's Innovation and Open Government Lab, including opportunities and challenges: Wilson, C. and Rahman, Z., [Citizen-generated data and governments: towards a collaborative model](#), DataShift.

Data Revolution

Leveraging the potential of new technologies for data collection and analysis will be an important part of monitoring sustainable development, including monitoring by young people. If this is going to be a genuine data revolution, however, all members of our societies should have access to the wealth of information available, and citizens should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to use this data to hold governments accountable for their commitments to sustainable development for all.³⁹ The current data revolution, ‘a ferment of experimentation, innovation and adaptation to the new world of data’,⁴⁰ offers an opportunity to ensure that the experiences of the most marginalised and disadvantaged are represented more fully and accurately than ever before. Harnessing the potential of the data revolution requires governments, civil society and the private sector to work together towards the improvement of data collection (including harmonisation between sources), timely and accessible dissemination of results and the use of accurate and complete data for implementing the SDGs on the basis of accountability for human rights obligations and the commitment to ‘leave no one behind’.⁴¹

As ‘critical agents of change’, young people have an important role in generating, using and analysing data on key issues that affect their lives.⁴² In order to hold governments accountable for their development commitments, however, young people need the skills to access and use this information. On-going work seeking to mobilise, equip and empower young people has revealed many **lessons for accountability** at local, national and global levels: a) stakeholders require capacity building to generate and use data; b) investment is needed to support close collaborations between data specialists and young leaders to harness the unique ways young people are generating data; c) the intersection of official data with the lived experiences of citizens, particularly the most marginalised, is an important site for understanding; d) development specialists, statisticians and civil society should be involved in encouraging and empowering young people to record, collect and work with community data; e) the generation of real-time data contributes to young people’s ability to monitor implementation and communicate findings as an effective and immediate method of social accountability; f) technical and financial support is required to strengthen and scale existing social accountability models; g) disaggregated data is essential to ensure the right data is available to make the right decisions for a sustainable future.⁴³

Young People as ‘Critical Agents of Change’

Young people **are already involved** in monitoring the realisation of their rights in many countries,⁴⁴ and many have demonstrated their willingness and capacity to contribute to good governance in examples throughout the world.⁴⁵ At the BYND 2015 Global Youth Summit in San José, young people declared that they ‘should be included as full partners in the post-2015 process and preserve the world we want for the youth of tomorrow’.⁴⁶ It is time to build on these calls to action to ensure that we have robust strategies for measuring the 2030 Agenda. Ultimately, the achievement of the 2030 Agenda requires the inclusion and participation of all members of our society to monitor and implement sustainable development. Young people’s insights, energy and innovations are indispensable to the achievement of this collective vision.

³⁹ Higgins and Cornforth (2015).

⁴⁰ Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development (2014) [A World that Counts: Mobilising the Data Revolution for Sustainable Development](#), p 2.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Mobile data collection platforms, such as those used during the Ebola crisis, are already creating opportunities to understand experiences of services at multiple levels of society in real time. Leveraging mobile technologies, for example, may offer considerable opportunities for accessing information about young people’s views and experiences that are not captured by existing ‘official data’ sources.

⁴³ Restless Development (2014) [The Data Revolution: Our Recommendations](#), which was originally submitted to the UN Secretary General’s Independent Expert Advisory Panel on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, October 2014.

⁴⁴ See for example: [AEGEE/European Students’ Forum Election Observation](#), an independent European youth initiative organising Election Observation Missions in Europe, engaging mission coordinators aged 18-35.

⁴⁵ See for example: Lundy, L., Orr, K., Marshall, C. (2015) ‘Towards better investment in the rights of the child: the views of children’, Plan International and Eurochild, a report capturing the views of nearly 2,700 children and young people in 71 countries about their views on public expenditure, available at: <http://www.childrightsconnect.org/govtspendingsurvey/>.

⁴⁶ BYND 2015 [2013 Costa Rica Declaration](#), ITU and Presidencia, República de Costa Rica, representing the views of 700 attendees and 3,000 more online participants in the BYND 2015 Global Youth Summit, Costa Rica, 9-11 September 2013.

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