EQUITY FOCUS AND GENDER-RESPONSIVENESS: BLIND SPOTS IN VNR REPORTING CASE STUDY: EASTERN EUROPE AND CIS COUNTRIES

Svetlana Negroustoueva, EvalGender+[1] Co-chair, IDEV-African Development Bank;
Antonina Rishko-Porcescu, EvalYouth Secretary, EvalYouth ECA Co-Chair.

Abstract

Human rights, gender equality and the commitment to "leaving no one behind" are core principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, launched in 2015. In 2018, 46 countries committed to presenting their voluntarily national reviews (VNRs) against SDGs at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF).

EvalGender+, in partnership with EvalSDGs and IIED, examined the extent to which gender consideration and equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluative evidence had been incorporated into VNR reports. Global-level findings and recommendations were published in February 2019[2]. This article presents results of the regional – based analysis of VNRs for fourteen countries in Europe and CIS.

The importance of evaluation in SDGs was highlighted in a few reports, primarily referencing various assessments. The review found extensive use of sex-disaggregated data, however evaluative and gender-responsive evidence was lacking. Although SDGs implementation plans included priority objectives and interventions, a need for gender-responsible evaluative evidence was not incorporated into future implementation plans. The "Leave no one behind principle" was addressed implicitly without explicit reference to the SDG principle.

EvalGender+ invites evaluation community to conduct similar analysis and use findings to advocate for gender-equality and equity-focused evaluation for SDGs. Agencies in charge of VNRs are strongly encouraged to engage with VOPEs and gender machineries, to integrate the principles of gender equality and "Leaving no one behind" for Agenda 2030.

In 2018, EvalGender+ joined forces with the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and EvalSDG to examine the extent to which equity-focused and gender-responsive (EFGR) evaluative evidence had been incorporated in 46 (of the 102) Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) presented at the 2018 HLPF[1]. The review built on IIED/EvalSDG work in 2016[3] and 2017[4]. The 2018 review of the VNRs included the following fourteen countries (of 46): Albania, Andorra, Armenia (CIS), Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and Switzerland. All VNR reports were in English or two languages (Switzerland and Spain), except Andorra (French).

The EvalGender+ review adapted IIED/EvalSDG methodology with minimum standard criteria of gender inclusion for national VNRs. These standards were developed by an expert group of the Latin-American and Caribbean Monitoring, Evaluation and Systematization Network (ReLAC), and validated at the National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) Conference and the IDEAS/ReLAC Conference in 2017. The following criteria were used during analysis of secondary VNR qualitative and quantitative data:

> 1) use of 'Evaluation' and 'Gender' related keywords; 2) reference to a governance system for measuring progress towards the SDGs;
> 3) description of a methodological framework for M&E;
> 4) integration of evaluation into SDG follow-up and review systems;
> 5) examples of national frameworks, strategies, policies integrating gender equality and related results;
> 6) evidence of inclusion of marginalized voices (Leave no one behind) in VNRs, and
> 7) evidence of plan(s) for a regular review of SDG progress at the national level, including the role of civil society in those processes.

The following selected findings were relatively consistent across 14 countries, and sub-regions:

Coverage of "gender equality" theme in VNRs is sometimes and partially present: however, the gender-segregated data was presented without deeper analysis.
Gender, economic, geographical equality, and vulnerable groups are included as background information in national policies and strategies. Many indicators are disaggregated by gender, geographical and economic position. For almost all SDGs (except 7, 11-15), the presentation of sex-disaggregated data was provided, including such most common SDGs with sex-disaggregation as 1-6, 8- 10, and 16-17. Cited *examples were:* Creation of a register of sex offenders has been mentioned (SDG 16), as well as Life expectancy (SDG 3) and Employment rates, share in managerial positions and the gender gap in pay (SDG 5).

Selected reports included all sex-disaggregated data in the Annexes, where all priority indicators were illustrated and explained. However, sometimes presentation of sex-disaggregated data was limited to just that, without any analysis. It was used with regard to a number of individual characteristics (gender/sex, age, disability, region, education, etc).

No one left behind principle: the gender perspective
The Leave no one behind principle (LNOB) was primarily addressed implicitly rather than with an explicit reference to the SDG principle. Beyond "gender inequality", a broader example of "inequality" related to income, asset, and "opportunity inequality", as well as "territorial inequality" between different regions in the same country; indicating attention to the LNOB principle.

Explicit use of words "Leaving no one behind" mostly related to children, the elderly, refugees, Roma populations, and people with disabilities. Mentioned in the section "No one left behind" as the explanation of objectives and background, it was rarely connected to a particular SDG or a principle. Findings indicate a variance in terms used to draw attention to LNOB principle: social and economic inclusion, vulnerable, disadvantaged, and socially sensitive groups.

- Discussion of issues affecting "refugees" was a shining example of attention to the LNOB.
- One report included gender-specific objectives, though limited to SDG 5, either regarding Roma women or women with small children. At the same time, such words as marginalized, gender sensitive or gender responsive, gender-based violence, etc. did not find a place in the report.

- Another report contained an extensive discussion of the population with disabilities under SDGs 3-5, 8, 10-11, usually, as a group for whom these issues would be more challenging,
- Attention to the issues of LGBT was minimal.

By and large, the reviews found superficial reference to marginalized groups without an explicit commitment to LNOB, implying a somewhat passive (rather than proactive and deliberate) approach to "leaving no one behind." Exceptions included young people (next generations), mothers of small children and Roma, although in all cases not across all the 'obvious' goals. Reference to those groups was usually in the context of national policies, laws, programs, etc., rather than reporting on progress by drawing on disaggregated data and assessing disparities between groups. Beyond the use of terms "available to everybody", or "not be discriminatory", notable examples include discussion of "disabilities" with respect to accessibility in cities, age, and inter-territorial equality.

Gender-responsive evaluative evidence: more monitoring, less evaluation
The importance of evaluation of SDGs, as distinctly different from monitoring, was mentioned in several reports, however, without detail about methodologies or frameworks. Evidence of using "evaluation" related terminology was notable, although limited. Even when 'monitoring and evaluation' were used together, the subsequent discussion often focused on monitoring using routine or statistical data (some with sex-disaggregated data). There were sector specific examples: monitoring is used with 'planning' and water/environmental planning, and "impact" is used in the context of Environmental Impact Assessments. The notable example of using 'assessment' was illustrated by the Mid-Term Impact Assessment of Latvia's National Development Plan 2020 that also tracks progress toward "Latvia 2030"; as well as individual sectorial needs assessments.

Governance and Use of Evidence
Predictably, national statistical offices were in charge of or heavily involved in SDG monitoring processes, as part of platforms or joint mechanisms. However, beyond that, there was no explicit reference to whether and how SDGs were taken up by M&E bodies, such as supreme audit institutions, or included in national performance M&E systems.
A visible example of the analytical piece, linking the use of M&E data to policy and program development includes:

> *"2012 survey conducted by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) on violence against women showed that every third woman in **Latvia** has experienced partner violence during her lifetime; a police risk assessment questionnaire (for use in calls regarding family conflict, including domestic violence) has been developed and tested. The risk assessment enables police officers to identify better and recognize different forms of domestic violence, and to explain to the victim the various ways in which the violent party can be at a distance."*

Across countries, for many SDGs, examples of priority objectives and interventions were provided. There was rarely an explicit reference to how these interventions and achievements would be evaluated. Although seldom, attention to evaluation and use of evaluative evidence was cited in action planning rather than part of actual reporting. However, attention to and need for gender-responsive evaluative evidence was not included in the plans for the future:

> *"M&E of the actions undertaken is conceived as an essential instrument for expanding and enriching these processes. This interest in evaluation is not only focused on analyzing the final results, but also on understanding and improving the process and context within which these actions are carried out, as well as their scope, relevance, articulation, and continuity. After the Action Plan is completed, an independent evaluation of the Plan will be carried out in 2020, for two reasons. The first is to improve implementation of the 2030 Agenda, collating all of the lessons learned over its two years in the force, in order to adjust the measures, policies, and governance*

> *mechanisms in the future. As part of a second VNR, **<u>Spain</u>** will present the outcomes of this Plan, its evaluation and lessons learned, and the new Sustainable Development Strategy."*

Discussion of data related challenges and opportunities did not specify the type of data, and often referred to as "monitoring & reporting" vs. "monitoring & evaluation".

Multi-stakeholders engagement in achieving SDGs
There is a consensus that the 2018 cycle of VNR processes was a stepping stone towards better coordination between stakeholders in measuring and achieving SDGs. In the CIS and primarily European context, there appears to be a limited acknowledgment of the role of VNR processes to bring attention to operationalizing the LNOB principle. While voluntary processes illustrate the national commitment to critical assessments of success and challenges, there appear to be lost opportunities for integrating evaluative evidence related to gender.

Approaches focused on multi-stakeholder engagements to achieve SDGs were noted, however without detailing who should be involved more, what stakeholders were missing, and what they would bring to the table. While often stated that social and economic partners were invited to the SDG -related deliberations, reference to any women's organizations or broadly national women's machineries was missing. Armenia provided an excellent example that other countries can follow with regards to explicit engagement between different types of stakeholders.

> *"National SDG Statistical Platform in **<u>Armenia</u>**, is maintained by the SCA in close cooperation with relevant state agencies, CSOs and the private sector. Dialogue with stakeholders was organized at different levels and formats such as (i) individual talks with representatives from various circles of stakeholders, i.e. Government agencies, community authorities, businesses, civil society organizations, and households; (ii) multi-stakeholder round table discussion; (iii) circulation and discussion of the draft VNR report with interested stakeholders. …… Furthermore, dialogue was essential for ensuring effective translation of SDGs into the local (and sector and stakeholder specific) realities and context and helping stakeholders understand their own and each other's role in implementing SDGs."*

Conclusions and Recommendations
Review found notable use of and reference to both monitoring and evaluation. The importance of SDGs evaluation was highlighted in several reports, primarily referencing various types of assessments. However, more extensive was inclusion of sex-disaggregated data in majority of the reports, albeit without more in-depth analysis. The "Leave no one behind principle" was primarily addressed implicitly (related to children, the elderly, refugees, Roma populations, and people with disabilities) rather than explicitly referencing the SDG principle. Although SDGs implementation plans included priority objectives and interventions, the evaluation of them was omitted. And more important, attention and need for gender-responsible evaluative evidence were not incorporated into future implementation plans.

The following European countries (Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Lichtenstein, Serbia, Turkmenistan) are scheduled to present their VNRs at the 2019 High-Level Political Forum [1]. EvalGender+ encourages the evaluation community to conduct similar analysis and use findings to advocate for gender-equality and equity-focused evaluation for SDGs. Agencies in charge of VNRs are strongly encouraged to engage with VOPEs and gender machineries, to integrate the principles of gender equality and "Leaving no one behind" for Agenda 2030. Likewise, with support from EvalPartners, EvalGender+, European Evaluation Society and Eurasian Alliance of National Evaluation Associations, national VOPEs and gender machineries can become partners in national VNR processes to strengthen attention to the LNOB principle, and specifically, to reporting on SDG 5 and other cross-cutting SDGs.

Svetlana Negroustoueva is a Principal Evaluation Officer at the Independent Evaluation Office of the African Development Bank. Previously, at the Climate Investment Funds (CIF)/World Bank, she managed and quality assured 21evaluation and learning activities. She has over 15 years of cross-sectorial experience with Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning in environment, health, food security, gender and social inclusion. In her work at CIF, Global Environmental Facility, UN and USAID-funded projects she maintained a gender lens to her M&E assignments. Her authored and co-authored work includes 'Advancing towards SDGs with Gender-responsive Evaluations and Professional Evaluation Associations" in UN Women's Transform magazine; "Gender as a Safeguard – The Human Rights Approach" under ECG Evaluation Cooperation Group; Haiti Gender Analysis, Feminist Evaluation on Better Evaluation platform; and"Compendium of Gender Equality and HIV Indicators". Svetlana is a Co-chair of EvalGender+ and an active member of the American Evaluation Association (AEA). She holds a Masters degree from the University of Texas, USA, and degree in Public Administration from Moscow State University in Russia.

Antonina Rishko-Porcescu, is an independent M&E specialist with strong knowledge of quantitative research methods and passion for data visualization. Antonina has professional experience in both social research and M&E. She worked with R.Akhmetov Foundation for Development of Ukraine, International Renaissance Foundation, FINEP – Forum for International development+planning, Centre of Migration research (Warsaw University), Centre for the urban history of East Central Europe, Save the Children, UNFPA. The projects are, mainly, connected to evaluation of social sphere, youth engagement, community development, including migrants' and minorities' communities. She is a secretary of global network of young and emerging evaluators EvalYouth, and founder of regional chapter EvalYouth Eastern Europe, Central Asia and South Caucasus, Board member of The Eurasian Alliance of National Evaluation Associations.

[1]https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=4444
[2]http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/17497IIED.pdf
[3] Simon B *et al.* (2017) Evaluation: a missed opportunity in the SDGs' first set of Voluntary National Reviews. IIED, London.http://pubs.iied.org/17423IIED
[4] Meyer W *et al.* (2018) VNR reporting needs evaluation: a call for global guidance and national action. IIED, London.http://pubs.iied.org/17446IIED