Equity focus and gender-responsiveness: shedding a light on critical blind spots for transformative change: Africa and beyond[1]

Human rights, gender equality and the commitment to "leaving no one behind" are core principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), launched in 2015. Three years after the launch of 2030 Agenda, in 2018 44 countries committed to presenting their voluntarily national reviews (VNRs) on implementation and progress at the High-Level Political Forum. EvalGender+, in partnership with EvalSDGs and IIED, examined the extent to which equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluative evidence has been incorporated into VNRs. This article presents some preliminary results of the integration of equity and gender equality issue in the VNR reports, which will be further expanded in forthcoming reports and dissemination products. The briefing provides selected key lessons from regional – based analysis of the VNR reports, for eight countries in Africa. Overall, there is a lack of evaluative evidence, and gender-responsive evidence in particular. Challenges in addressing gender inequality are acknowledged, including broader challenges with data use for policy development towards gender equality.

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Human rights, gender equality and the commitment to "leaving no one behind" are core principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda), underpinning efforts to prevent conflict, overcome divisions and address the root causes of inequities, discrimination and unfair power relations. Integrating an equity and gender equality perspective into the implementation and for the SDG follow-up and review processes is therefore crucial for ensuring alignment with those principles.

The 2030 Agenda was adopted in 2015. Within three years, between 2015 and 2018 102 countries presented their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) against SDGs at the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). In 2018, EvalGender+ joined forces with the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and EvalSDG and, building on IIED/EvalSDG work in 2016[3] and 2017[4] VNR reviews , examined the extent to which equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluative evidence had been incorporated in 44 (of the 102) VNRs presented at the 2018 HLPF . Among the 44, eight countries in Africa were included: Benin, Cabo Verde, Guinea (Conakry), Mali, Namibia, Niger, Senegal, Togo.

The EvalGender+ review adapted the methodology used by IIED/EvalSDG in 2016 and 2017. Dimensions from a rapid check of minimum standards in gender inclusion for national VNRs, were incorporated in the original review template. These minimum standards were developed by an expert group at the Latin-American and Caribbean Monitoring, Evaluation and Systematization Network (ReLAC), and validated at the National Evaluation Capacities (NEC) Conference and at the workshop "Gender and SDGs" at the IDEAS/ReLAC Conference in 2017.

> *"Despite selected reference to sex-disaggregated monitoring data, evaluation receives little attention, and evaluative evidence, particularly related to equity and gender equality, is not commonly used to inform policymakers in the Voluntary National Review processes reviewed".*

Data were collected using quantitative and qualitative methodologies, focusing on seven criteria: 1) use of Evaluation and Gender related keywords in the VNRs; 2) mention of a reporting system for measuring progress towards the SDGs; 3) description of a methodological framework for M&E; 4) evidence that evaluation is integrated into follow-up and review systems and into the general governance system; 5) evidence that gender-responsive and equity-focused evaluative evidence is integrated into follow-up and review systems and into general governance systems; 6) evidence that gender equality is incorporated in national policies and systems; and 7) evidence that marginalized voices (Leave no one behind) are included in the voluntary national reviews. Regional teams conducted the assessment against the criteria.

The findings were relatively consistent across regions. This facilitated drawing conclusions and validating recommendations of global nature, ▶▶

▶ which would still be applicable regionally and locally. The following are selected findings from the regional review of the eight African countries:

- Selected countries (Namibia and Togo) highlighted challenges in achieving national priorities in the VNR executive summary, including safe land tenure rights, decentralization, digitalising the economy, setting up a national statistical system, strengthening human-resource capacity and financing the economy.

- Gender equality is highlighted in some SDG reports beyond related to SDG 5, for example SDGs 3, 4, 10, 15. For example, Senegal and Benin each highlighted gender equality in three SDGs, with both referencing GE in SDG 2 on Food security (Zero Hunger), Senegal mentioned elements related to gender equality in the reports of SDGs 11 and 13.

- Gender equality is highlighted in some SDG reports beyond the one related to SDG 5, such as in the reports about SDGs 3, 4, 10, 15. For example, Senegal and Benin each highlighted gender equality in three SDGs. Senegal referenced GE in SDG2 on food security (Zero Hunger) and reports of SDG 11 and 13.

- Reporting against gender-sensitive targets, including SDG 5, tends to rely on 'proxy' indicators, rather than on the SDG target indicators; reporting against SDG 5 drew on indicators relevant to other goals, which could be considered as a sign of mainstreaming the concept of gender equality. Namibia partially reported on the two SDG 5 related indicators belonging to target 5.5[5] ", whereas no other SDG indicators were disaggregated in the reporting. Other sex-disaggregated indicators used in reporting were not in fact SDG indicators. Furthermore, worth noting,

is the reference of SDG 3.3.2[6] under progress reporting for SDG 5.

- Primarily, VNR reports highlighted gender disparities, drawing on disaggregated data. Understandably, the easiest sex-disaggregated SDG indicators were consistently on employment, education and the proportion of women in leadership positions. Some reports tended to highlight specific women-focused activities/projects/interventions, such as highlighting vocational training and drawing on disaggregated data on poverty and employment. For example, Mali reported on proportions of jobs by (private and public) sector taken up by women and men, while the report from Guinea (Conakry) disaggregated all the baseline indicators.

- A limited number of countries integrated or reported on elements of gender-responsive assessment or gender analysis. In many cases, reports included annexes with sex-disaggregated data but without relevant analysis in the body of the report itself. No explicit gender responsive evaluative evidence was found.

- Some reports acknowledge the lack of disaggregated data, overall lack of data including evaluative evidence. For example, while not specific to gender, Namibia VNR report, as part of the content under SDG 17, acknowledges the need for good data to inform evidence-based policy, planning, decision-making, monitoring, evaluation and reporting of national development plans, programs and projects at every level.

- Reference to treaties around Gender Equality was mentioned by three countries (Cabo Verde, Namibia ▶▶

▶ and Senegal). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was the most cited, followed by the Beijing Platform, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of women, and selected national legislation.

■ Many reports highlight marginalised groups. For instance, the Benin VNR reports on social protection, social safety nets, legislation and balanced specialisation (decentralisation); Cabo Verde's Single Social Registry quotes their permanent instrument for mapping vulnerable families and monitoring the situation of families. However, none of the reports demonstrates how the perspectives from those groups were included during the development of VNR reports.

■ Collaborative approaches to VNR processes were referenced in several countries, and included the use of existing platforms. They often involved national multi-sectorial ministerial representation, Statistical offices and, sometimes, civil society, as well as the UN agencies. Benin included two representatives of women's organisations in the VNR steering committees to integrate the SDGs into public policies. The rest of the reports do not indicate the involvement of women-led or women-focused institutions in shaping how the countries will seek to achieve the SDGs.

■ Engagement of the Volunteer Organizations for Professional Evaluation (VOPEs) or other Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)-related professional communities in the VNR processes was not cited in any of the reports.

■ Lastly, there appeared to be a limited recognition of importance of MEL, but recognition of MEL related capacity gaps.

The overarching conclusion is that despite selected reference to sex-disaggregated monitoring data, evaluation receives little attention, and evaluative evidence, particularly related to equity and gender equality, is not commonly used to inform policymakers in the VNR processes reviewed. A gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offers an opportunity for transformative change. Bringing evaluative evidence on gender equality and equity needs to be strengthened and/or established, to go beyond the use of disaggregated data. Comprehensive qualitative and quantitative evidence is necessary to indicate the status of progress, and to understand the reasons behind the successes and the challenges in achieving gender equality in the SDG era and beyond.

The following African countries are supposed to present their VNRs in 2019: Ghana, Lesotho, Mauritania, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Tunisia, and United Republic of Tanzania[7]. Findings from this analysis can be used regionally and further 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+, African Gender Development and Evaluation Network (AGDEN), and others, VOPEs and gender machineries can become ▶▶

▶ partners in country VNR processes to strengthen attention to the principle of leaving no one behind, and specifically, to strengthen comprehensive reporting on SDG 5 and other cross-cutting SDGs.

The selected findings and conclusions above are intended to illustrate how equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluative evidence has been incorporated in 2018 VNRs in African countries. The findings, conclusions and recommendations of global nature have been published by IIED and EvalGender+, with EvalsDGs in February 2019[8]. eVALU

Endnotes

1. This paper is based on an upcoming draft to be published by IIED on Gender Equality in the 2018 VNRs.

2. EvalGender+, the global partnership to promote the demand, supply and use of Equity-Focused and Gender-Responsive Evaluations.

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

5. SDG5 target 5.5 aims to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life

6. SDG3. Indicator 3. 3.2 "Tuberculosis incidence per 1,000 population"

7. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=4444

8. http://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/17497IIED.pdf

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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

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Authors' profile

Chloé Naneix, a Morocco-based emerging evaluator, has almost five years of experience as an independent evaluation consultant, combined with 8 years in project management. A passionate gender advocate, she strives to place gender equity at the center of her evaluation practice. She has designed and conducted eleven project reviews in the fields of women empowerment, youth employability, green economy and social entrepreneurship. Most recently, she has been working on developing a Gender Analysis concept for a Swiss NGO supporting women's organizations in the MENA region and conducted a pilot study with a youth development project in Morocco. She is a member of the Moroccan Evaluation Association (AME), AEA, RFE-e, and EvalYouth EvalMena Chapter.

Svetlana Negroustoueva recently joined AfDB's Independent Evaluation Office as a Principal Evaluation Officer. Previously, as an M&E and Learning expert at the Climate Investment Funds (CIF)/World Bank, she managed and quality assured 21 evaluation and learning activities. She has over 15 years of experience with MEL and research for various implementing entities, across such areas as environment, health, food security and social inclusion. Through her work for CIF, Global Environmental Facility, UN and USAID-funded projects she maintained a gender lense 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 in Public Affairs from the University of Texas, USA.