



# KEY ASKS

2023 • SDG National Reviews

## BUSINESS, CHILDREN AND THE SDGs

In the 2030 Agenda, we have a holistic framework that brings together the global economic, environmental and development agendas for the first time. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that (i) response and recover efforts cannot be separated from the SDGs; and that (ii) we need stronger commitments and cooperation between public and private sectors. The Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) process led by governments provides an important platform to leverage collaboration and alignment across sectors to maximize impact for children and young people.

To make an accurate assessment of the progress made on the SDGs for children, it is crucial to capture the contribution and impact of the private sector. UNICEF strongly believes that the private sector is key to the realisation and implementation of the SDGs for every child, and that engagement and transparency are the enablers for private and public sector actors to work together. Therefore, UNICEF continues to work in collaboration with strategic partners to highlight and increase the importance of the private sector for the SDGs and children.



### KEY ASKS

UNICEF encourages the following actions to improve understanding of private sector's impact on children, adolescents and youth and endeavours to support businesses and governments on these actions:

- 1. Engage the private sector for children and children on the private sector at every step of SDGs implementation.** When developing and monitoring national SDG plans, it is crucial to engage with all stakeholders including the private sector. By including business in these discussions at every stage, policy actors will facilitate alignment of priorities and understand what specific contributions major industries can make at national level and for children specifically. While there has been an encouraging trend over the years, with a steady proportion of countries consulting the private sector in reviewing the national strategy and progress on the SDGs, the alignment of business with children remains limited. As Member States recognise the importance of businesses in the realisation of the SDGs and capture their contribution as part of the VNR process, ensuring that the direct and indirect impact of businesses on children and the SDGs is included will be central. Failing to do that will inevitably maintain the status quo with an incomplete picture of the progress on the goals at the national level. In the same vein, children's voices regarding the private sector's role and impact on the SDGs should also be encouraged, heard, and captured. This can be done through consultations (on and/or offline), surveys, focus group discussions, etc.
- 2. Ensure representation of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the VNR process.** Mainstreaming the SDG agenda among smaller business entities remains a challenge faced by many countries. Larger firms have been better placed to invest in that space and contribute to the VNR process. To encourage participation of businesses of all sizes, supply chain intervention by sector is pivotal. Smaller firms' participation would also ensure to balance the concentration of business intervention in industrial regions and help reach the furthest left behind. Governments should also identify incentives for companies, from SMEs to Multinational Corporations (MNCs), to join multi stakeholder platforms and other mechanisms established to monitor, report, and follow up on the SDGs. Depending on the context and the industry, different business imperatives can be identified including on the need to align business strategy with national priorities, strengthening licence to operate and building resilient business models.
- 3. Facilitate transparency and the disclosure of private sector contributions to the SDGs and children.** Children and youth are woven into Agenda 2030 in many ways. Several of the goals focus on children and youth – the well-being and healthy development of children and youth are essential to achievement of the overall agenda. Policy actors can support private sector reporting practices by different means such as adopting regulatory mandatory reporting requirements, providing guidelines, and establishing business platforms. So far, the private sector has focused primarily on their positive contribution to the SDGs, often ignoring the negative impact on children that should be mitigated and stopped. Raising

awareness on the negative impact will help corporates put in place measures to stop and mitigate such impact.

- 4. Establish multi-stakeholder platforms for effective collaboration across the private sector, with youth communities and the public sector.** Dialogue and information sharing across and within sectors should be undertaken on the implementation of the SDGs to accelerate their realisation. Across the world, platforms and mechanisms are emerging that strengthen and increase stakeholder engagement as demonstrated again in the 2021 VNRs. However, while formal arrangements for effective stakeholder engagement are essential in ensuring a whole-of-society approach, mechanisms to engage stakeholders in the VNR process are rarely described in detail. More attention to stakeholder engagement practices, including with youth groups, would enable a better assessment of its impact and quality. Particular attention on the representation of different groups in multi-stakeholder platforms should also be given. Reporting on institutionalised mechanisms and establishing stakeholder engagement plans that include methods for engaging different groups can help achieve clarity on countries' long-term approaches to developing an inclusive SDG planning, implementation, and monitoring process.
- 5. Develop a measurement and monitoring tool to track private sector contributions to the SDGs and children.** As is the case in the public sector, keeping track of contribution by private companies is essential to ensure progress and implementation of the SDGs for children. The data businesses disclose through their sustainability reporting practices constitutes a good source of information at the national level, which can help policy actors understand the contribution to specific areas within industries and sectors on children.



### Concrete Examples & Good Practices

For example, the second VNR presented by the Government of **Colombia** in 2018 used corporate sustainability data released by Colombian companies to assess business contributions and impacts on key topics. This was the first time a government aggregated sustainability reporting data at the national level to inform its VNR. Such tool will help systematise business's contribution to the SDGs and should include indicators on children and youth.

Another example is the 2017 VNR from **Nigeria** in which the Government developed the 'SDG Reporting Tool', a localised instrument designed to help companies identify, prioritise, and report their contributions to achieving the SDGs. Developing the tool became crucial since there was previously no central unit for the private sector to report SDG-related activities to the Nigerian Government. The tool also serves the need of businesses to carry out reporting by themselves and to demonstrate to the public and other stakeholders what they are doing regarding the SDGs.<sup>1</sup>

In the 2022 VNR presentations, the private sector was cited as an important stakeholder by various governments. For example, El Salvador implemented a welfare strategy that includes specific recovery measures through supporting microenterprises and small businesses. The Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka conducted a mapping exercise of 150 companies across 10 sectors with the aim of understanding the extent of private sector involvement in SDG activities. In Sudan the government established the Investment and Private Sector Development Agency (IPSDA) as a one-stop government institution to promote the private sector. Numerous countries, Andorra, Argentina, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Jamaica, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Switzerland, Togo, United Arab Emirates and Uruguay flagged the work of private sector companies in integrating the SDGs into corporate policies and included examples of good practices. Finally, in Jamaica and Lesotho, vulnerable groups including children, the elderly and persons with disabilities received food packages with the support of the private sector.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [NIGERIA: Engaging the Private Sector in the Voluntary National Review](#)

<sup>2</sup> <https://hlpf.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/VNR%202022%20Synthesis%20Report.pdf>