

### Keywords:

Leave no one behind, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), energy access, informal settlements, fishing

## OVERVIEW

### IIED Shaping Sustainable Markets Group

#### Project name:

Leave no one behind: assessing sector policy choices

#### Project leader:

Essam Yassin Mohammed

#### Time frame:

1 April 2016 – 31 December 2016

#### Budget:

£183,500

#### Objective:

To find out what it will take to turn the promise to 'leave no one behind' in the Sustainable Development Goals from aspiration to action, in three specific policy sectors: fisheries, energy access and urban development.

## PROJECT SUMMARY

'Leave no one behind' (LNOB) is the rallying cry of the SDGs. Through this project, IIED is working with partners in Asia and Africa to ask what the words mean to different groups and what action is needed to turn them from rhetoric to reality. In Southeast Asia, our case studies show how low-income urban groups already recognise the need to be inclusive and use different tools and approaches to make sure no one in their community is left behind. In Tanzania, our analysis of public finance data offers a stark reminder that politics and money still favour the few over the many. And in Bangladesh, our exploration of a fisheries value chain reveals that it is viable and commercially valuable, but deeply inequitable and socially unjust.

## CHANGE IN ACTION

Much of the rhetoric for LNOB in the context of the SDGs refers to finishing the work of the MDGs and 'getting to zero' by ending poverty in ways that protect the environment. Over the past 15 years the number of people living in extreme poverty has halved; but despite an overall reduction in poverty, inequalities have increased.

# Leave no one behind: from ambition to action

## A first look at what it will take to keep the SDG promise

At the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) lies a promise to 'leave no one behind'. These words remind us that from Tokyo to Timbuktu, everyone deserves the chance to thrive and prosper. But can this noble ambition be turned into tangible action?

This is what we have begun to explore at IIED, focusing our efforts on three specific groups at risk of being left behind: marginalised people living in informal settlements (including people with disabilities), the energy poor and small-scale fishers.

### A communal duty of care

In Southeast Asia, we teamed up with partners to find out what 'leave no one behind' means to low-income urban groups. What we found was that these communities have long recognised a duty of care to all community members and have systems in place to leave no one behind. For example, many join savings groups and thus gain access to livelihood loans and small grants to cover essentials such as school uniform, medicines or coping with lost wages after an accident.

Where communities are provided with external resources, they have had a much broader impact. For example, the Bang Bua community of Bangkok built 'central homes' as part of their government-funded upgrading scheme. These were specifically for community members that were otherwise unable to participate in the programme because they were elderly or disabled. The programme also included rental units for those ineligible to join the upgrading scheme because

they did not own their own homes, and the renters then cared for the elderly and disabled. This meant every community member could be included.

Organised low-income groups in Southeast Asia know who needs their support within the community, and how best to give it to them. They are natural allies in the global effort to leave no one behind. And if we are to realise the SDG promise at scale, donors, governments and NGOs must work with these groups and support what they are already doing.

### Money and power

Tanzania has regularly hit the headlines in recent years, with the discovery of off- and on-shore gas. The news fuelled hopes of reliable energy for all, even the most remote homes. But plans for gas focus on big power plants connected to the grid. That is all very well for the fifth of Tanzanians with access to the national grid, many of whom live in Dar es Salaam. But the millions of Tanzanians who live in rural areas, where grid extension is unaffordable or impractical, will be left out of the gas equation. So are these energy poor being catered for elsewhere?

To answer that question, our project looked at government energy spending in Tanzania. Our findings are stark: from 2010 to 2017, 98 per cent (US\$2 billion) of public energy finance went to big infrastructure projects designed to serve or extend the grid. And just two per cent (US\$40 million) went to decentralised energy projects serving the rural poor. Donors have given a higher priority to decentralised energy,

The MDGs have been criticised for targeting those easiest to reach first. The LNOB agenda is an attempt to focus sustainable development efforts on the poorest and most marginalised groups.

IIED's research explored how the SDGs can address the causes of social exclusion and marginalisation at the same time as reducing environmental stress — focusing on coastal fishing communities, access to energy, and marginalised people living in urban areas.

## KEY LESSONS LEARNT & INNOVATIONS

- Organised groups of the urban poor in Southeast Asia recognise a duty of care to all members of their community and see the inclusion of all as essential to social cohesion. But with government and donor support, their reach could be scaled up through existing community mechanisms to target many more people.
- The imbalance in public energy spending in Tanzania is stark: 98 per cent of the national energy budget goes to large-scale infrastructure projects that will do little for almost 70 per cent of the population living in rural areas, where grid extension is often unaffordable or impractical. Leaving no one behind in this context must begin with a major change in the direction of public finance flows.
- The hilsa fisheries value chain in Bangladesh is vibrant, viable and commercially valuable. But it is also incredibly unfair: fishers at the bottom of the chain take home up to 20 times less than exporters at the top. Leaving no one behind in this context means unblocking bottlenecks that inhibit profitability for small-scale fishers; this includes redefining rigid local power structures by promoting financial inclusion and increased investment in market infrastructure.

## PARTNERS' VIEW

*The concept of 'leave no one behind' offers an opportunity to think beyond the linear headcount of poverty reduction by taking into account some systemic constraints poor people face, including power imbalances, institutional biases and access to services. Understanding and addressing complexity in reaching those furthest behind is critical in realising this big ambition.*

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This research was funded by UK aid from the UK Government, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the UK Government.



Fishers collecting the day's catch, Bangladesh.

Espen Raenussen/PANOS

committing US\$173 million between 2008 and 2021 to decentralised energy (nearly 11 per cent of their overall energy spend). Nevertheless, the World Bank estimates that just to provide everyone with basic access to energy (such as a low-capacity solar home system) would require an investment of US\$425 million a year until 2030.

## Fishy value chains

For several years, IIED has worked in the Lower Meghna Basin in Bangladesh to improve the sustainability of hilsa fisheries and the livelihoods that depend on them. Now we are using value chain analysis to spot potential bottlenecks and power imbalances in the hilsa supply chain.

We are finding that the hilsa chain is vibrant and commercially viable. But it is also incredibly unfair. Some businesses, such as exporters, are making big money — around two million taka (US\$25,000) a year. But very little of this gets back to the fishers, whose average yearly income only just tops US\$1,000 and is as much as 40 per cent lower than the national average.

The problem is that for many fishers, the money that comes in from selling fish does not even cover the cost of catching them, so they are perpetually in debt. Between 40–60 per cent of fishers need loans to operate, but have no access to suitable and affordable financial products — a key bottleneck in the value chain. They resort to borrowing from moneylenders, and are obliged to hand over their entire catch in return for credit. Drastic reforms to the financial sector are needed to ensure fishers have access to appropriate finance.

## Next steps

Our efforts to unpack 'leave no one behind' are just beginning. In Southeast Asia, we are writing up our case studies to showcase community initiatives and identify options for supporting them. In Tanzania, we continue to deepen our understanding of inclusion and energy access by mapping off-grid electricity providers to quantify their geographical and social reach. And in Bangladesh, we are feeding our data and insights on the hilsa value chain into other work with partners to assess how local power structures enhance or impede inclusion.

Overall our experience across the three programmes has shown that ensuring no one is left behind requires a number of responses: analysing the complex social and economic systems which exclude the most vulnerable; identifying the barriers and opportunities for development; and supporting marginalised people to address power imbalances, overcome blockages, and maximise potential. Only this nuanced approach to the complexity of poverty will *really* ensure that no one is left behind.



## Knowledge Products

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges. We support some of the world's most vulnerable people to strengthen their voice in decision making.