

## **SDG Network Scotland's written submission to the UK Parliament's International Development Committee (IDC) inquiry into UK progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

1. SDG Network Scotland has been formed out of a demand to increase working together and partnership on the SDGs across Scotland and beyond. The coalition is here to build awareness and engagement across civil society and with business and government. Where possible, it will support the implementation of the SDGs in Scotland and aims to ensure that the voices of those committed to sustainability are heard by key decision makers.
2. This submission has been coordinated by SDG Network Scotland and is supported by:

COPE Scotland, Corra Foundation, EAUC, Gaia Education, Glasgow Caledonian University, International Development Education Alliance Scotland, International Presentation Association, International Voluntary Service, Keep Scotland Beautiful, Learning for Sustainability Scotland, Leith Community Crops in Pots, One Stone Advisors Ltd, Sciennes Primary School, Scotland's International Development Alliance, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations, Scottish Environment LINK, Scottish Human Rights Commission, Scottish Youth Parliament, Soroptimist International Great Britain and Ireland, TBL Services, Transition Edinburgh, Transition St Andrews, UN House Scotland, Urban Roots, Alec Wersun, Bruce Ryan, Chris Mackie, Colin Curtis, Delfina Zagarazú, Gordon Branston, Hannah Salome, Paul Bradley.

### **Summary of submission to IDC inquiry into UK progress on the Sustainable Development Goals**

3. The UK needs a National Implementation Plan to deliver the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. For the pace of progress to increase, governments, civil society organisations, businesses and communities must work together. That much is obvious, but it is impossible to do so without a clear and supported plan that takes into account the roles of major stakeholders and those of the devolved nations in achieving the SDGs.

4. There needs to be leadership from the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Office to ensure the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the “Leave No One Behind within planetary boundaries” principle are enshrined across Government, not simply sitting with the UK’s Department for International Development. This might be a global agenda, but it is a national and local one too, and one that cuts across all Government departments.
5. Scotland is moving in the right direction in this regard. Since the alignment of the SDGs to Scotland’s National Performance Framework, the ability for major stakeholders, including civil society, to work collaboratively with Scottish Government on the SDGs has improved greatly with a centrally located team within Scottish Government leading on domestic implementation. This should serve as inspiration to a wider UK approach. Wales has also coordinated an integrated approach.
6. The UK Voluntary National Review (VNR) should not just be the product of Government or an account of Government activity; it is a national review that requires all sections of society to be engaged with the theory and practice of sustainable development. The UK VNR should be used as the perfect opportunity to start a conversation with citizens and organisations to build greater engagement and action around the SDGs and add to the existing movement on sustainable development.
7. The limited engagement process undertaken by the UK Government has so far failed to take advantage of the VNR by not building an inclusive and participative process that could drive engagement and action. We recommend for future VNRs that the UK Government examine the collaborative partnerships forming in Scotland that are currently being facilitated by SDG Network Scotland and the Scottish Government. At a UK level, UKSSD is also supporting collaborative change.

## **DFID’s role in leading UK Implementation of the SDGs**

6. Given the holistic nature of the 2030 Agenda, and the interconnected nature of all 17 SDGs, their implementation must be approached as a cross-government priority. This means leadership at Prime Ministerial level and coordination through the Cabinet Office is fundamental in order to make sure all UK Government departments uphold their responsibility to implement the SDGs. It means that the SDGs require a systemic approach including policy coherent development and recognising the holistic nature of sustainable development.
7. The Department for International Development (DFID) plays a crucial role in the implementation of SDGs internationally, but it is not in the Department’s remit to secure such a comprehensive approach to domestic implementation. DFID is not responsible for any of the 169 domestically applicable targets, nor in ensuring that different government departments work towards better policy coherence for devising a sustainable blueprint for the UK. Actions to reduce poverty, advance social equity and ensure environmental protection fall outside DFID’s remit.
8. Although DFID can support other departments with its knowledge and expertise, there needs to be leadership from the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Office to ensure the Leave No One Behind principle is enshrined across Government.
9. DFID should be focused on its overarching objective to reduce poverty in developing countries, as outlined by International Development Act 2002. In line with the Act, DFID should focus on ‘furthering sustainable development in one or more countries outside the UK’, rather than coordinating UK domestic SDG implementation.

10. A change has recently been made in Scotland with the Scottish Government's refresh of Scotland's National Performance Framework (NPF). Since the alignment of the SDGs to Scotland's NPF, the abilities of civil society and other major stakeholders to work collaboratively with Scottish Government on the SDGs has improved greatly by having a centrally located team within Government leading on domestic implementation.
11. Although it is still early days, the focus on SDGs in Scotland's revised National Performance Framework and National Outcomes will be a key pillar of domestic implementation of the Goals and the 'whole-of-society' and 'whole-of-government' approach required to implement them internationally as well as domestically.
12. We are hopeful that the revised Scottish National Outcomes will mainstream the concept of sustainable development and the SDGs framework across all policy areas in Government and provide clarity over the responsibility of Ministers for the delivery of the SDGs. We also see the alignment of the National Outcomes with the SDGs as the starting point for developing and delivering an SDG National Implementation Plan for Scotland, as we have seen in Finland and in Ireland. The UK needs its own National Implementation Plan to deliver the SDGs.

### **Is the process for developing the UK's Voluntary National Review (VNR) consultative and inclusive enough?**

13. The UK's success in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals rests on the UK Government's efforts to ensure an inclusive implementation process. In being a member of the Open Government Partnership, the United Kingdom has committed to seeking a culture of governance that follows the principles of transparency, accountability and participation. These principles should form the basis of any collaboration around SDG implementation and the Voluntary National Review, yet the current process fails to do so.
14. The VNR should not just be the product of Government or an account of Government activity; it is a national review that features all sections of society, although this does not seem to be recognised by the approach taken by the DFID. The UK VNR on SDG performance is more than simply reporting on progress. It provides the perfect opportunity to start a conversation with citizens and organisations on the UK-wide adoption of a rights-based approach to leaving no-one behind, while setting the environmental limits and critical natural thresholds for the use of natural resources.
15. The UK Government's approach to the review has so far provided limited opportunity for the voice of devolved nations and indeed even less for non-governmental stakeholders to come through. SDG Network Scotland and other organisations in Scotland were only made aware of DFID-led VNR stakeholder meetings in London through word of mouth, and there has been no clear, visible communications and engagement plan from the UK Government to mobilise civil society and other major stakeholders across England or the devolved nations.
16. Much of the engagement with Scottish stakeholders has relied on SDG Network Scotland inviting DFID to Scotland as early on in the process as possible and working collaboratively with the Scottish Government to keep up to date with latest developments.
17. That is why SDG Network Scotland set up an open working group in September 2018 to focus on the VNR. The group was joined by staff from Scottish Government, and since November it has been working to consider how Scotland can contribute to the review and use this as a catalyst to widen

involvement. The transparent and collaborative approach taken by the Scottish Government and SDG Network Scotland could inform the wider UK approach on delivering meaningful opportunities for participation.

18. Although DFID have made some efforts to gather case studies through an online portal and a social media campaign on SDG-related New Year's resolutions, these actions do not equate to taking an open government approach in delivering the Voluntary National Review. Furthermore, a lack of communication with key networks and civil society groups across the UK, particularly with devolved nations, meant neither action was as rewarding as they could have been in fostering an open dialogue between different stakeholders on how between now and 2030 to end poverty and hunger once and for all; to fight inequalities; to ensure the lasting protection of the planet; and to create conditions for a strong circular economy and shared prosperity.
19. These actions are a useful starting point, but if the review is to be more than a box ticking exercise, it should be used to drive engagement and action. We would like to see more on how the UK Government will deepen public understanding, engagement and participation over the life-cycle of the Sustainable Development Goals, which is essential in their delivery and the behavioural change that is required across our society.
20. For future VNRs, we recommend that the UK Government should look at the collaborative partnerships forming in Scotland that are currently being facilitated by SDG Network Scotland and the Scottish Government. Although too soon to measure the success of this partnership, setting up an open working group that members of the SDG Network (open to any individual or organisation) can join has allowed us to assess the challenges and plan how Scotland should approach the VNR in an open and collaborative manner with the Scottish Government.
21. In Scotland, all meetings of the VNR Working Group are open for anyone to join and notes, papers and agendas are shared in an open online folder. This approach has allowed us to keep wider civil society and key networks up to date on developments. It has also helped us to collaboratively develop an engagement approach for Scotland's contribution to the UK Voluntary National Review and any Scottish supplementary review.
22. SDG Network Scotland is also liaising with partners in Wales to build links between non-governmental groups in the devolved nations. There is a general consensus that the devolved nations should have their own chapter in the review, allowing for editorial control that allows for meaningful in depth and substantial analysis with the use of a tailored engagement approach suitable for each nation.
23. In December, we received notice that the UK Government had shared their draft proposal for the outline of the review. Regrettably, under this proposal Scotland and the other devolved nations will not have their own chapters. The lack of clarity and flexibility in relation to the agreed contributions of devolved nations has limited the time available to us as civil society to hold a thorough conversation in Scotland that is inclusive and participative.
24. By taking an open approach with the SDG Network's VNR Working Group, civil society and Scottish Government have been able to respond quickly to latest developments and agree a logical way forward in line with the time constraints presented to us. This will consist of two phases: a three-week evidence gathering period through the use of a survey and a subsequent period that will allow for comments on Scotland's draft contribution using open documents. This is a good starting point in our collaboration on the SDGs in Scotland and could inform the wider UK approach.
25. The UN SDGs are part of an aspirational drive to transform the future; they were inspired by third sector inputs as well as from member state governments, and they have already been taken up by

many significant parties in the private sector. The UK Government is currently not enabling the aspirational aspects across the country in a manner that could focus people on what kind of future they wish and how we can collectively achieve this, thereby addressing the need for dialogue, collaboration and bridging divisions within contemporary UK society.

26. The UN SDGs are the current best possible option, and an outcome of collaborative dialogue, but they can be constructively debated and should be seen as a framework that inspires discussion in our educational institutions, our communities and different sectors.

## **Conclusion**

27. Partnership and public engagement lie at the heart of the SDGs. As with all intergovernmental agreements, the success of the SDGs will be determined by the willingness of governments to implement them in a deep and open dialogue with stakeholders and major groups in all its forms. We express our willingness to engage with the UK Government in advancing the bold SDG agenda for people, planet and prosperity.