



“Leave No One Behind” in Middle-Income Countries. A Review of Progress and Policies

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1. Introduction

The principle to “leave no one behind” (LNOB) is a central commitment of the 2030 Agenda. The idea to “leave no one behind” is a key part of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 and 2 regarding ending poverty and hunger in all its forms, and SDG 10 regarding reducing inequality. Moreover, the terms “inclusive”, “for all”, “equitable” and “equitable access” are used repeatedly in the 2030 Agenda in relation to health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), gender (SDG 5), water and sanitation (SDG 6), energy (SDG 7), economic growth (SDG 8), industrialization (SDG 9), cities and human settlements (SDG 11) and, more broadly, societies and institutions (SDG 16).

The objective of this chapter is to identify the main conclusions of recent studies measuring progress in LNOB and to showcase examples of public policies that are or could be most successful at addressing and implementing the principle of “leave no one behind” in middle-income countries. LNOB is of particular relevance in these countries because they have a significant population living in poverty and because the gains of economic progress tend to be unequally distributed.

2. “Leaving No One Behind” What Does It Mean?

However, what does “leaving no one behind” actually mean? A comprehensive UN report, “Leaving no one behind: the imperative of inclusive development” (UN 2016), emphasizes the concept of social inclusion to operationalize LNOB. Social inclusion is understood as a “process of improving the terms of participation in society for people who are disadvantaged on the basis of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status, through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights”. The report’s definition of social inclusion thus explicitly refers to people who are disadvantaged on the basis of certain characteristics that increase the risk of social exclusion, defined as “a state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life” (UN 2016).

Stuart and Samman (2017) provide a more comprehensive interpretation of LNOB and see the concept of LNOB as addressing three dimensions of social progress: (1) addressing discriminatory barriers, which could arise from geography or aspects of social identity, (2) ending extreme poverty (in all its forms) and (3) reducing inequalities. LNOB thus assumes that progress does not automatically trickle down to all groups of society. This implies that existing gaps between the worse- and the better-off will grow without deliberate efforts targeting those left behind (Stuart and Samman 2017).

Following this approach, we also understand LNOB as a comprehensive principle that emphasizes social, economic and political inclusion and that extends beyond an anti-discrimination agenda. This interpretation of the LNOB principle implies that it is important to focus on development policy areas that are key for economic and political participation and on development policies that address areas where people are denied access to public services and are even discriminated against. Key arenas for LNOB-relevant policies are hence education, social protection (including universal health coverage), and the labor market. In all these areas, strong mechanisms of positive feedback are at work that keep people poorly educated, with low skills, bad health and in precarious jobs. In addition, inclusive institutions and corresponding cross-sectoral progress in legal frameworks are required, including constitutional anti-discriminatory provisions (gender, race, disabilities etc.), measures to protect minorities and affirmative action.

Further, we think it would be useful to stress even more than Stuart and Samman (2017) the dynamic element implied by “being left behind”. “Being left behind” implies that the distance between the “left behind” and the rest of society grows larger over time, i.e., that future life chances are impaired. Examples include early childhood disadvantages, not being able to read and write, being in an informal job without training for too long.

Thus, LNOB is of particular importance in middle-income contexts, where inequalities are rampant and where the benefits of development are often unequally shared. In absolute numbers, many of the world’s poor live in middle-income economies. India alone has about 175 million people living below the USD 1.90 (2011 PPP) poverty line (data for 2015¹). By definition, the absolutely deprived will be relatively more deprived than they are in contexts that are poorer on average. This situation provides a rationale to keep engaging with middle-income

¹ www.worldbank.org (accessed on 30 May 2018).

countries through development cooperation with a focus on LNOB. Yet, the European Consensus on Development (EU 2017) does not explicitly mention LNOB or related concepts, such as social inclusion or inclusive development. Instead, it refers to cooperation, policy dialogue and partnerships with middle-income countries on sustainable development and other shared interests.

3. Measuring Progress in “Leaving No-One Behind”

As has become apparent from the above conceptual considerations, even a somewhat narrower understanding of LNOB encompasses many of the SDGs. Counting the SDG indicators that are either directly related to the LNOB principle (such as SDG 1 or SDG 10) or that are to be disaggregated by groups amounts to 82 indicators (of a total of 232 indicators in the SDGs). The number of indicators to be disaggregated by sex is 33, by age groups 24, and by disability status 10 (own calculations). Interestingly, only two indicators are explicitly stated to be disaggregated by ethnic/indigenous status and so are two indicators by migrant status.

This vast number of often-disaggregated indicators presents an important challenge to measuring LNOB progress: the production of (micro) data required to provide the LNOB-relevant indicators.

To overcome this challenge, a couple of authors of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (Greenhill 2017; Stuart et al. 2016) have proposed a LNOB index that measures governments’ readiness for implementing LNOB.

- Data: Have surveys to provide for disaggregated data been conducted recently?
- Policy: Do countries have selected core policies in place: are health services free at the point of access; are there anti-discrimination policies in employment; and can women own land?
- Finance: Do governments meet agreed spending targets in health, education and social protection?

According to this LNOB index, about half (9 out of 17) of the middle-income countries are not on track to implement LNOB and this is despite the fact that the simple cumulative LNOB index is relatively generous in classifying countries as “ready”.

Clearly, however, providing disaggregated data can only be a first step of addressing discrimination and inequality. Having policies in place does not yet mean that they are effectively implemented. Eventually, countries should not only be judged on their “preparedness” or their “intentions” to implement the LNOB principle, but on effectively delivering on it. Further, by not considering LNOB-relevant outcome

variables, including relevant SDG indicators, the LNOB index falls short of providing information on the order of magnitude of the challenges, for example, the presence of majorly disadvantaged and discriminated-against groups and the extent to which exclusion and the resulting inequalities leave them behind.

We hence use the remainder of this section to present some key indicators for measuring LNOB progress—albeit data limitations do not allow us to say much about developments over time. We provide an exemplary selection of indicators (for selected middle-income countries) that also illustrate some of the challenges in measuring progress. We chose indicators that we consider to represent key aspects of the major LNOB policy areas identified in Section 1: Education, social protection (including universal health coverage), and legal frameworks and anti-discrimination policies.

However, before we turn to these indicators, we briefly discuss the progress in extreme poverty reduction in middle-income economies.

3.1. Extreme Poverty in Middle-Income Countries

Many of today's middle-income economies, i.e., middle-income economies as of 2015, have been very successful in combating extreme poverty. Figure 1 shows that all middle-income economies—except Yemen—saw extreme poverty decrease between 2005 and 2015. Yet, progress has been uneven: In East and South-East Asia, China and Vietnam stand out with poverty declines from levels around 20 percent to 5 percent or less. Considerable poverty reduction has also been seen in the middle-income economies of South Asia with India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka starting from very different levels. In Indonesia (and the Philippines), progress has been somewhat slower with poverty rates still at about 10 percent (also down from 20 percent in 2005). Progress has been similar in many middle-income countries in Latin America, where the economic growth of this period also helped the very poor. Countries with initially lower poverty rates like Brazil, Mexico, or Nicaragua found it more difficult to further bring down poverty. In Africa, extreme poverty has proven to be much more persistent in both richer economies like South Africa and, even more so, in poorer ones like Cameroon, Nigeria or Zambia. Ghana stands out as the only African middle-income economy with recorded substantial poverty reduction.

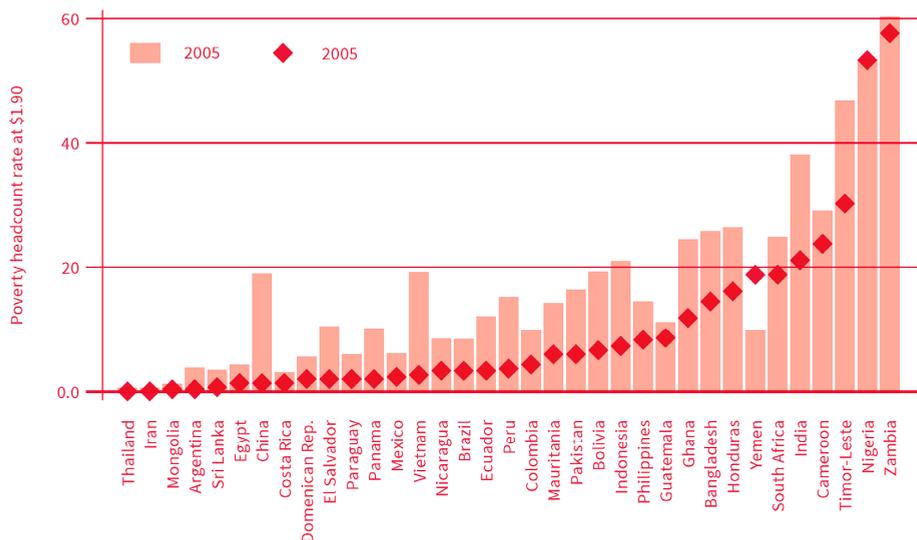


Figure 1. Extreme poverty in middle-income economies, 2005–2015. Source: World Development Indicators, World Bank (accessed on 30 May 2018), used with permission. Notes: All non-European middle-income countries with data from 2003 to 2007 and 2013 to 2017. Exceptions: Ghana (2012), India (2011), Nigeria (2009).

For monitoring LNOB, these poverty headcounts should be reported by age, sex, location and employment status (SDG 1, target 1.1.1). However, these disaggregated data are not yet available on the World Bank website (the World Bank is the “data custodian” for these indicators).² This already indicates that quite some efforts are required to improve reporting on LNOB-relevant indicators.

3.2. Education

Access to (high-quality) public services, and especially to education, is one key dimension of LNOB. Deficient education system puts many of the poor at risk of being left behind and not benefitting from growth in average incomes (World Bank 2017). If people lack education they are likely to end up in vulnerable employment that characterizes labor markets in many middle-income economies and it seems unlikely

² The World Bank (World Bank 2018a) has made some progress here, for example in its recent Poverty and Shared Prosperity Report (2018).

that a rapidly growing formal sector will absorb the informal workforce quickly (Stuart et al. 2018).

The fact that the lack of proper education impairs future life chances makes education central to LNOB and also explains why the indicators under SDG target 4.5 demand “parity indices” (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators [...] that can be disaggregated” (UNESCO 2016).

Despite increasing enrollment rates, national education systems are failing worldwide to provide adequate learning outcomes for millions of children in low and middle-income countries. The (still patchy) data on learning achievements suggest that students in low-income countries and even middle-income countries often lack even the most basic skills in reading, writing and math. For instance, in rural India, about 75 percent of students in grade 3 could not solve a two-digit subtraction and by grade 5 half could still not do so. Students in Brazil, Indonesia, and Mexico clearly underperform their peers in the OECD, with the notable exception of China where students show learning achievements in both reading and in math above the OECD average (own calculations using data from www.oecd.org/pisa/data/). These poor learning outcomes hold in particular for disadvantaged children, be it because they are female, from poor families, disabled, or from rural or even conflict-affected areas (World Bank 2017). With the SDGs, the emphasis of measuring progress in education has therefore shifted from enrollment to learning achievement because “schooling is not the same as learning” (World Bank 2017).

Surprisingly, little data on learning outcome exist and the school enrollment rate can often not be disaggregated by the desired groups—except for gender gaps in education that are increasingly understood and addressed (Minasyan et al. 2019). As reported by UNESCO’s Data Digest (UNESCO 2017) disaggregating education data by measures of wealth and disability status, for example, was possible in only 14% and 19% of countries, respectively.

Yet, some evidence for selected groups in selected countries is available. Figure 2 forcefully illustrates the extent of discrimination in access to education in some countries. In Latin America, for instance, the share of the indigenous population that has completed lower secondary schooling can be more than 30 percentage points lower than for other population groups. These differences can be observed despite major progress in increasing the school attendance of indigenous children between 2000 and 2010 in the region (UN 2014; UNESCO 2018). Figure 2 also shows lower secondary school completion by ethnic groups in Ghana, again showing considerable

differences across ethnic groups. For learning outcomes disaggregated data is even scarcer, but few studies exist. For instance, in Uruguay, poor children in grade 6 are five times as likely to be assessed as “not competent” in math than richer children. In general, the findings on learning differences tend to exacerbate the findings on school enrollment and completion rates, with disadvantaged groups seeing particularly large differences once learning outcomes are accounted for (World Bank 2017).

3.3. Social Protection

Social protection is an important target under SDG 1 and crucial for LNOB. Specifically, target 1.3 calls for the implementation of “nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors” and including “substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”. The corresponding SDG indicator 1.3.1 gives the percentage of the total population covered by at least one social protection benefit (effective coverage). The benefits considered include those for children, mothers with newborns, persons with severe disabilities, the unemployed, and older persons. Based on the sparse data that are available, among middle-income economies there has been quite some progress in achieving higher effective social protection coverage. One main reason for substantial progress in the past 25 years has been the rise of non-contributory cash transfer programs of various types across the developing world. In Latin America, the expansion of means-tested cash transfer program has improved coverage of child, maternity and family benefits among the poor. Yet, the situation has improved less for the somewhat better-off who are neither covered by cash transfers nor by contributory schemes.

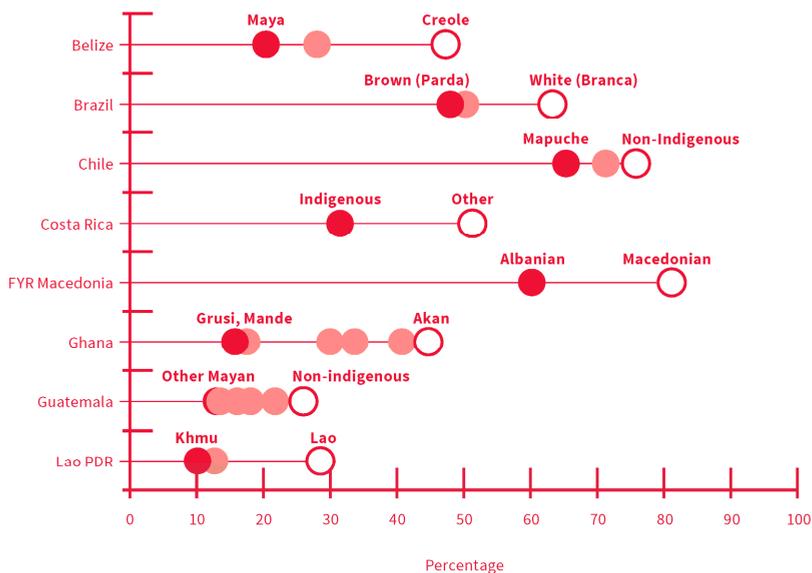


Figure 2. Youth who completed lower secondary education in rural areas, by ethnicity, latest available data since 2011. Source: UNESCO (2018). World Inequality Database on Education at www.education-inequalities.org.

On the other hand, huge variation remains. Indicator 1.3.1 (all figures taken from ILO (2017a)) varies between about 40 percent in Bolivia and Colombia and 67 percent for Argentina. In Asia, coverage can be as low as 19 percent in India and reaches its maximum with only 47 percent in the Philippines. In Africa, the Southern African middle-income economies of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa today reach parts of their poorer populations, in particular those at old-age and with children, through a comprehensive system of social transfers. Yet, average effective coverage is relatively low in Botswana with 15 percent and reaches 48 percent in South Africa. In other African middle-income economies, for example Cameroon (9 percent) or Nigeria (4 percent), there is very low effective coverage, while Ghana takes a middle place with 18 percent. Finally, unemployment remains uninsured for most people in most countries of the world. Often, the differences between countries in social protection are not necessarily related to income differences between middle income countries. Colombia has double the per capita income of Bolivia, and South Africa is slightly poorer than Botswana in per capita terms. This implies a very important role for policies, specific institutions, and political commitment (see Section 3.3).

A key indicator for social protection is also the Universal Health Coverage index (UHC index, SDG indicator 3.8.1). This index reports the coverage of essential

health services in percentage (defined as the average coverage of essential services that include reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health, infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases and service capacity and access). The maximum value is 80. In Figure 3, we report this index for all non-European middle-income countries, for which the index is available, and, as can readily be seen, the index is available only for a limited number of countries (only 24 out of approximately 90). The Figure shows quite some variance among middle-income economies. While a number of countries, including Peru, Mexico, China, and Thailand are close to full coverage (index of 80), some countries have coverage sometimes well below 50 percent, including two major West African economies, Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria.

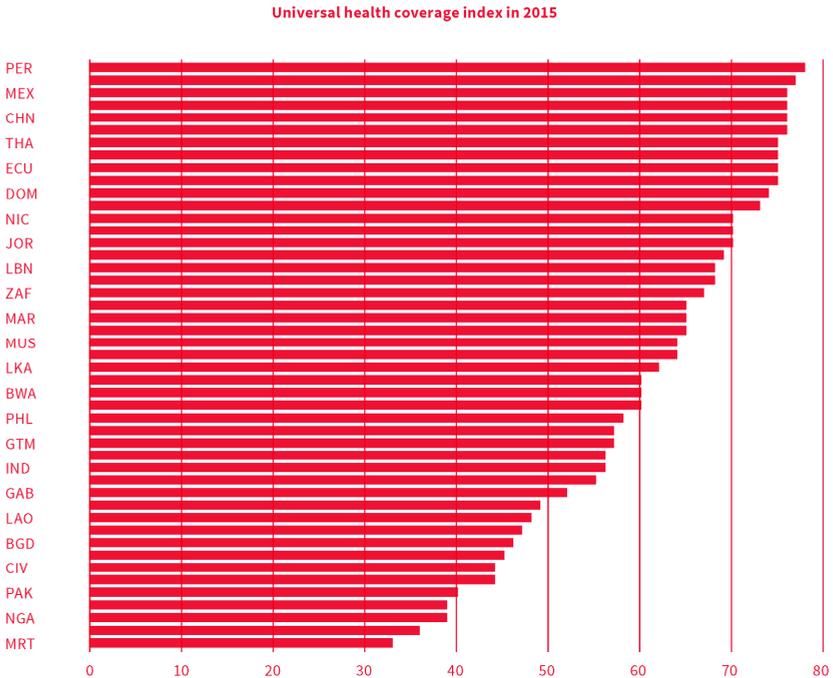


Figure 3. Universal health coverage index, 2015. Source: Authors’ own compilation adapted from Development Indicators, World Bank (accessed on 30 May 2018). Note: All non-European middle-income countries with data.

According to the SDG indicator catalogue, the UHC index should also be reported for “the most disadvantaged population”. In official databases, these indicators are not yet available by these groups, but Hogan et al. (2018) reports the UHC for the poorest wealth quintile (based on a DHS-based asset index) and the

national average for few selected countries. In this sample of countries, it becomes apparent that middle-income economies do not only differ in their average level of access, but also very much in the equality of access. For example, Colombia and Peru come close to an index of 80 (the maximum) on average. Yet, while the UHC index is around 65 for the poorest wealth quintile in Colombia, this figure is well below 60 for Peru.

3.4. Legal Frameworks and Anti-Discrimination

Legal frameworks and anti-discrimination measures matter for many dimensions of LNOB. A stock-taking exercise of LNOB-relevant SDG targets and corresponding indicators reveals that gender discrimination is the only dimension of discrimination that is explicitly referred to in terms of legal frameworks. Key indicator 5.1.1 will be used to monitor “whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex”. The indicator, however, is (still) a tier III indicator, i.e., under development. Another gender-related indicator under SDG 5 monitors the “number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee women aged 15–49 years access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education” (5.6.2). Further, the means of implementation under the gender goal include references (and corresponding indicators) to women’s equal rights to land ownership and/or control and the number of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women’s empowerment. For all these indicators, no data are available to date, albeit the information can, in principle, be obtained (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/>).

With respect to the de-jure and de-facto discrimination gaps important regional patterns have been noted. While many countries in East Asia, South-East Asia and Latin America have often passed comprehensive legislation to protect women, there are still enforcement problems in a number of countries. In contrast, countries in the Africa, MENA, and South Asia regions even lack the legislative basis to protect women (Branisa et al. 2014). The Social Institutions and Gender Index (Branisa et al. 2014) that contains both legal (e.g., laws on marriage age, domestic violence, access to land, access to public space) and factual components (e.g., missing women, female genital mutilation incidence) shows the variance between middle-income economies also within the same region. In Africa, for example, Ghana and Nigeria are ranked as having high and very high levels of discrimination, while Namibia and South Africa are classified as having low level of discrimination.

With respect to national legal frameworks and policy documents (de-jure) it appears that developing countries are more ready to eliminate discrimination against

women, children, the elderly, the disabled, and the rural population compared to discrimination against indigenous/ethnic groups, refugees/migrants or LGBT people. Stuart et al. (2016) show that almost all of the national development plans from 39 low- and middle income countries refer to the rural population and women as marginal group. In total, 79% of the plans explicitly mention the disabled as a vulnerable group, while a focus on ethnic and indigenous minorities can only be found in 50%; only 21% countries list refugees/migrants and only 15% of countries LGBT people as marginal groups.

Interestingly, these two groups also receive little (migrants/refugees) or even no (LGBT people) explicit attention in the SDGs to start with. While many indicators are to be provided by sex, age groups, geographical location, and disability. Migrants are only referred to with regard to employment. Migrants and LGBT people are also not formally defined as “vulnerable group” in the agenda document (in contrast to the children, youth, and disabled), albeit they would fall under some of the general provisions of the SDGs, for example target 16.b (“Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development”). Far from anti-discrimination measures for LGBT people in place, many developing countries criminalize homosexual relations by law. In 76 countries and territories, homosexual relations are illegal, in seven countries they are punishable by death (UN 2017).

To conclude, discrimination based on sex and age have been addressed (also not completely) over the last years by national policies and are mainstreamed across the SDGs. In contrast, discrimination against migrants/refugees, ethnic and indigenous groups as well as LGBT people does not rank high in national agendas. This is despite the fact that these groups tend to be at particular risk of exclusion

While legal frameworks adhering to the principles of non-discrimination constitute an important pre-condition for living in societies without discrimination they do not guarantee the de-facto absence of discrimination in real lives. The gap between de-jure and de-facto discrimination in the realm of LNOB can have multiple causes such as lack of legal access due to poverty and illiteracy or the lack of state capacity to enforce non-discriminatory policies effectively in the context of deep-rooted prejudices and cultural norms (Fredman 2013). A case in point is “equal [...] rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land [...]” (SDG 1, target 1.4). The “access to basic services indicator is a tier III indicator still under development. For the tenure rights and perceptions indicator (“total adult population with secure tenure rights to land” (by sex and type of tenure)), a methodology has been agreed upon, but data (through survey instruments and a corresponding module) remains yet

to be produced (<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/files/Metadata-01-04-02.pdf>). An index on perceived tenure security, the PRIndex, has been piloted for a number of developing countries including a couple of middle-income economies (<https://landportal.org/book/indicator/la-pri-pts>). The results indicate that between a quarter and third of respondents perceive themselves to have insecure tenure (<http://www.prindex.net/analysis>). Moreover, some differences between men and women arise. Women in India, for example, are only half as confident as men to have secure tenure rights if they own their dwelling. These insights are very instructive and may bear general relevance for measuring (progress in reducing) discrimination. Aggregate outcome variables (even though measured at the micro-level through surveys) may still conceal important discriminatory practices.

4. Review of Key Policies to Implement LNOB

Starting from these observations, we now assess which policies in education, health, labor markets, social protection, and anti-discrimination have been successful in achieving progress in implementing LNOB. We highlight specific examples and best practices and examine context factors and institutions that condition success in specific cases or in middle-income economies in general.

4.1. Education

Within the Asia region, for instance, the most successful countries both in terms of average learning outcomes and equity are from East Asia and they significantly outperform their peers from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand. From this comparison, the World Bank (2018b) draws the general conclusion that the rigorous implementation of policies of “progressive universalism” with equal access at the primary and lower secondary school level has been key. While some lower middle-income countries, in particular in Africa, still need to address basic problems of education infrastructure (availability of and distance to schools, sufficient number of teachers, and school facilities; AAI (2015)), most of these policy challenges can be easily addressed in middle-income countries. They have achieved comparatively low fertility levels which puts less pressure on governments’ budget to expand school construction and teacher hiring and training. Many crucial components of education systems in middle-income countries have already been established for longer periods. This and the fiscal space allows these countries to focus on fine-tuning these systems to focus more on the quality, universal access to secondary education, and reduction of educational gaps for vulnerable groups.

Replicating the success of some middle-income countries in implementing LNOB in education first of all implies to build-on and upgrade conditional cash transfer (CCT) systems that have considerably improved access to schooling among the poor in the past 20 years. Conditional cash transfer programs (CCTs) provide monetary transfers conditional on primary or secondary school enrollment and attendance (and/or other conditions). The beneficiaries of CCTs are usually the (very) poor with many programs focusing especially on women, mothers, children, and rural populations. Reviews on the impact of CCTs on schooling and learning find that these programs typically increase student enrollment (for example, Fiszbein et al. 2009). Schooling impacts are similar for men and women, at roughly 1.5 additional years (Parker and Vogl 2017). The success of the program has been attributed to conditioning money transfers to human capital investments. Likewise, the administrative capacity to build an accurate targeting database with moderate errors has ensured that the program was received by the poor (Parker and Todd 2017); www.gob.mx/prospera/documentos/componente-prospera-educacion). The results on the effectiveness of CCTs are usually not available for certain vulnerable groups, such as children with disabilities or by religion and ethnicity. Over the years, however, many CCTs were re-designed to focus on specific vulnerable groups. For instance, Bolsa Familia in Brazil achieved a substantial increase of coverage of Afro-descent families in social protection schemes and an increase of educational outcomes of children in participating families. Familias en Acción in Colombia incorporated suggestions by local indigenous groups in its project design and locally defined education services and accountability criteria. Red de Oportunidades in Panama, a program targeted specifically to indigenous groups, has helped closing educational gaps (ECLAC 2015).

Second, the available evidence suggests that early child care and education has to rank high on the education agenda, since children tend to be left behind at very young age. Early childhood education presents a window of opportunity to address inequalities and closing gaps in physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development between children from richer vs. poorer and rural vs. urban background (Behrman et al. 2013; Engle et al. 2011; Glewwe et al. 2013). Developing countries have expanded access to preschool provision in the past decade with all regions in the world increasing pre-school enrollment. Yet, in developing countries less than 20% of children have access to early childhood education with facilities facing quality problems with children from poor families and rural areas often being excluded from these (World Bank 2016). Evidence from both developed and developing countries has highlighted investment in early childhood education as one of the most cost-effective ways of providing education (World Bank 2016). For instance,

Gertler et al. (2014) find that in the context of an early childhood care and schooling intervention in Kingston, Jamaica, children later earned on average 25% more than children who did not receive the intervention.

Third, the quality of education and learning achievement have to improve not only on average, but in particular among the poor and disadvantaged. Here, teacher quality has been identified as a major cause of bad learning outcomes (World Bank 2017; UNESCO 2015) and its effect is exacerbated for poor children in poorer and disadvantaged areas and schools. Policies need to produce better teachers and distribute good teachers better. While most developing countries have professionalized their teacher management and training systems, almost all of these reforms have failed to improve teacher quality (Galiani and Perez-Truglia 2013; Ganimian and Murnane 2016). In general, it seems that in-service teacher training programs, which have been implemented in many middle-income countries in recent years, seem not be able to add important and relevant skills to teachers. One example is a two-year professional development program to pre-primary teachers in Chile that failed to improve student's cognitive abilities (Yoshikawa et al. 2015). Likewise, a national policy in Indonesia to double salaries of certified teachers found no effect of the program on student learning outcomes (De Ree et al. 2018). These disappointing results on in-service teacher training programs have highlighted the need for recruiting better and more suitable candidates in the first place (Pugatch 2017; World Bank 2018b). From a LNOB perspective, the improvement of education services in disadvantaged areas is key and many developing countries provide special incentives (financial, fast-track to become civil servant teacher, etc.) to locate to such areas. As pointed out in Luschei and Chudgar (2015) many of the existing teacher deployment schemes, such as Mexico's CONAFE, have only shown moderate benefits while cost concerns over these programs continue. Similarly, Gambia's hardship allowance which provided teachers with up to an extra 40% salary bonus for working in remote areas conditional on student learning improvements was found to have no impact on student learning outcomes (Pugatch and Schroeder 2018). On the other hand, Mexico's CONAFE program was reformed to focus stronger on hiring teachers who speak relevant indigenous languages which has shown some initial improvements in the effectiveness of the program in raising students' learning outcomes (Trevino 2013).

Finally, affirmative action programs have the potential to reinforce the effect of all these measures if successfully applied. Several developing countries have introduced some sort of affirmative action programs in education that directly address discrimination. The most studied country in this field is India, which

implements quotas based on caste or other social and income criteria in its educational system. Evidence on the success of the quota systems in education are mostly positive. According to Bertrand et al. (2010) India's affirmative action programs in tertiary education have led to substantial education increases for those low-caste families that benefited from the program while not lowering the quality of education provision. The same result was obtained by Cassan (2019) when studying primary school education. However, Cassan (2019) shows that among unscheduled caste families, only boys benefit. Similarly, success in raising enrollment and graduation rates was reported for Malaysia where various affirmative action programs are in place for bumiputras, i.e., indigenous Malays. Enrollment in higher education of bumiputras has increased from 40% in 1970 to more than 80% in public universities (Marcus et al. 2016). We were not able to find examples of large-scale affirmative action programs in education for girls in middle-income countries, albeit the successes of CCTs reported above hold for boys and girls alike.

4.2. Labor Policies

LNOB-relevant labor market policies in middle income-economies will have to focus on generating decent employment, including social protection coverage, and better pay. Economic growth and structural change will drive employment generation, but complimentary policies can make sure that labor markets become more inclusive and protective. Examples are labor market policies that are relevant in addressing wage inequalities, under- and unemployment and labor market discrimination in middle-income economies, including minimum wages, public works programs and anti-discriminatory policies.

The available evidence suggests that formal employment cannot be easily increased by interventions aimed at formalizing firms. The effects of these policies have been shown to be negligible (Bruhn and McKenzie 2013). This is because the potential gains of formalizing—for example legalized access to infrastructure, legal processes, or access to social security systems—are not perceived by firms to outweigh the costs of registration and possible tax and social security contribution payments.

Public works programs have a long tradition in developing countries as a safety net instrument for the poor. Public works programs usually provide temporary employment at a wage rate below the minimum wage (often in the construction sector and sometimes only for rural areas) and have been shown to reduce poverty among those employed (Zimmermann 2014). Two well-known programs in middle-income countries are the Argentina's Jefes y Jefas program and India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme (MGNRES). Despite benefits for participants,

implementation problems regarding setting the right wage, rationing, corruption, and mismanagement have provided difficulties ensuring the success of public work programs. The programs have been shown to be extremely beneficial to the rural population and to post-conflict settings, which might render these programs a policy towards poorer and disadvantaged regions of middle-income countries (Subbarao et al. 2013). In most countries public works programs tend to attract mostly men. India's MGNRES, however, aims to foster women's participation by providing child care facilities, covered sanitary facilities, and equal wage policies. The evidence regarding female participation is mixed. While official figures put female participation rates above 50 per cent³, others claim that MGNRES experienced low female participation rates due to problems in the implementation of the stipulated measures (Subbarao et al. 2013).

Minimum wages have been a main tool in the formal sector to ensure that workers and their families can achieve sufficient income to avoid falling into poverty (ILO 2018). For middle-income countries compared to poorer developing countries minimum wage legislation is more likely to be an effective policy tool because in former countries a larger share of the labor force works in the formal sector and governments possess the capacity to enforce enacted legislation (better monitoring, higher fines for cheating, tax reliefs). According to ILO reviews of the literature, minimum wages have generally been shown to benefit minimum-wage earners and decrease the gender pay gap albeit the overall effects are small and the effects on employment remain controversial (ILO 2016, 2017b). The most studied middle-income countries with respect to minimum wage legislation are Brazil (Cunningham 2006; Saltiel and Urzua 2017) and Indonesia (Driemeier et al. 2015; Hohberg and Lay 2015). In both countries, minimum wage policies were found to lead not only to higher wages among formal sector workers but as well for informal sector workers while no job displacement effects took place which seems to indicate that minimum wage legislation can be an effective policy tool to help the poorest workers.

Several developing countries have affirmative action policies in place that aim to increase inclusion of women, disabled, religious groups/castes, and ethnic groups. Affirmative action programs for women are increasingly adopted in developing countries but are mostly concentrated on specific vocational training and entrepreneurship schemes while quotas are still rarely used to enforce employment and wage equality except for special cases, for example parliament seats or positions

³ See <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=186368> (accessed on 20 May 2018).

in government (Marcus et al. 2016). With respect to race and caste, the most famous programs in this context come from India, South Africa and Malaysia. In South Africa the passing of Employment Equality Act in 1998, the Black Economic Empowerment Act in 2003, and the Codes of Good Conduct in 2007 set the objective to increase African descent's employment at all sectors and job levels. The policies were not found to have increased employment prospects as intended among the general black population. However, for women the policies seemed to have led to a small improvement in employment prospects for top positions. In general, weak enforcement, high unemployment rates and a lack of qualified applicants has been blamed for the limited success of South Africa's affirmative action legislation (Klasen and Minasyan 2017). In contrast, Malaysia's experience to empower the indigenous bumiputras starting in the 1970s by imposing employment and equity ownership quota has contributed to lowering wage, employment and asset inequality between the different ethnic groups. Similarly, positive impacts of quotas on civil and public service in India for scheduled and unscheduled tribes and other backward castes were found to have slowly increased the share of persons from scheduled and unscheduled tribes in the country's public sector (Marcus et al. 2016).

The most widely applied affirmative action instrument with respect to disability is the use of mandated quotas for formal sector enterprises in the private and public sector. Although very little evidence for developing countries exist, it seems that many countries do not fulfil these quotas. For instance, South Africa requires firms to employ 2% disabled persons and Tanzania's quota is at 3%. However, in both countries the actual employment share for disabled is less than 1%. Somewhat higher formal sector employment shares are reported for China which in addition to quotas provides tax incentives, and penalties for companies that fail the quota of 1.5%. Due to weak formal inspections, the target of 1.5% is not reached either, however. There is no reliable study yet that looks at the impact of disability quotas on wages and welfare outcomes of disabled persons (Marcus et al. 2016).

4.3. Social Protection

How to achieve universal social protection, including universal health coverage, is a key policy question to implement LNOB. In many middle-income countries, a bottom-up non-contributory approach targeted towards the poor and vulnerable has considerably advanced social protection coverage. The policies and programs (UHC, CCTs, social pensions, and unconditional family benefits) that have overcome the regressive nature of previous health and social transfer systems offer important insights for countries that have not yet introduced them and for further development

of these systems. With regard to LNOB, a first key remaining challenge in many middle-income countries is the significant lack of protection of the “informal non-poor” who are covered neither through social insurance nor through non-contributory programs. How large this group is depends on the size of the informal sector as well as the generosity and effectiveness of non-contributory programs (Bonfert et al. 2015; Cotlear et al. 2015; ILO 2017a). A second challenge remains equity of access despite the progress made, in particular for women, migrants and the disabled⁴.

We first examine UHC policies. McKee et al. (2013) points out that many countries achieved UHC while still being quite poor. Although legislation that guarantees UHC is important, it does not automatically translate into access to health services or insurance coverage. McKee et al. (2013) point out that of 75 countries that had de jure UHC, only 58 had de facto UHC in 2009. Countries committed to achieving UHC have adopted a multitude of strategies (focusing on supply-side vs. demand-side constraints, voluntary vs. mandatory health insurance, separate schemes for the poor and informal workers vs. schemes embedded in existing social insurance for the formal sector, financing through contributions vs. general revenues, universal vs. targeted schemes). In very general terms, most countries provide non-contributory health care to the poor and aim at collecting some contributions (often subsidized) from non-poor informal workers (Nakhimovsky et al. 2017). A synthesis of 24 case studies of health care expansion in developing countries (a sample of countries with a strong political commitment to achieving UHC) argues that the success in increasing health coverage of the poor and vulnerable is based on combining supply- and demand-side interventions that prioritize the poor (Cotlear et al. 2015). These interventions include upgrading health care services in poor areas, a focus on primary care, as well as removing economic barriers and providing incentives for the poor (for example, through conditions in CCTs). Cotlear et al. (2015) conclude, however, that there is no “best model”. Success does not depend on whether programs target the poor or the entire informal sector nor whether programs are embedded in existing formal sector health insurance or operate autonomously. Rather, enrollment rates of the poor depend on quality of implementation and maturity of the programs. These findings indicate a strong role of political and institutional factors, a view confirmed by McKee et al. (2013). Moreover, effective UHC is highly political because it is redistributive. This implies

⁴ Note that we do not address the interrelated issues of (minimum) benefits and financial sustainability, which have of course an important bearing on the viability of the efforts to achieve inclusive social protection systems in emerging countries.

that technical solutions hence need to be aligned with the national political economy context (Kelsall et al. 2016; Reich et al. 2016).

One option to extend the coverage of social protection is to accelerate formalization, but we have discussed the limited potential of deliberate formalization policies in Section 3.2. The second option is to open social insurance schemes to informal workers. In general, voluntary enrollment in social insurance schemes is very low if they are not adapted to the needs of informal sector workers. Many informal sector workers cannot (do not want to) afford even small contributions particularly when these are flat (as opposed to contributions that are sensitive to income). Their income may be irregular and they are often sensitive to time and administrative costs related to enrollment. This explains the low uptake of contributory schemes by informal sector workers (Bonfert et al. 2015). Programs that let beneficiaries choose which risks they want covered according to need and contributory capacity, allow for flexible contribution payments, and untie schemes from employment contracts and residency are more successful (ILO 2017a). For example, in several Latin American countries (Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador), a simplified tax and social security contribution collection mechanism called monotax has been introduced for small contributors. A single payment covers taxes as well as social protection contributions and has been found to facilitate formalization as well as social protection coverage. Indonesia is also set to expand health coverage using a contributory system (see Annex). A third option to reach informal workers is by expanding non-contributory systems to a broad population such as in the case of Mexico's and Brazil's CCT or South Africa's social pension (ILO 2017a). Albeit, potentially the most effective way to increase coverage the feasibility of such an approach depends, of course, on fiscal space. Further, the co-existence of a generous non-contributory system and contributory social insurance can generate disincentives to becoming formal (Aterido et al. 2011). Economic growth may help: The expansion of health coverage to the non-poor informal sector has been more successful in richer countries with a smaller informal sector, lower poverty ratios, and larger government revenues (Cotlear et al. 2015).

Women and migrant workers in informal employment are at particular risk to be excluded from social protection (Holmes and Scott 2016; Hopkins et al. 2016; Ulrichs 2016). They tend to work in the lowest paid, most vulnerable occupations (for example, women in domestic services) and social insurance schemes fail to cater their needs. In particular, social protection systems typically do not accommodate interruptions in employment, a problem for women who face longer periods dedicated to caring for others, and benefits are non-portable, which implies that migrant workers

cannot claim benefits when they return to their home country. Some policies address these problems. For example, in South Africa, labor regulations regarding maximum working hours, sickness benefits and annual leave have been extended in the early 2000s to cover agricultural workers as well as seasonal and temporary workers (Ulrichs 2016). The rights of domestic workers have been strengthened in the past 10 years in quite a number of middle-income countries, including Brazil, South Africa and Thailand (Ulrichs 2016). Bolivia has introduced child credits in its pension system that value the birth of a child with a certain number of months contributed towards pensions. In the same vein, the minimum vesting period to access pension benefits can be reduced to account for interruptions in employment histories of women (Ulrichs 2016). Moreover, women (widows, women in old age, pregnant and lactating mothers) are often specifically targeted by social assistance or UHC programs—they are usually among the first targeted groups before programs are extended to the wider population (Dodlova et al. 2018).

Many countries provide social assistance to disabled persons or families with a disabled member through specifically targeted programs or general social assistance. Yet, little is known about whether these programs reach the disabled in practice. The World Report on Disability (WHO 2011) acknowledges that there is little research on what works in providing safety nets for the disabled but cites anecdotal evidence that the disabled may face barriers in access to existing programs. The report notes that information on programs may be inadequate, welfare offices physically inaccessible, or the design characteristics of programs may fail to account for specific needs of disabled people (disabled children in CCTs, adjusted means testing formula, possibility to designate a person on behalf of the disabled person). A more recent systematic review implies that little progress has been made in the past 5 years, albeit some efforts can be observed in selected countries (for example, in Indonesia, see Annex). The study (Banks et al. 2017) finds that access to social protection appears to fall far below need with benefits from participation limited to maintaining minimum living standards. The review confirms the dearth of high-quality, robust evidence in this area.

5. Summary, Conclusions and the Role of Development Cooperation

We show that LNOB can be a meaningful guiding principle for national development policy as well as development cooperation in middle-income economies, as very unequal progress may threaten the gains for the poor of countries graduating from low to middle-income status.

There are two key lessons to be learnt from our review of measuring LNOB progress. First, the LNOB index is helpful to compare country commitments and performance, in particular with regard to data provision and policy formulation. It has, however, clear limitations. In particular, it is an index measuring preparedness rather than implementation. Further—and this also applies to an index that would focus more on outcomes—the condensation of multiple indicators into one number means that the same weighting is applied to all countries. Yet, country priorities for implementing LNOB will be and should be different because the challenges of left-behind groups and discrimination have very different causes and consequences. Second, our review clearly illustrates the huge data gaps that remain for key LNOB indicators. Disaggregated data are needed to identify the left behind, including children, women, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants. For a number of these groups, in particular persons with disabilities and migrants, data are simply not yet available.

Our brief and selective review of LNOB-relevant policies and approaches in middle-income countries shows a very rich foundation for evidence-based policy-making (and this is only the tip of an iceberg). This is particularly so in education, health and social protection where major policy shifts and experiments, which were well documented and assessed, offer important lessons learnt. Importantly, these are lessons from middle-income countries for middle-income countries, which offers scope for more South-South knowledge-sharing and cooperation. In education, health, and social protection, the targets and (disaggregated) indicators of the Agenda 2030—aside the abovementioned problems—provide clear guidance to the objectives of implementing LNOB and thus the objectives of the relevant policies. This is much less the case for the labor market that is, however, equally relevant for implementing LNOB in middle-income countries. It is well understood that the labor market has a key role in how the poor benefit from growth. While our review of policies on labor markets illustrates some interesting findings on the effectiveness of selected labor market policies in terms of employment outcomes, the link of these policies to inclusive development remains vague. Partly, this is because developments on labor markets are driven by macroeconomic developments and structural change, which, in turn, are influenced by many factors and policies that we have not reviewed here.

With these caveats, a number of challenges and potential policy solutions stand out in terms of substantive sectoral policy issues: (1) In education, progressive universal policies should emphasize equity in learning achievements. There is an

important role for data on learning achievements to uncover differences between the average (or the top) and those left behind. Our review clearly shows the limits to demand-side policies that remain ineffective if some supply-side factors, in particular teacher quality for disadvantaged students remain unaddressed. (2) In social protection, a very clear conclusion is that a universal approach to social policy is possible if there is the political will and commitment. Ideally, this approach is complemented by special or targeted measures to address the distinct obstacles faced by disadvantaged, marginalized or otherwise excluded social groups. Countries can choose different pathways towards expanding coverage and a key issue will be to address the needs of “informal non-poor”. (3) With regard to labor market policies, no clear conclusions emerge. This is also since most policies tend to have modest effects. Clearly, labor market policies need to account for structural realities, i.e., in particular a (still) high share of informal employment.

Our sectoral approach in reviewing key policies should not encourage thinking in silos. In fact, the review forcefully illustrates that the challenges of implementing LNOB are closely interlinked, which calls for integrated solutions. Informality, for example, does not only affect and needs to be addressed by labor market policies. Policies to expand social protection coverage will influence formalization rates. Similarly, many social policies targeted towards to poor, in particular CCTs, combine education, health, and labor market components. Such integrated approaches also offer opportunities to mainstream anti-discrimination efforts, in particular women and girls. LNOB thus cuts across sectors and is not only, but also an anti-discrimination agenda.

This is why we support the idea of Risse (2018) who calls for countries to include a specific chapter on LNOB in VNR reporting. In such a chapter, it should be highlighted how policies and programmes are being adapted to reach the people who are furthest behind first. Further, the chapter should provide information on the status of data collection or plans to improve data availability.

Our review shows that anti-discriminatory measures can be found in all sectors, but that they tend to focus on discrimination of girls and women, in line with a review of affirmative action policies (AEPs) in developing countries by Marcus et al. (2016). According to Marcus et al. (2016), only few countries such as Vietnam, China and Malaysia have AEPs in education and labor markets for specific ethnic/indigenous groups. In light of the apparent discrimination against ethnic groups (for example in education), in particular in Africa, but also South-East Asia, this lack of anti-discriminatory measures is alarming. Similarly, discrimination against migrants/refugees and LBGT people is hardly addressed—be it in terms of

legal framework or policies. Some few countries start to address discrimination against the disabled. For all these groups, there is not only a lack of disaggregated data to assess the degree of discrimination in different dimensions. There is also very limited evidence on the policies required to implement this important aspect of LNOB.

Development cooperation for “inclusive development” faces important challenges as redistribution and in particular discrimination are highly political. Where groups are actively discriminated against (as opposed to “merely” not being prioritized), a powerful (political) majority or elite is likely to benefit from this discrimination (exploitation of cheap labor, social status). In such cases, a strong political will and a profound change in societal attitudes are prerequisites for inclusion of the left behind (Stuart et al. 2016). Sometimes, the role of cooperation may thus be limited to support to put in place these political and societal prerequisites.

These findings have important implications for development cooperation. First, cooperation in LNOB-related issues will be more political than in other spheres of cooperation. We have only briefly touched upon the challenges related to the involvement of external actors regarding the sensitive issues of inequality, redistribution, and discrimination, which will have to be kept in mind when engaging with middle-income countries.

A case in point is the lack of anti-discriminatory action for LBGT people. In our view, development cooperation should focus on the international level and encourage decriminalization of homosexuality and anti-discrimination legislation. At the same time, cooperation “on the ground” needs to adhere to the do no harm principle and abstain from donor-driven initiatives that may be incompatible with local priorities and values. Where feasible, development cooperation should support local advocacy groups through capacity building and finance (USAID 2013). A similar approach should be followed regarding ethnic/indigenous groups.

An important instrument for increasing awareness for not leaving behind these groups is the identification and quantification of inequalities and discrimination as an important first step in implementing LNOB. The deficits of measuring progress exist at the national level, but also at the level of the global data custodians. At the national level, new data collection efforts need to start which result in higher survey costs and investments into administrative processes that not all countries, especially poorer countries, might be able to afford (UNESCO 2017). Development cooperation can play a key role in supporting data collection and analysis at these various levels.

Building on the many substantive policy experiences from various middle-income countries, development cooperation can support South-South

cooperation engage in triangular cooperation. This can take various forms, including knowledge transfer from middle-income countries to poorer developing countries or knowledge platforms where exchanges between middle-income countries are facilitated.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that a very large number of those left behind live in middle-income countries, and increasingly so. The “threshold” model of eligibility to receive development cooperation for certain types of support may not be suitable for this situation.

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