



House of Commons  
Women and Equalities  
Committee

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# Implementation of Sustainable Development Goal 5 in the UK

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**Eighth Report of Session 2016–17**





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**Eighth Report of Session 2016–17**

*Report, together with formal minutes  
relating to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 1 March 2017*

**HC 885**

Published on 14 March 2017  
by authority of the House of Commons

## Women and Equalities Committee

The Women and Equalities Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration and policy of the Government Equalities Office (GEO).

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[Lucy Allan MP](#) (Conservative, Telford)

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The following were also members of the Committee during this inquiry:

[Ruth Cadbury MP](#) (Labour, Brentford and Isleworth)

[Jo Churchill MP](#) (Conservative, Bury St Edmunds)

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The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/womenandequalities](http://www.parliament.uk/womenandequalities) and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Judith Boyce (Clerk), Sharmini Selvarajah (Second Clerk), Tansy Hutchinson (Committee Specialist), Holly Dustin (Committee Specialist), Shai Jacobs (Committee Specialist), Asaad Qadri (Inquiry Manager), Aaron Huang (Inquiry Manager), Alexandra Hunter-Wainwright (Senior Committee Assistant), Mandy Sullivan (Committee Assistant), and Liz Parratt (Media Officer).

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# Contents

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<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
The Sustainable Development Goals	4
Sustainable Development Goal 5	4
Our inquiry	5
<b>1 Why should the UK engage with SDG 5?</b>	<b>6</b>
Government commitment to the SDGs	6
Why domestic implementation of SDG 5 matters	7
Domestic opportunities presented by SDG 5	7
<b>2 Government leadership</b>	<b>9</b>
Responsibility for the SDGs	9
Recommendations for change	10
Awareness of the SDGs in the UK	11
Government action on the SDGs	12
Review of Single Departmental Plans	12
Publication of a report on Agenda 2030	13
Lessons from other countries	13
High Level Political Forum	15
<b>3 Specific actions to achieve SDG 5</b>	<b>18</b>
Refreshed Single Departmental Plans	18
The Government Equalities Office's current Single Department Plan	18
What should be included in refreshed Single Departmental Plans	19
Leave No-One Behind	21
Other recommendations to achieve SDG 5	22
Public Sector Equality Duty	22
CEDAW	23
Embedding gender equality across government	23
Ensuring progress across the UK	24
Conclusions and recommendations	25
<b>4 Building a partnership to achieve SDG 5</b>	<b>27</b>
Partnership working and the SDGs	27
The benefits of partnership working	27
Current levels of partnership working	28

Working with civil society	29
Models for engagement	29
Resources for engagement	31
Working with business	32
Improving engagement with business	33
<b>5 Gathering data and monitoring progress</b>	<b>36</b>
Monitoring progress on the Sustainable Development Goals	36
National SDG Indicators	37
Role of the Office for National Statistics	38
ONS consultation on national indicators	38
Data collection	39
Disaggregating data	40
Working with civil society and business	41
<b>Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Annex: Terms of reference</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Formal Minutes</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Witnesses</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Published written evidence</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament</b>	<b>53</b>

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# 1 Why should the UK engage with SDG 5?

## Government commitment to the SDGs

9. The UK Government has been widely acknowledged as playing an important role in the development of the SDGs, and SDG 5 in particular.<sup>3</sup> Lord Bates, Minister of State for the Department for International Development, told us:

a number of the goals that we secured, whether it be on forced marriage, FGM, access to education or sexual reproductive health—which came up against real opposition—involved tremendous effort from the Government working internationally and with civil society to bring about those changes. We have shown leadership.<sup>4</sup>

10. This leadership came from the highest political levels. Former Prime Minister David Cameron played a key role in the development of the SDGs as Co-Chair of the Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda 2012–13. He also personally hosted a side-event on the theme of ‘leaving no-one behind’ during the 2015 UN Sustainable Development Summit.<sup>5</sup>

11. In her first speech to the UN, in September 2016, Prime Minister Theresa May emphasised the UK’s role in the implementation of the SDGs, specifically referring to women and girls:

We will drive forward the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. We will continue to champion the rights of women and girls, making sure that all girls get the education they deserve, and tackling horrific abuses such as female genital mutilation and the use of sexual violence in conflict.<sup>6</sup>

12. The Government stated its continuing commitment to the SDGs in its evidence to this inquiry, saying that it

is committed to the implementation of the goals—both as part of our continuing commitment to being a key player in strategic international development and through our own domestic policy agenda.<sup>7</sup>

13. The Minister for International Development reiterated the importance of the domestic implementation in oral evidence to us, emphasising that

the SDGs apply not only internationally but equally domestically, and that is what makes them unique and different from the MDGs [Millennium Development Goals], and therefore we have to ensure that we meet all of those obligations at a national level as we meet them and advance them at international level.<sup>8</sup>

3 Independent Commission for Aid Impact, [DfID’s efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls: a learning review](#) (May 2016), para 3.52

4 Q199

5 Department for International Development, [Leaving No-One Behind: our promise](#), accessed 28 February 2017

6 Prime Minister’s Office, [Theresa May’s speech to the UN General Assembly](#) (September 2016)

7 [Government Equalities Office](#) (SDG003)

8 Q199

14. Caroline Dinenage MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Women, Equalities and Early Years, told us that for Government Equalities Office (GEO), “Goal 5 embeds everything that [it is] always trying to do,” and that it is “very keen that that spreads throughout Government.”<sup>9</sup>

### Why domestic implementation of SDG 5 matters

15. Several stakeholders told us that domestic achievement of SDG 5 was key to maintaining the UK’s position as a leading proponent of women’s rights globally. The British Council argued that if the UK took a proactive role in sharing its experience of implementing the goals with other countries, that “would cement the UK’s credibility and leadership in this area and help spread values of equality around the world.”<sup>10</sup> The Government Equalities Office states that one of its priorities is “using our influence to promote international equality”.<sup>11</sup>

16. Witnesses drew attention to the potentially negative effects of any discrepancy between the UK’s leadership role in championing SDG 5 and its record in taking action to achieve the goal. Jessica Woodroffe of the Gender and Development Network pointed to the leadership shown by “both David Cameron and Justine Greening [ ... ] on the international stage, particularly on gender” and noted that without the UK’s contribution “a lot of the language on gender equality would not have been in Agenda 2030.” She warned that if the UK is not seen to take action in developing a clear plan, it “runs the risk of looking very paternalistic, very patronising and not being prepared to practise what it preaches, by having called on countries with far fewer resources to do things that it will not itself commit to.”<sup>12</sup>

17. Other witnesses told us that not clearly setting out a strategy for SDG 5 domestically could affect the UK’s position within the UN. Marianne Haslegrave of the Commonwealth Medical Trust said:

We could put ourselves into isolation when it comes to the whole process, which is not a good place to be, particularly when we worked so hard to get gender equality, women’s empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and rights into the agenda. The UK spoke up, spoke up and spoke up all the time. Now it is not there.<sup>13</sup>

### Domestic opportunities presented by SDG 5

18. The SDGs present the Government with an opportunity to demonstrate work already done in the UK and show commitment to further work towards gender equality in the UK. As Plan International UK noted, “the SDGs have the potential to transform girls’ and women’s lives.”<sup>14</sup> The Government Equalities Office (GEO) itself drew attention to

9 Q163

10 [British Council](#) (SDG0019), para 1.8

11 Government Equalities Office, [About us](#), accessed 28 February 2017

12 Q33

13 Q4 [Marianne Haslegrave]

14 [Plan International UK](#) (SDG0018), para 33

the alignment between SDG 5 and its own priorities, saying that “our domestic policy agenda on equality strongly supports the aims and spirit of Goal 5, as well as many of the priorities set out in it.”<sup>15</sup>

19. The focus within the SDGs on the principle of ‘leaving no-one behind’ also presents opportunities for alignment with the Government’s domestic policy priorities. This principle commits signatory countries to prioritising the needs of the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups within each country. Dr Carole Easton of the Young Women’s Trust explained how there is evidence that women’s equality and empowerment is already valued in the UK, but that SDG 5 can add “weight and leverage” to this, particularly in terms of women not being left behind.<sup>16</sup>

20. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) pointed out that the SDGs can play a role in supporting other government commitments on gender equality. Specifically, it said a focus on the SDGs could strengthen the UK’s forthcoming state report to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), due in July 2017.<sup>17</sup>

**21. The UK Government was at the heart of developing the Sustainable Development Goals and led globally on the inclusion of a standalone goal addressing gender equality. Existing policies and legislation show the Government’s commitment to gender equality but a clear plan is needed now. Domestic engagement with the SDGs is therefore critical to the UK’s standing at the UN, and to its position as a world leader on gender equality. The Government needs to act to ensure the effective implementation of SDG 5 in the UK as a matter of priority.**

**22. Domestic engagement with the SDGs, and SDG 5 in particular, can do more than protect the UK’s international standing. The Goals present the Government with an opportunity to further its work on achieving gender equality and improving the lives of the most marginalised and disadvantaged people and to leave no-one behind.**

15 [Government Equalities Office](#) (SDG0003)

16 Q112 [Dr Easton]

17 [CEDAW](#) was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. It is often described as an international bill of rights for women.

## 2 Government leadership

23. This chapter examines how the Government has allocated responsibility for domestic achievement of SDG 5, actions it has taken to date, and levels of domestic political leadership. It also looks at how other, similar countries are allocating responsibility for the SDGs within government and considers whether the UK would benefit from submitting to a UN assessment of its progress.

### Responsibility for the SDGs

24. The question of which government department is responsible for action to achieve the SDGs has been raised in previous inquiries. The International Development Committee recommended in its report that “the Cabinet Office should lead on this work, in consultation with the Department for International Development (DFID).”<sup>18</sup> In response, the Government said it believed that

Agenda 2030 should continue to sit under the leadership of the Secretary of State for International Development as DFID is well placed to oversee the agenda in its entirety, having played a key role in negotiating the goals, which have poverty reduction as one of their primary objectives.<sup>19</sup>

The Government also noted the role of the Minister for the Cabinet Office to “support the domestic implementation of Agenda 2030”.<sup>20</sup>

25. In written evidence to this inquiry, the Government reiterated its position that the “primary purpose” of the SDGs is to eradicate global poverty, and therefore it is appropriate for DFID to retain “policy oversight” of them. It also noted that the “Cabinet Office supports DFID by coordinating across the departments.”<sup>21</sup>

26. When asked for clarification of the respective roles of the Cabinet Office and DFID, the Minister for International Development told us that:

Our Secretary of State will play a co-ordinating role in ensuring that people understand what the policy is and what the intention is behind it, because we have that institutional knowledge built up over time. It is the Secretary of State’s responsibility to then report to the Cabinet Office.<sup>22</sup>

27. The Minister for International Development further explained that, with regard to the SDGs, his Department was not “a lead department in a traditional sense.” He said that DFID would lead on the SDGs and make sure the policy was understood, with co-ordination being done by the Cabinet Office. He also noted that within this structure, “the Cabinet Office have their traditional role of scrutinising the single departmental plans” to ensure that SDG commitments are being met.<sup>23</sup>

18 International Development Committee, First Report of Session 2016–17, [UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals](#), HC 103, para 77

19 International Development Committee, Fourth Special Report of Session 2016–17, [UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: Government response](#), HC 673

20 International Development Committee, Fourth Special Report of Session 2016–17, [UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: Government response](#), HC 673

21 [Government Equalities Office \(SDG003\)](#)

22 Q177

23 Q175

28. In respect of SDG 5, the Government stated that the Government Equalities Office (GEO) “will lead on reporting for government in terms of domestic implementation of Goal 5, in a similar [ ... ] way that GEO does for the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).”<sup>24</sup> The Minister for Women, Equalities and Early Years told us that:

the GEO’s role really is liaising with other Government departments in the implementation of SDG 5 in particular and being available to support and advise other Government departments on that particular aspect of it and how we do all the gender equality aspects.<sup>25</sup>

### **Recommendations for change**

29. A variety of suggestions have been made to improve how the Government manages the SDGs. Jessica Woodroffe of the Gender and Development Network said that leadership from the very top of government could drive action:

We need the Prime Minister to play a leading role in this, in the way that her predecessor did. This is about whole-government action, and this shuffling around about who is doing what is clearly not working.<sup>26</sup>

The Minister for International Development argued that leadership on the SDGs was, in fact, coming from the very top of government. He said that, “The Prime Minister is obviously key in this as leading this.”<sup>27</sup>

30. In its 2016 report, the International Development Committee recommended that the Cabinet Office should lead on this work, in consultation with DFID. The UN Women National Committee UK also suggested that “the Cabinet Office report [ ... ] to parliament each year on the progress made across government departments and agencies in the implementation of SDG.”<sup>28</sup>

31. Other recommendations we heard for improving the effectiveness of government responsibility for the SDGs included that:

- A Cabinet Office Minister should hold the SDG portfolio (UKSSD);<sup>29</sup>
- High-level leadership should come from the Prime Minister and Cabinet Office (Plan International UK);<sup>30</sup>
- The Government should establish clear lines of responsibility and mechanisms for coordination between Government departments (UN Women National Committee UK);<sup>31</sup>

24 [Government Equalities Office \(SDG003\)](#)

25 Q210

26 Q34

27 Q176

28 [UN Women \(SDG0009\)](#), para 2

29 [UKSSD \(SDG0032\)](#), para 6

30 [Plan International UK \(SGG0018\)](#), para 6

31 [UN Women \(SDG0009\)](#)

- Each government department should have an individual lead on gender equality and there should be an overall lead to ensure progress across all departments (Agenda).<sup>32</sup>

## Awareness of the SDGs in the UK

32. Whilst there are high levels of awareness of the Government's work on FGM, domestic violence, and broader equality issues, the lack of a plan and domestic political leadership on SDG 5 have been cited as reasons for low levels of awareness of the SDGs amongst business and civil society in the UK. Dr Mary-Ann Stephenson told us that no-one in her network of women's organisations in the West Midlands had heard of SDG 5. She commented that

There has not been the leadership to say, "This is an important thing we have signed up to. We have led the way globally on this, and now we are going to deliver domestically", which has made organisations start getting involved, pushing on their bit and identifying issues. That mechanism needs to be in place for engagement, in order to create the pressure that is one of the key things for leadership to happen.<sup>33</sup>

33. This view was backed up by British Council research. That research found that awareness of the SDGs was fairly low among organisations that had a predominantly domestic focus and agenda, while much higher among NGOs engaging in international development, for example members of the Gender and Development Network. The British Council interpreted this as an indication that "the universality of the goals and the significance of Goal 5 have not been taken on board by the majority of organisations and experts focusing on gender equality in the UK".<sup>34</sup>

34. Lynn Everson, owner of a small business and representative of the Business and Professional Women's Network, noted a similarly low level of SDG knowledge amongst businesses:

Some commentators translate the SDGs as "Senseless, Dreamy and Garbled" and they are conspicuous by their absence in business circles in the UK. Indeed the British Chambers of Commerce makes no reference to the SDGs on its website. The concept and title are complex and seem remote whereas they should be taken as a blueprint of commercial best practice for all sizes of company and organisation, so they must be better publicised and mainstreamed.<sup>35</sup>

35. In response to questions about the Government's plans to publicise the SDGs, the Minister for International Development expressed a hope that the Government's forthcoming report on Agenda 2030 would bring some publicity to the issue.<sup>36</sup>

32 [Agenda](#) (SDG0004), para 10

33 Q46

34 [British Council](#) (SDG0019), para 4.1

35 [Business and Professional Women UK](#) (SDG0047)

36 Q169

## Government action on the SDGs

### Review of Single Departmental Plans

36. In its response to the inquiry, and in evidence to other select committees, the Government has focused on its forthcoming review of Single Departmental Plans (SDPs) as central to its work on the SDGs domestically. The Government initially rejected the International Development Committee's recommendation that "each department's Single Departmental Plan, [ ... ] should be urgently reviewed [ ... ] with specific references to relevant SDGs by number."<sup>37</sup> The Government responded that the Conservative Party general election manifesto "sets out the policy areas through which the UK will make its contribution to implementation of the goals."<sup>38</sup> However, in evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee on 17 January 2017, Cabinet Office Minister Chris Skidmore said that a "refresh" of Single Departmental Plans was taking place with the results to be published by the end of April 2017, and that this would "ensure that SDGs are fully referenced in all SDPs in every Department."<sup>39</sup>

37. The Minister for Women, Equalities and Early Years told us that this refresh of the SDPs is central to the Government's plan for implementation, and that the plans

will encapsulate how this is mainstreamed throughout Government. They will hopefully reassure stakeholders and organisations that do not feel that we are taking this seriously that every aspect of Government does have to take a view on this and pay reference to the goal.<sup>40</sup>

38. The importance of each SDG target having clear "departmental ownership" was acknowledged by the Minister for International Development who explained that the "targets, obligations and indicators" included within SDPs were a priority at almost every departmental board. He noted that each SDG indicator "will be owned by a department and each departmental organisation will meet and be very much focused on delivering those indicators." The Minister said he expected this system would "drive quite a lot of activity and suggestions as to how we make better progress if we are falling behind."<sup>41</sup>

39. We asked the Ministers who is responsible for oversight of this process. The Minister for International Development's answer again focused on a division of responsibility between his Department and the Cabinet Office:

If there is an indicator that we are falling behind on, a target we are not meeting or a goal that is inadequately covered, [DFID] would spot that and, in our policy overview role, highlight it. However, we would highlight it in partnership with the Cabinet Office to the department for it to take action rather than necessarily stipulating what that action should be.<sup>42</sup>

37 International Development Committee, First Report of Session 2016–17, [UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals](#), HC 103, para 77

38 International Development Committee, Fourth Special Report of Session 2016–17, [UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: Government response](#), HC 673

39 [Oral evidence taken before the Environmental Audit Committee](#) on 17 January 2017, HC 596, Q160

40 Q164

41 Q211

42 Q219



### Publication of a report on Agenda 2030

40. In its response to the International Development Committee's report, the Government said it would publish a report setting out a clear narrative for the Government's approach to implementing the SDGs internationally and domestically. This would include "key principles, flagship initiatives and expected results and further information on how the government is set up to contribute towards achievement of Agenda 2030."<sup>43</sup>

41. The Minister for International Development told us that this report would "go through goal by goal and identify the areas that [the Government is] going to focus on" in both an international and domestic context.<sup>44</sup> The Minister confirmed that this report was likely to be published in March or April 2017.

### Lessons from other countries

42. While the UK has yet to publish its plan for domestic achievement of the SDGs, some other European countries have already set out their strategies in this area. Marianne Haslegrave of the Commonwealth Medical Trust was among several witnesses to criticise what she saw as the UK's relative lack of strategic plan on the SDGs.<sup>45</sup> She argued that

While the UK played a leading role in the development of the SDGs and 2030 Agenda, it is now in danger of being left behind in comparison with many other European countries, in implementation, follow up and review.<sup>46</sup>

43. Other countries cited as examples of good practice included the Czech Republic, Germany and Switzerland. All three are cited in the International Development Committee's report.<sup>47</sup>

43 International Development Committee, Fourth Special Report of Session 2016–17, [UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals: Government response](#), HC 673

44 Q187

45 See also Q36 [Sam Smethers], Q54 [Jessica Woodroffe] and Q4 [Dr Helen Mott].

46 [Commonwealth Medical Trust](#) (SDG0011), para 2

47 International Development Committee, First Report of Session 2016–17, [UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals](#), HC 103

**Box 1: How other countries have set out their plans to implement the SDGs**

The Czech Republic's response to a UN regional survey on SDG implementation states that, "The Government Office has the leading role in the implementation process, with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Environment. The Government Council for Sustainable Development, chaired by the Prime Minister, will serve as a coordination body to ensure that all key stakeholders are involved and informed about the process."

In Germany the Federal Chancellery is currently leading the process to revise and adapt its National Sustainable Development Strategy to reflect the 2030 Agenda. Responsibility has been given to the Chancellery, rather than one of the ministries, as "sustainable development is a guiding principle of any policy of the German government". The existing National Sustainable Development Strategy will "be structured along the 17 SDGs in a comprehensive manner. It will cover national implementation measures with both internal and external effects as well as measures aiming at progress at international level".

The Swiss Government published its Sustainable Development Strategy for 2016–2019 in January 2016. The Strategy states: "The 2030 Agenda is not legally binding, but provides an important reference framework for Switzerland. The Federal Council takes it very seriously, and is committed on both the national and international levels to the Agenda's implementation. One of the ways in which this will happen at national level is through the specific targets defined in this Sustainable Development Strategy, which is based on the SDG and will help to achieve them [ ... ]. The aim in the future is to align the Strategy as comprehensively as possible with the 2030 Agenda to secure Switzerland's contribution to achieving the SDG by 2030".

Source: International Development Committee, [UK implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

44. Norway's approach to the SDGs was also given as an example of good practice by Bond/GADN in their written evidence to our inquiry. In some ways it is similar to the UK Government's plans for single departmental plans, with each of the 17 SDGs being allocated a co-ordinating ministry responsible for implementation, in consultation with other ministries involved in the targets. A key difference is the existence of a report from each ministry "on the status of follow-up for its respective goal(s) in its budget proposal." These proposals are then brought together by the Ministry of Finance in a national budget white paper and presented to the Storting (Norwegian Parliament) annually, along with the state budget.<sup>48</sup>

45. Finland was also pointed to as an example for the UK to follow. Womankind Worldwide recommended that the UK follow its example of creating "high-level leadership [to] ensure that the SDGs are implemented as a universal agenda". Womankind Worldwide explained that, from 1 January 2016, the government of Finland transferred the coordinating secretariat of the Commission on Sustainable Development from the Ministry of the Environment to the Prime Minister's office. The aim was to strengthen "policy coherence for the implementation of the various dimensions of sustainable development".<sup>49</sup>

48 [Bond/GADN](#) (SDG0028), para 32

49 [Womankind Worldwide](#) (SDG0020), para 9

46. Through its examination of a variety of approaches to implementing the SDGs, Bond/GADN suggested that:

a good national approach to implementation would include at least:

- an analysis of existing policies and practices to identify gaps and ensure alignment against the SDGs;
- formal institutional framework set up to ensure that Parliament and Government Departments are actively and regularly engaged with the agenda, coordinated by the Head of Government's office;
- clear lines of responsibility for the delivery of each goal;
- clear mechanisms for engaging a broad range of stakeholders and the wider public to garner support for the SDGs in society at large; and
- a planning and policy-making approach which explicitly refers to the SDGs.<sup>50</sup>

Bond/GADN concluded that “so far the UK Government has not delivered any of the above.”<sup>51</sup> It remains to be seen how far the forthcoming report from the Department for International Development and the refresh of Single Departmental Plans will address these issues.

### High Level Political Forum

47. A specific action taken by some of the countries cited as being good examples for the UK to follow is participation in the UN's High Level Political Forum (HLPF). This is a voluntary process that takes place every July. At the HLPF a country delivers a report on its progress, successes and challenges, and will have this discussed by other states and stakeholders. The frequency with which countries are obliged to submit to these reviews has not yet been decided.

48. The UK has not yet submitted a review and has not signed up to do so in 2017. A number of stakeholders, including the Commonwealth Medical Trust and the National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO), have suggested that the UK should commit to participating in the national review process at HLPF in 2018 “and take a leadership role, rather than being left behind.”<sup>52</sup> Jessica Woodroffe of GADN told us that, although scrutiny provided by participating in the Forum would be brief, the process of producing the report itself would “spur on action.”<sup>53</sup> She also pointed out that:

The lesson both from the [Millennium Development Goals] and from what other countries have so far done on the SDGs suggests that committing to voluntary national reporting is going to be key. Having an annual review, with a high level of stakeholder consultation, will also be key.<sup>54</sup>

50 [Bond/GADN \(SDG0028\)](#), para 37

51 [Bond/GADN \(SDG0028\)](#), para 37

52 [Commonwealth Medical Trust \(SDG0011\)](#), para 9

53 Q48 [Jessica Woodroffe]

54 Q56 [Jessica Woodroffe]

49. Bond/GADN recommended that the UK should submit “at least three national reviews by 2030” and spelt out how such a review should be managed:

The process for preparing the report should be open, inclusive and participatory, supporting the active and meaningful engagement of citizens, with particular efforts to include marginalised groups.<sup>55</sup>

NAWO suggested the UK follow the example of Finland, which developed its report to the HLPF in 2016 with the full involvement of civil society who were also involved in the report’s presentation to the UN.<sup>56</sup>

50. When questioned on whether the Government would participate in the 2018 review, the Minister for Women, Equalities and Early Years said:

We want to see what comes out of the Single Departmental Plans, when they come out later on in the year. We want to see what comes out of the ONS project and consultation. [ ... ] It would be foolish for us to plough on and go and report to the High-level Group without that knowledge in our arsenal. However, we do not shy away from reporting.<sup>57</sup>

The Minister also told us that “On average, only about six countries can report each year anyway.”<sup>58</sup> However, 22 countries reported in 2016,<sup>59</sup> and as of February 2017, a further 43 countries had committed to reporting in 2017.<sup>60</sup>

51. **We welcome the Government’s refresh of Single Departmental Plans to incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This demonstrates a clear commitment to the goals and their domestic implementation. However, the UK is lagging behind many of its OECD counterparts in terms of outlining a clear plan for the achievement of the SDGs. This stands in stark contrast to the UK’s leadership role in formulating the SDGs, and in championing the inclusion of a standalone gender goal. It is regrettable that the UK has already missed opportunities to submit data to the UN and to participate in the High Level Political Forum in 2017. The Government must take the opportunity that the refreshed Single Departmental Plans provide, and use this to raise awareness of the SDGs, and SDG 5 in particular, across the UK.**

52. In order to achieve this, our main recommendation is that:

***Leadership on the SDGs should come from the top of Government. The Government should domestically publicise its commitment to the achievement of the SDGs in the UK. It should immediately commit to reporting to the UN’s High Level Political Forum in 2018.***

53. In addition to this,

***We support the International Development Committee’s recommendation that responsibility for the SDGs should sit within the Cabinet Office and not the Department***

55 [Bond/GADN \(SDG0028\)](#), para 5

56 [National Alliance of Women’s Organisations \(SDG0027\)](#)

57 Q171 [Caroline Dinéage]

58 Q170

59 UN, [Inputs to the 2016 High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development](#), accessed 21 February 2017

60 UN, [SDGs in Action newsletter](#) (February 2017)

*for International Development. The Government should take greater leadership by bringing together the elements of Single Departmental Plans that support the SDGs in a co-ordinated National Implementation Plan, to be led by the Cabinet Office.*

54. *We urge the Government to publish its report examining the domestic implementation of the SDGs, as promised to the International Development Committee in September 2016, without further delay.*

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in any form before 00.01 a.m. on Tuesday 14 March 2017

### 3 Specific actions to achieve SDG 5

55. The UK is a global leader on equality policies and law, and SDG 5 can help drive further improvement in empowering all women and girls in the UK. This chapter will outline actions that are needed to ensure the successful achievement of SDG 5 in the UK. It begins by assessing the Single Departmental Plans (SDPs), as these are the key mechanism through which the Government proposes to embed SDG targets in domestic policy-making. We will examine which specific targets should be included in departmental plans in order to achieve SDG 5, and outline some of the barriers that stand in their way. We will also examine how the core SDG principle of ‘leaving no-one behind’ can be incorporated within departmental plans.

56. Recommendations for other actions that could be used to support the domestic implementation of SDG 5 will then be assessed; these include using existing domestic legislation and international obligations as well as a broader focus on gender equality across government departments. Finally, we will examine some of the issues that must be addressed to ensure that SDG 5 is effectively implemented across the UK, including within the devolved administrations.

#### Refreshed Single Departmental Plans

57. In chapter 2, we noted that the Government’s refresh of Single Departmental Plans (SDPs) to include specific references to the SDGs demonstrates a commitment to domestic implementation of the goals. It is not just the fact of these refreshed plans which is important, however, but the extent to which they explicitly cover and allocate responsibility for all of the targets attached to the goals.

58. The Minister for International Development told us that the forthcoming Government report on the SDGs will not detail exactly how the goals are allocated across departments. However, he stated that this will be included in the Single Departmental Plans which:

will go down to the granular level of detail with each of the indicators that are set about how we are going to go about implementing them and measuring them.<sup>61</sup>

#### *The Government Equalities Office’s current Single Department Plan*

59. The GEO’s Single Departmental Plan targets are incorporated within the Department for Education’s plan. The aims relevant to SDG 5 currently included in the GEO section of that plan are those related to reducing the gender pay gap, increasing women’s representation on boards and promoting female leadership in the media, charitable and education sectors. The plan states that GEO is:

- working towards reducing the gender pay gap and pushing employers to do so, by:
  - implementing regulations requiring employers with at least 250 employees to publish the difference between the average pay and bonuses of their male and female employees;

- extending these reporting requirements to larger public sector employers;
  - stimulating debate and action on women's economic inequality through strong communication and leadership; and
  - delivering support, guidance and best practice to support businesses to report, analyse and act on their pay data.
- working to build on the achievement of meeting Lord Davies' target of 25 per cent FTSE 100 board positions being filled by women by increasing female representation on FTSE 350 boards to 33 per cent by 2020, which will include:
    - working with business to ensure a third of FTSE 350 board positions are held by women;
    - helping women progress through management to senior positions; and
    - promoting female leadership in the media, charitable and education sectors.<sup>62</sup>

60. The relevant performance metrics are the percentage difference between the average earnings of men and women and the proportion of FTSE 350 board positions that are held by women.

### ***What should be included in refreshed Single Departmental Plans***

61. The following SDG 5 targets, which are highly relevant to the UK, are currently not included in any department's Single Departmental Plan:

- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.

A further target within Goal 5 calls for ensuring "women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life."<sup>63</sup> Although the GEO's current plan does include taking steps to achieve increased participation by women in public and economic leadership (through its work on women and boards), there is nothing within the plan referring to women's political leadership or participation in political life.

62. The target on unpaid caring was raised as an example of a target which could deliver significant change, but which also raises questions about where SDGs sit and how they are measured.<sup>64</sup>

62 Department for Education, [Single departmental plan 2015 to 2020](#), accessed 28 February 2017

63 UN, [Goal 5 targets](#), accessed 20 February 2017

64 Q38 [Jessica Woodroffe]

Dr Mary-Ann Stephenson observed:

It does not fit anywhere neatly. Some of it has impact on women's poverty in old age: the surest route to poverty in old age is to be a woman and look after other people for nothing. That shows how we value unpaid work, if the price you pay for it in retirement is poverty. It does not fit neatly into any Department, so there is a gap there.<sup>65</sup>

63. Dr Graham Long also pointed out that measuring the target on unpaid caring led to “an incredibly tough question that is worth asking: what kind of form should valuing unpaid or domestic work take?” He explained that the UN does give some suggestions of ways to measure the target, for example, through the provision of public services, infrastructure, social protection policies, and promotion of shared responsibility in the family. However, he noted that these were “only suggestions that we do not have to take.”<sup>66</sup>

64. The Fawcett Society set out detailed suggestions for UK indicators for each target in SDG 5 in its written evidence to us, together with actions needed to achieve them. Its suggestion for the target on unpaid leave provides a starting point for considering some of the issues raised above.

**Box 2: An example of how action and indicators could be developed under the target on valuing unpaid care**

Indicators: Percentage take up of Shared Parental Leave by fathers; percentage of jobs advertised as flexible working and percentage of senior roles available as part-time or job-share; percentage of women and men requesting and securing flexible working; time-use survey data on the gender distribution of unpaid labour in the home; percentage of women experiencing pregnancy discrimination.

Action required: Introduction of a parental leave system that presumes equality of responsibility for caring for children (e.g. Swedish “daddy month” system with high level of pay close to replacement rate); a requirement on employers to advertise all jobs as flexible working jobs unless there is a strong business case not to; employment practices which lead to pregnancy discrimination regarded as undermining business performance, taken seriously and managed or disciplined appropriately. Abolition of employment tribunal fees.

Outcomes: Equalisation of time spent caring for children in the early years and other unpaid work in the home; all jobs advertised on a flexible working basis unless there is a strong business reason not to; senior roles available on a part-time basis; men as likely as women to work flexibly; an end to pregnancy discrimination; barriers to individual women fighting discrimination claims are removed.

Source: Fawcett Society<sup>67</sup>

65 Q38

66 Q27

67 [Fawcett Society](#) (SDG0031)



## Leave No-One Behind

65. In addition to the challenge of incorporating hard to measure targets within Single Departmental Plans, governments must also adhere to the principle of ‘leaving no-one behind’ throughout their implementation of the SDGs. This requires a focus on reaching the most vulnerable and marginalised and is an integral part of the SDG agenda: in signing up to the SDGs, the UK has committed to achieving this. The Declaration to the SDGs states:

As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no-one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.<sup>68</sup>

66. Evidence to this inquiry suggests that the theme of ‘leaving no-one behind’ has particular relevance to SDG 5 because of the inequality experienced by women across a range of issues. For example, on average, women are more likely to live in poverty than men because of lower incomes and assets over their lifetimes. Women make up 65 per cent of pensioners living at risk of poverty.<sup>69</sup> A higher proportion of women than men in England and Wales report being a victim of domestic violence, with those aged 16 to 19, White women, disabled women and women in low-income households particularly vulnerable.<sup>70</sup> And, as our report on Women in the House of Commons after the 2020 election noted, the UK ranks only 48th globally for representation of women in the lower or single legislative chamber, having fallen from 25th place in 1999.<sup>71</sup>

67. Katharine Sacks-Jones, Director of the Agenda Alliance, said the SDGs offered an opportunity to focus on marginalised women “for whom services do not really work and who are particularly excluded within society.”<sup>72</sup> She said it was important to recognise that

at the moment in the UK a lot of women are left behind. From a gender perspective, some women face multiple disadvantage: extensive abuse and violence, both as children and adults, on and off across their lives, combined with inequality and poverty.<sup>73</sup>

68. The UN has raised concerns that women experiencing the multiple disadvantages outlined above are not protected adequately by UK equality laws. The Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) said in its Concluding Observations on the UK in 2013 that it was concerned that the Public Sector Equality Duty in England “does not adequately protect women against multiple discrimination.”<sup>74</sup>

68 UN, [Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) (2015)

69 LSE Gender Institute, [Confronting Gender Inequality: findings from the LSE Commission on gender, inequality and power](#) (2015)

70 Office for National Statistics, [Focus on Violent Crime and Sexual Offences: 2013/14](#) (February 2015)

71 Women and Equalities Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2016–17, [Women in the House of Commons after the 2020 election](#), HC 630

72 Q108

73 Q107

74 UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, [Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#), para 16







































































