Written evidence submitted by the Department for International Development, HM Government

Overview

The UK Government welcomes the opportunity to submit evidence to the Environmental Audit Committee’s follow-up inquiry into the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The UK enjoys enormous respect and influence on development issues, and was at the forefront of negotiating the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda – the global framework for combatting the most pressing global challenges of our time. We lobbied hard to ensure the SDGs are inclusive and ambitious; reflecting a pledge to Leave No one Behind; and helping to tackle challenges like extreme poverty and disease, global instability and conflict, mass migration, climate change and gender inequality – challenges that do not heed national borders. Delivery of the SDGs is, therefore, firmly in our national interest.

The Government’s programme of work covers all 17 SDGs, and the Government is firmly committed to making progress on all of them. Single Departmental Plans continue to provide the basis for the Government’s planning and performance framework, and in these plans, Departments have highlighted how priority programmes and activities will contribute to delivery of the SDGs at home and abroad. High level summaries of updated plans were published on 23rd May 2018, alongside the corporate report “Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals” on GOV.UK.

The UK Government will be presenting a Voluntary National Review (VNR) of progress towards the SDGs at the UN High Level Political Forum in 2019. The Government welcomes the VNR process as an invaluable opportunity to review progress, including learning more about what people, communities and businesses are doing across the country on this agenda, and share experience and lessons with the wider international community.

It is not only Governments that will deliver the SDGs. Much of the important work being done in the UK on this agenda is being undertaken by schools, youth groups, charities, civil society, businesses and many others. Therefore, as part of our VNR we are looking to launch an online platform later this month where people can share their stories and contribute to the report we will be presenting in July 2019.
1) What steps the Government has taken to achieve the Goals:

The UK is well placed to deliver the SDGs by 2030 and implementation of the Government’s programme of work continues, covering all 17 Goals. At present, the Government has made significant progress towards some of the SDGs, and the UK has already met some of the targets.

For example, as part of initiatives to achieve gender equality (Goal 5), the Government recently introduced ground-breaking regulations requiring large employers to publish the differences between what they pay their male and female staff in average salaries and bonuses. In the first year of reporting, over 10,000 employers reported their data. The world-leading regulations increase transparency, driving board level discussions and pushing employers to take real steps towards closing the gap.

We have also allocated £5 million to mark the centenary of voting rights for women in 2018. This fund is supporting projects that raise awareness of this crucial milestone and encourages more women to participate in democracy and build a diverse political system that reflects the nation it serves.

With the aim of reducing inequality within the UK (in alignment with Goal 10), the Government published the results of its Race Disparity Audit on 10 October 2017 in the ground-breaking publication *Ethnicity Facts and Figures*. The findings will help to understand and assess differences between ethnic groups, identify public services where disparities are diminishing, and those where work is needed to develop effective strategies to reduce disparities between ethnic groups.

The UK Government is also making a significant contribution to the SDGs internationally. The SDGs are embedded across all of DFID’s work, and recent achievements include enabling 8.5 million additional women from July 2012 to March 2017 to use modern methods of family planning, supporting 27.2 million people to access clean water and/or better sanitation between April 2015 and March 2017 and supported 7.1 million children to gain a decent education between April 2015 and March 2017. Promoting prosperity goes hand in hand with eradicating poverty. DFID’s Economic Development Strategy sets out how greater economic inclusion of the poorest is essential for sustained growth and ending global poverty.

However, Governments cannot deliver the SDGs alone. We need the private sector – along with civil society – to be there with us, stimulating growth and mobilising investment to help deliver the Goals.
2) **What steps the Government has taken since the Committee's report to better mainstream the Sustainable Development Goals into its programme:**

Single Departmental Plans continue to provide the basis for the Government’s planning and performance framework. In these plans, departments have highlighted how the priority programmes and activities for which they are responsible will contribute to delivery of the SDGs.

To support departments in embedding the Goals in planned activity DFID and Cabinet Office co-chair a cross-Whitehall group. This group has met regularly since September 2017 and provides a platform to coordinate Goal implementation, embed the Goals in departmental activity and consider progress towards their implementation. As part of the VNR process, Cabinet Office and DFID will work with nominated Departmental Champions. Champions will support completion of the review.

Reflecting the conclusions of Departmental business planning processes for 2018/19, on the 23rd May, the Government published high-level summaries of the Single Departmental Plans on GOV.UK The Government also updated “Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals” highlighting some of the ways that the Government will support the delivery of the Goals through its domestic and international programme.

3) **How this is reflected in Single Departmental Plans and departmental reporting:**

In their plans, Departments have highlighted how the priority programmes and activities for which they are responsible will contribute to delivery of the SDGs. Departments continue to report regularly to Cabinet Office on their progress in delivering their Single Departmental Plan. This enables DFID and Cabinet Office to track progress towards delivery of the Goals.

Embedding the Goals in Single Departmental Plans will also enable progress towards them to be reported publicly in Departments’ Annual Report and Accounts. Importantly, this will enable progress towards the SDGs to be scrutinised by Parliament and the public.

Single Departmental Plans are an established process to focus Government’s efforts on important issues and we are confident they will support the delivery of the SDGs.
4) Whether the Government has done more since the Committee’s report to raise awareness of the SDGs especially amongst children and young people?

The Government is committed to working with our partners and stakeholders to raise awareness of the SDGs and deliver the priorities set out in Single Departmental Plans.

Mobilising children and young people will be important in order to fully achieve the SDGs. That is why we are working to increase their knowledge and understanding of the Goals. The national curriculum, which acts as a benchmark of excellence to schools, enables teachers to impart knowledge and to raise awareness of the SDGs and sustainability issues, and teachers are free to expand upon topics specified in the national curriculum if they choose to.

In addition, we are raising children and young people’s SDG awareness on health and well-being under new proposals (draft guidance is currently out for consultation) to make health education compulsory in all state funded primary and secondary schools. Many schools will teach health education as part of a broader personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme that supports their duty to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. Schools are free to draw on the PSHE Association’s programme of study which covers ages 5 to 18, and is based on three core themes: Health and Wellbeing; Relationships; and Living in the Wider World.

The Department for Education (DfE) also supports the Connecting Classrooms through Global Learning Programme, which is a £38 million, three-year programme (2018-21). It will provide opportunities for pupils in the UK and in the developing world to learn about global issues. DfE is encouraging schools to participate in the programme, which is led by DFID and co-designed, co-funded and delivered by the British Council. The programme will focus on children aged between 7 and 14 and will support partnerships between schools in the four nations of the UK and a range of priority countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, South and East Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa. By working directly with UK pupils, the programme invests in a new generation of Global Britain ambassadors who are proud of the work the UK is doing to tackle global poverty, and are better prepared to live and eventually work in a globalised economy.
5) What preparations are underway for the Voluntary National Review process, and how will the outcomes and impacts be measured

The Government will present a Voluntary National Review (VNR) of progress towards the SDGs at the UN High Level Political Forum in 2019 to showcase the UK’s work to deliver the SDGs, take stock of progress that has been made and understand better what more needs to be done. The Government supports the VNR process as a valuable exercise, with the opportunity to reflect on implementation and learn from others.

We have been working to finalise our plans for the VNR, and have developed a set of principles to inform it:

- we are clear that the VNR should set out how the work of the Government will support the delivery of all 17 SDGs. This year's theme of ‘Empowering people and ensuring inclusiveness and equality’ covers priorities for the UK Government, including economic growth, inequality, and peace and justice. We expect to highlight these areas in our report;
- there should be a good balance between the UK’s domestic and international work; and
- the VNR should adopt a data-driven approach to ensure it is robust and credible. We believe this is consistent with the VNRs presented by other countries and reflects UN guidance.

The report would be Government-led with DFID leading the overall coordination and drafting process, with support from the Cabinet Office and other Government departments. We are making use of existing cross-Whitehall mechanisms and are consulting with interested stakeholders to produce a strong report. SDG Champions are in the process of being nominated by each Department and will be responsible for supporting production of the review. In addition, we will soon be launching an online platform to ensure we capture as many views and suggestions as possible.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for reporting the UK’s data for the global indicators to the UN. As at 3 September, the ONS is reporting UK data for 151 (62%) of the 244 global indicators. The Government is working closely with ONS to understand the UK’s progress towards data collection for these indicators.

6) Whether the Government can be said to have an action plan on the SDGs?

The Government believes that the most effective way of supporting delivery of the Goals is by ensuring that they are embedded within the existing planning and performance framework, and in particular Single Departmental Plans. Such plans articulate how planned activity will support delivery of the Goals. This is in line with the UN Resolution launching the SDGs.
7) How does the Government take its commitment under the SDGs to address food insecurity and malnutrition in all its forms into account when developing policy on food; is there the data to effectively measure progress against these commitments?

The UK has a strong commitment to tackling malnutrition through promoting healthy, balanced diets both for the general population and particular at-risk groups. The Government is helping the most vulnerable to afford and have access to nutritious food, through initiatives such as the Healthy Start scheme and Free School Meals.

In addition, earlier this year, we announced a programme of research and pilots to explore ways of supporting children from disadvantaged families to access free enrichment activities and healthy food during school holidays so that they return to school engaged and invigorated, ready for a new term. This work is already underway, and we have provided £2m of funding to support the delivery of free enrichment activities and healthy food for disadvantaged children this summer. Drawing on this, we will set out plans for the 2019 pilots later this year.

We are also investing up to £26 million over the next three years to help create more breakfast clubs in schools across the country so even more children can enjoy a nutritious start to the day.

Through the Healthy Food Schemes, the Government provides a nutritional safety net to those who need it the most. Together, the schemes help more than three million children, as well as supporting the Childhood Obesity Plan and helping to reduce health inequalities. For example:

- **Healthy Start** is a targeted scheme which helps to encourage a healthy diet among 307,000 pregnant women and children under four from lower income families, who are in receipt of specified benefits. Healthy Start allows pregnant women and children aged over one and under four to receive a voucher worth £3.10 every week. Children aged under one receive two vouchers, worth £6.20 in total, every week. The vouchers can be used to buy, or be put towards the cost of, fruit, vegetables, milk and infant formula. Recipients are also eligible for free Healthy Start vitamins.

- **The Nursery Milk Scheme** provides reimbursement to childcare providers for a daily 189 ml (1/3 pint) portion of milk to children under the age of five, helping them deliver on their responsibility to provide food and drink which is balanced and nutritious.

- **The School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme** provides 2.3m children in Key Stage 1 with a portion of fresh fruit or vegetables each day at school. Over 16,000 institutions are signed up to the scheme and approximately 445 m pieces of fruit and vegetables are distributed to children annually. Schools are encouraged to use the scheme as an
opportunity to educate children about fruit and vegetables and to assist a healthy, balanced diet. The scheme also contributes towards the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

As partners of the Global Food Security Programme (GFS), the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and other Departments are working with the GFS to look at how food systems can comply with Sustainable Development Goals – A Task Force has been set up to look at this issue. A series of workshops with departments, industry, academics and NGOs are in progress to look at food systems that are both compliant with the Paris climate agreement and global health goals. GFS published a new Insight report focused on Paris-compliant healthy food systems, providing a synthesis of current knowledge tailored to policy and practice professionals.

Internationally, the UK’s global nutrition position paper Saving Lives, Investing in Future Generations and Building Prosperity sets out DFID’s approach to tackling malnutrition which aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 2 and the World Health Assembly Nutrition Targets.

The UK has a commitment to reach 50 million people with nutrition-related interventions in developing countries by 2020. By March 2018 we had reached 42 million people. Our approach includes scaling up work to address the needs of young children, particularly focusing on the first two years of life, to prevent stunting, wasting and micronutrient deficiencies. The UK puts girls and women at the heart of our work on global nutrition; particularly targeting unequal access to food, water and other essential services. Alongside this, the UK takes action to prevent famine by helping countries to build their resilience to drought and other shocks.

Our UK bilateral nutrition programmes focus on supporting countries with a high burden of undernutrition for example, in Ethiopia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Nigeria, Malawi, Mozambique Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Sudan, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Bangladesh, Burma, Pakistan. Our programmes deliver an evidence-based set of ‘nutrition-specific’ interventions as part of health services and adjust policies in other sectors (e.g. agriculture, social protection) to make sure these have a positive impact on nutrition.

DFID is increasing its focus on improving food systems in order to increase poor people’s access to safe, nutritious diets, as a key means of tackling all forms of malnutrition including undernutrition and overweight/obesity. DFID’s approach involves mobilising greater private sector innovation and investment in the agri-food sector, supporting governments to adopt effective food systems policies and strengthening accountability mechanisms for responsible business action on nutrition.

We also work to ensure health system strengthening supports improved quality and coverage of nutrition-specific services.

DFID reports results against the UK commitment to reach 50 million people with nutrition-related interventions by 2020 in its Annual Report. Data to
measure progress on the global nutrition targets are reported annually in the Global Nutrition Report which DFID helps to fund. The report focusses on data quality and its availability, while continuing to undertake analysis to identify priority areas for investment.

We work across our agriculture programmes to ensure that wherever appropriate, these monitor Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) impacts alongside other indicators. For example, the Global Agriculture and Food Security Programme, to which DFID is contributing £136 million over six years, now works against a results framework that is compatible with SDG indicators across implementing agencies, which captures results from both its public and private sector investment windows. This framework monitors the programme’s FNS results at outcome and at impact level through the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES) of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. We also work closely with the FAO and the World Bank to support these organisations to perform their roles as custodians for SDG indicators related to SDG 2.0 on zero hunger.

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