

Australia, Poverty, and the Sustainable Development Goals

A Response to what the Australian Government writes about Poverty in its *Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals*

Academics Stand Against Poverty Oceania



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ABOUT ASAP AND ASAP OCEANIA

Academics Stand Against Poverty (ASAP) is an international community of scholars and researchers working to confront the rules and practices that perpetuate global poverty, and to advocate for targeted, evidence-based reforms. With a strong presence among universities and academics in the global South, the ASAP network links like-minded academics, students and researchers from different disciplines around the world to formulate and articulate policy reforms at both national and international levels.

Academics Stand Against Poverty Oceania (ASAP Oceania), is a volunteer-based Chapter of ASAP. ASAP Oceania consists of a network of academics and development professionals committed to addressing poverty in all its forms both internationally and domestically, with a focus on Australia, New Zealand, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia in the Asia Pacific Region.

ASAP Oceania seeks to make its rigorous, cutting-edge research available to journalists and the broader public in order to shift conventional narratives about the causes of poverty, and to encourage citizen engagement in finding solutions to national and regional problems. It is perhaps unique among such organisation for engaging both with domestic poverty in Australia and with poverty overseas.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

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This report is being published on October 17, the United Nations International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. The official page for this day notes that 2018 is the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and says, 'It is important to recall the fundamental connection between extreme poverty and human rights, and that people living in poverty are disproportionately affected by many human rights violations'.¹ This of course is correct, but there is no reference to the idea that extreme poverty is itself a violation of human rights. Yet article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights begins:²

'Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.'

When this right was proclaimed seventy years ago one might have doubted whether there were enough resources to achieve it globally. In 2018, though, when according to an Oxfam report there are '2,043 dollar billionaires worldwide', and '42 people own the same wealth as the bottom 3.7 billion people', there should no longer be any doubt.³

¹ United Nations: <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/>

² United Nations: 'Poverty Eradication': <https://www.un.org/development/desa/socialperspectiveondevelopment/international-day-for-the-eradication-of-poverty-homepage/2018-2.html>

³ *Reward Work, not Wealth*, Oxfam Briefing Paper, January 2018: https://www.oxfam.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/bp-reward-work-not-wealth-220118-en_EMBARGO-2.pdf

The persistence of extreme poverty, then, is no longer just an unfortunate fact, as it has been for most of human history. It has become a choice. Globally, we make collective social and political choices that keep more than 700 million people, or 11% of the world population, in extreme poverty.⁴

This week is also Anti-Poverty Week in Australia. Australian citizens also make collective social and political choices that cause both relative poverty and absolute poverty to persist in Australia, and indeed sometimes to grow. In one of the contributions to this document, Ruth Phillips (Social Policy) estimates that 13.3% of the Australian population were living in relative poverty in 2016, and that 3.9 per cent were living in absolute poverty in 2014 (p. 48). No one could credibly argue that it is impossible at least to reduce this poverty, so once again its continuation is a matter of choice.

What position does the Australian Government take on such poverty, both domestically and internationally? One can glean an answer to this question from the Voluntary National Review (VNR) on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the Australian Government released in June this year.⁵ The 17 SDGs, which were adopted by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in 2015, focus on a wide range of developmental and environmental targets. The first goal is ‘End poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030’, and many of the other goals are related to poverty in a broad, multi-dimensional sense of that term.

So what does the Australian Government say about poverty in the VNR, and how accurate and representative is what it says? In order to help answer these questions, Academics Stand Against Poverty Oceania (ASAP Oceania),⁶ a network of academics and development professionals working in Australia and the Asia Pacific Region, has coordinated experts on several aspects of poverty to write brief, accessible responses to what the Australian Government says about poverty in the VNR. Given the unsystematic nature of the VNR and the

⁴ United Nations: ‘No poverty: Why it matters’: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Goal-1.pdf>

⁵ Australian Government: *Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals* (2018): https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/19592VNR_final_approved_version.pdf

⁶ <http://oceania.academicsstand.org/>

heterogeneity of its contents, it wasn't easy to provide a template for responses. That said, we suggested that contributors construct their responses around the following questions.

1. **What does the AVNR write about your field of expertise?** (What aspects of that field does the AVNR focus on? What are the main points the AVNR makes?)
2. **Is what the AVNR writes about your field of expertise accurate and representative?** (Does it potentially mislead by omission? Are the cases the AVNR focuses on representative, or are they cherry-picked? Is data provided where suitable data is available?)
3. **In your view, which policies most need to be reformed to improve Australia's performance in your field of expertise?**

This is the resulting document. The topics covered are Food Security, Indigenous Policy, Children and Families, Foreign Aid, Gender, Housing, Social Policy, and Disability. This of course is very far from a complete list of relevant topics, but is nonetheless broad enough to enable one to see if any common themes emerge across different sectors, and hence how systematic any failings are.

A number of the contributors note that the Australian Government has not made any funding available specifically for the SDGs. Consequently, as Georgeou and Hawksley (Foreign Aid) put it, the VNR is 'mostly an exercise in linking existing programs to different SDGs' (p. 31). So the transformative approach that many argue is necessary to achieve the SDGs is entirely absent (Phillips (Social Policy); Malekpour 2018⁷). In its place are descriptions of current policies and of case studies presented as illustrating the Australian Government's approach.

Many contributors to the Response also comment on the lack of data needed to assess Australia's performance, which makes it difficult to tell how representative the case studies the VNR focuses on are. For example, Robinson (Disability) writes, 'with no consistent application of disaggregated data we are left to question whether the examples provided are based on evidence and the extent to which these initiatives are positively impacting on people with

⁷ Shirin Malekpour: 'Australia must embrace transformation for a sustainable future', *The Conversation*: June 19 2018: <https://theconversation.com/australia-must-embrace-transformation-for-a-sustainable-future-98457>

disability or not' (p. 56) Jacobs (Housing) writes, 'Where data is provided it is selective and 'cherry picked' to give an impression of action' (p. 45). Jacobs also suggests that '... it is far better to look at the budgetary commitments to see whether aspirations can be delivered'. However, on this front he reports that the Review 'is woeful, with little information on budgets to address housing affordability concerns' (p. 45).

Another common theme in the Response concerns important issues that have been left out of the VNR. For example, Hawksley and Georgeou (Foreign Aid) note that the VNR makes no reference to the fact that Australia gives less now in international aid and development than at any time since the late 1960s. Robyn Alders (Food Security) notes that the VNR gives little attention to 'environmental, social and financial sustainability' (p. 15), and to obesity, which 'is more prevalent in low socio-economic settings' (p. 14). And Altman (Indigenous Policy) writes, 'The AVNR is highly selective in documenting the dire circumstances of many Indigenous peoples especially in remote Australia; at times it reads like Australian government propaganda for international consumption rather than serious reporting' (p. 20).

The VNR says that 'The strength of the SDG framework lies in the interlinkages between the SDGs' (VNR: 15). However, a number of the contributors argue that current government policies fail to take proper account of such interlinkages. Thus Cook (Children and Families) writes that 'the primary weakness of the [VNR] with respect to children and families' is the failure to recognise that 'It is in the interconnections between violence, poverty and families that solutions lie, rather than in solutions aimed at increasing individuals' capacity for employment' (p. 26). Alders (Food Security) argues that one of the key issues needing more attention is 'The integration of agricultural, health, environmental and socioeconomic policies' (p. 16).

A number of the contributors also highlight areas in which poverty in Australia is getting worse rather than better. Thus Altman (Indigenous Policy) writes (p. 20):

'Focusing on SDG1: No Poverty the AVNR overlooks a body of published research from the ANU (much sponsored by the Australian government) showing that not only are

Indigenous poverty rates everywhere greater than non-Indigenous rates, but that in some jurisdictions poverty is in fact increasing.'

And Phillips (Social Policy) notes that 'inequality between the rich and the poor has widened considerably' in Australia in recent years (p. 48).

Similarly, a number of contributors to the Response argue that current government policies are increasing poverty rather than reducing it. Thus Jacobs (Housing) writes, 'Overall, my impression is that the current Commonwealth's housing and tax policies accentuate poverty' (p. 47). Cook (Children and Families) writes, 'Taken together, the interconnections between these policies aimed at vulnerable children and families serve to exacerbate rather than ameliorate poverty along gender lines' (p. 26). Phillips (Social Policy) writes, 'Recent welfare reforms in Australia have seen an increase in the number of people on below-poverty line incomes' (p. 49). Both Phillips (Social Policy) and Gissane and Hutchinson (Gender) note the increase in homelessness for women, reflecting, as Phillips puts it, 'the failure to support women who have left violent relationships, have become single later in life and have had low incomes, precarious, impermanent work histories and very low superannuation savings (Phillips, 2017)' (p. 49).

Altman writes (p. 21):

'What is of great concern, but not mentioned in the AVNR, is that the government's own Community Development Program introduced on 1 July 2015 is exacerbating this deepening poverty by applying nearly 400,000 No Show No Pay penalties (to early 2018) to Indigenous people who do not turn up for Work for the Dole activities.'

So what policies should replace current, failing policies? Georgeou and Hawksley (Foreign Aid) argue that Australia should triple its current aid spending to take it up to the UN goal of 0.7% of gross national income, and ensure that 'recipient countries have more say in how aid money coming into their communities is spent, and how best they can reduce poverty and achieve their own SDGs' (p. 33).

On the domestic front, a number of contributors including Jacobs (Housing) and Phillips (Social Policy) argue that the government needs to spend more on social housing. Phillips also writes (p. 51):

‘ . . . there is extensive evidence that strong welfare state services and redistributive mechanisms such as unconditional cash transfers are the most effective sustainable solutions to entrenched poverty.’

Gissane and Hutchinson (Gender) write (p. 39):

‘Poverty must be addressed through a comprehensive and effective social protection system, including through income support payments. To this end, an immediate increase to the Newstart payment is required.’

Many other contributors also make this point about the Newstart payment. Gissane and Hutchinson (Gender) also write that the VNR ‘ . . . has shown that the Australian Government needs a system of gender-responsive policy development, informed by gender data and processes to analyse the gendered impacts of all policy proposals’ (p. 39).

The political philosopher John Rawls argued that the best test of the moral character of a government is how it treats those who are most disadvantaged. ‘Australia, Poverty and the Sustainable Development Goals’ shows that the Australian Government is failing this test badly.

Chapter 2: Food Security

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1. What does the AVNR write about your field of expertise?

The full title of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 is 'End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture'. This reflects the intimate linkages between food security, nutrition security and sustainable development as food and nutrition underpin the maximum population size that can be sustained indefinitely. In relation to SDG2, the AVNR focuses on:

- Australia as a producer of clean, healthy food that supplies both domestic consumers and as well as over 30 million international consumers. The importance of food to achieving good health and wellbeing (SDG3) was mentioned;
- Australian advocacy for open markets and free trade as well as the reduction of market-distorting agricultural support;
- The need for the agricultural sector to adapt to climate change while at the same time reducing its greenhouse gas emissions;
- Research and development innovation through Australia's 15 rural research and development corporations, co-funded by Government and industry;
- The need to address food insecurity in remote and disadvantaged communities – with 15% of Australians experiencing temporary food insecurity at least once in 2016-17, the report emphasises the role of community support groups and food recovery organisations (e.g. OzHarvest, FareShare and Foodbank) partnering with supermarket chains, and commercial and hospitality businesses to mitigate food insecurity while also reducing food waste (SDG12); and

- Australian Government support for agricultural research and development – the report notes that Australia was a founding member of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and that it continues to champion efforts in support of global and regional food security through international and regional bodies (e.g. G20, APEC and the OECD), as well as the international food standard-setting body Codex Alimentarius and the International Network of Food Safety Authorities. The report highlights the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research and the DFAT Launch Food program which supports 15 solutions utilising food technology, emerging communications and behavioural economics and insights to address access to affordable, nutritious, desirable and sustainable food and promote people’s selection and consumption of more nutritious food in the Indo-Pacific region.

2. Is what the AVNR writes about your field of expertise accurate and representative?

Overall, the AVNR has addressed the majority of the SDG2 goal targets.¹ It is important to note that the SDG food production indicators have a strong focus on cereal crops, as these have been the staple foods commonly associated with food security. With increasing attention on nutrition security, indicators tracking vegetable, fruit and animal-source food production are also needed. With vast rangeland areas in Australia, tracking the sustainable production of animal-source food and fibre is important.²

The AVNR gave little attention to two crucial objectives:

- (i) Nutrition security – current indicators suggest that Australia is a malnourished nation with 63.4% of Australian adults and around one in four (27.4%) children aged 5-17 years being overweight or obese in 2014-15.³ Obesity is more prevalent in low

¹ UN SDG2: Zero Hunger <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>

² The Transforming Australia: SDG Progress Report <https://www.sdgtransformingaustralia.com/#/1250/1280//>

³ National Health Survey 2014-15

[http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/CDA852A349B4CEE6CA257F150009FC53/\\$File/national%20health%20survey%20first%20results,%202014-15.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/CDA852A349B4CEE6CA257F150009FC53/$File/national%20health%20survey%20first%20results,%202014-15.pdf)

socio-economic settings.⁴ The World Health Organization suggests that anaemia is a moderate public health risk in Australia with females more likely than males to have inadequate iron intakes (23% did not meet requirements compared with 3% of males). The prevalence of inadequate intakes was highest amongst females aged 14-50 years, with nearly two in five having inadequate iron intakes.³ Iron deficiency anaemia is more prevalent in lower socio-economic groups.⁵

So while Australian farmers produce healthy nutritious food, 35% of total energy consumed in 2011-12 was from 'discretionary foods', that is foods considered to be of little nutritional value and which tend to be high in saturated fats, sugars and salt.⁶ Some efforts are underway to improve nutritional standards (e.g. the health star rating system), however, much more is required to ensure that resources used to produce healthy food are used efficiently to contribute to good health in the population with minimal waste;

- (ii) Sustainability – in relation to agriculture, environmental, social and financial sustainability must be taken into account. In terms of environmental sustainability, loss of biodiversity and soil carbon are significant issues.⁷ Australian Government expenditure in support of the Agricultural Sector is well below that seen in Europe and North America. It is notable that this decline over the past decade has occurred at a time when research and development into climate-smart agriculture has become increasingly important.² The number of farmers in Australia has been declining for many decades as small farmers sell up to large-scale farming operations, and fewer young people take over family farms. There were 19,700 fewer farmers in Australia in 2011 than in 2006, a fall of 11% over five years. Over the 30 years to 2011, the number of farmers declined by 106,200 (40%), an average of 294 fewer farmers every month over that period. Inadequate financial returns

⁴ Ghosh et al. 2016. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4861099/>

⁵ Callender and Schofield (2016) <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26824733>

⁶ Australian Health Survey: Nutrition First Results - Foods and Nutrients, 2011-12
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/4364.0.55.007main+features12011-12>

⁷ New South Wales Department of Primary Industries (2008) Increasing soil organic carbon of agricultural land.
<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/soils/soil-carbon/increasing-soil-organic-carbon-of-agricultural-land>

and mental health stresses contribute significantly to this decline. To date, there has been an inadequate focus on poverty amongst farming households.⁸

3. In your view, which policies most need to be reformed to improve Australia's performance in your field of expertise?

The efficient and sustainable production of food is central to achieving sustainable development in which no one is left behind. Food and nutrition security and sustainable, regenerative agriculture require increased focus and restructured policy environments that facilitate the development of synergistic agriculture, nutrition and health indicators. Key issues requiring attention include:

- The integration of agricultural, health, environmental and socioeconomic policies, recognizing that balanced food is essential to good physical, mental and cultural health;
- Food system policies and pricing need to account for both quality (i.e. natural nutrient density) as well as quantity;
- That agricultural frameworks, including subsidies and trade agreements, must support the production, distribution and marketing of food that promotes good health and sustainable land management practices, and account for the external costs to communities, public health, the global economy and the planetary ecosystem;
- That regulatory frameworks need to align equity, safety, nutrition and ecology;
- That financial and social support structures should be reoriented to recognize and support the role of women in ensuring nutritional wellbeing in their communities.⁹

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Chapter 3: Indigenous Australia

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The first AVNR showcases Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in 13 of the 17 SDGs. At the outset the report refers specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who comprise 3 per cent of the Australian population, noting that while there is no SDG specific to Indigenous peoples, all are significant for them. Indeed, the AVNR begins and ends with an Indigenous flourish, the art work on the cover by Jordana Angus a Wiradjuri (NSW) artist depicts the 17 interconnected SDG, bookended with a detailed glossary at pp 126–129 that explains the artistic symbolism embedded in each element. And the report itself was designed and typeset by Carbon Creative, an Indigenous company engaged through the government's affirmative Indigenous Procurement Policy. In forewords the now ex-Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull refers to the diverse needs and aspirations of Indigenous Australians and there is also reference to the Indigenous concept of Caring for Country to reflect a commitment to environmental sustainability while simultaneously noting the national economic ethos of 'a fair go' for all (that dispossessed and marginalised Indigenous Australians might question). An Australian government commitment to recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in 'our constitution' is also noted (p. 7), a statement that is totally divorced from veracity following the outright rejection without negotiation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart by Turnbull late last year. The report lauds Australia's economic success and 26 years of uninterrupted economic growth and notes the challenge to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples without documenting the extent of that challenge, and the depth of poverty for some sections of the Indigenous population or its historical and structural causes.

The AVNR is highly selective in documenting the dire circumstances of many Indigenous peoples especially in remote Australia; at times it reads like Australian government propaganda for international consumption rather than serious reporting. Let's begin with the Council of Australian Governments' headline Closing the Gap framework reported belatedly under SDG10 Reducing Inequality. The framework launched in 2008 has failed to deliver as documented in ten annual reports to the Australian parliament and yet there has been no attempt to change its fundamental direction. Closing the Gap had seven modest disparity targets: to halve the gap in child mortality by 2018, to halve the gap in reading and numeracy by 2018, to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020, to halve the gap in employment outcomes by 2018; to close the gap in life expectancy by 2031; a revised target to have 95 per cent of Indigenous four-year olds in early childhood education by 2025; and an ambitious new target devised by another ex-Prime Minister Tony Abbott to close the gap in school attendance between 2014 and 2018 (Commonwealth of Australia 2018).

In this report as elsewhere, the Australian government asserts that three targets are on track. In fact, only one, year 12 attainment might be on track. I say might because research published by the Grattan Institute shows widening gaps, referred to as a gulf, in learning outcomes, especially evident in remote and very remote areas (Goss 2018). The information on child mortality provided refers to trends from 1998 with most progress already achieved by 2008. And the government's early Indigenous childhood goal is not defined as a gap rather an early childhood enrolment target. This target had failed after five years by 2013 and so was 'reset' to be met by 2025 (see Altman 2018).

Focusing on SDG1: No Poverty the AVNR overlooks a body of published research from the ANU (much sponsored by the Australian government) showing that not only are Indigenous poverty rates everywhere greater than non-Indigenous rates, but that in some jurisdictions poverty is in fact increasing. Francis Markham and Nicholas Biddle (2018) from ANU show that Indigenous poverty rates in Australia have declined slowly in the last decade from 33.9 per cent in 2006 to

31.4 per cent in 2016, at this rate SDG1 would take over 100 years to achieve. The situation in very remote Australia is direr as more than half Indigenous people live in households below the poverty line; in this jurisdiction poverty rates have increased in the last intercensal period 2011–2016. This is partly because the employment disparity between Indigenous and other Australians has grown. In very remote Australia, as the non-Indigenous employment rate has hovered about 80 per cent between 2006 and 2016, the Indigenous rate has declined from nearly 50 per cent to just over 30 per cent. In remote Indigenous Australia the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous employment is growing; and the absolute rate of Indigenous employment has declined to the extent that only three in 10 Indigenous adults are in paid work. What is of great concern, but not mentioned in the AVNR, is that the government's own Community Development Program introduced on 1 July 2015 is exacerbating this deepening poverty by applying nearly 400,000 No Show No Pay penalties (to early 2018) to Indigenous people who do not turn up for Work for the Dole activities (Fowkes 2018). Some programs like the Indigenous Procurement Policy might work, but others like the Community Development Program is delivering below award forms of forced labour not 'Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG8). Despite the SDG2: Zero Hunger people are going hungry in part because discriminatory and expensive to administer income management regimes introduced in the past decade in the name of 'improving food security' (p30) (that are not mentioned in AVNR) force Indigenous people to purchase expensive store food while on welfare. The option to live on country at homelands is limited by lack of clean water and sanitation (SDG6) and infrastructure (SDG9). Consequently, there is a reduction in remote people's access to their land and natural resources, a form of 'food sovereignty' that could reduce hunger and enhance Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG3).

The statement of how Indigenous peoples care for country needs to be urgently reversed. How does the Australian country care for Indigenous peoples, especially those who are deeply disadvantaged owing to a combination of historical legacy, racial discrimination, structural

demographic and locational factors and cultural differences? The short answer is not very well at all. It is a sad indictment of a rich settler society like Australia that no progress has been made in recent years on SDGs 1 and 2 to end poverty and eliminate hunger. Policy reform is urgently needed especially in the context of international reporting to acknowledge the crushing failure of the past decade and the deepened impoverishment especially evident in remote Indigenous Australia. Australia could learn from other settler societies that have managed decolonisation and governance for sustainable Indigenous development far better. But the Australian government could also expand rapidly what it accurately documents as working at present. For example, on Climate Action (SDG13) Indigenous groups have been successfully contracted to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through savannah fire management. And with Life on Land (SDG15) Indigenous ranger groups are currently managing 75 Indigenous Protected Areas (45% of the Australian conservation estate) but on uncertain shoestring budgets. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG9) makes reference to the Development of Northern Australia but fails to mention Indigenous peoples or their ownership of more than half this jurisdiction (covering 53% of Australia's land mass) under land rights and native title laws.

The Closing the Gap agenda imposed on Indigenous Australians in 2008 is being refreshed in 2018 in apparent 'partnership' with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (p.72). Perhaps the 17 SDGs should be thrown into the consultation mix to allow external scrutiny of Australia's efforts by the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development to ensure No Poverty (SDG1) and Zero Hunger (SDG2) are not left until 2030 but are treated as urgent well-being priorities.

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Chapter 4: Children and Families

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1. What does the Voluntary National Review say about children and families?

Children and families do not feature prominently in the Australian government's response to the Sustainable Development Goals. As such, families are not explicitly conceived of in the VNR document as sites where children are raised, or where resources are shared intergenerationally. There is a greater focus on women and girls, as directed by Australia's response to Goal 5 on gender equality. However, while the VNR notes the important contribution that women and girls make to "the ongoing development of Australia's innovative industries, economic growth and cohesive communities into the future" (p. 43) and the importance of raising "community awareness of gender inequality, particularly its linkages with violence", there is no acknowledgement of the family as the primary social institution that shapes women's and girls' experiences and opportunities.

The care work conducted in families – particularly caring for children – is referred to as contributing to the Australian economy, and to the sustainable development goals. For example, the Introduction notes, "The many Australian families engaged in the care economy, in volunteer work, and through their everyday activity including their paid work are contributing to the SDGs" (p. 7). For women (p. 43), and families with children who share in around one third of total government expenditure alongside older Australians, people with disabilities, veterans, carers and unemployed people (p. 23), work is positioned as the solution to achieve gender equality and reduce poverty, respectively. Here, Australia's action plan is "to build people's capacity to participate economically and socially to the extent they are able" (p. 23).

2. Is the Voluntary National Review's approach to children and families accurate and representative?

The VNR provides mixed messages about the wellbeing of children and families, depending on whether these families are located outside of Australia, or are able to be marked out as 'others' from the mainstream Australian population. This is particularly marked for Goal 1 on poverty and Goal 5 on gender equality. For example, with respect to their action on Goal 1, the government notes that, "we recognise that gender equality is central to everything we do and as such aim to mainstream gender equality across all SDGs" (p. 26). However this appears in a section on Australia's 'Regional and Global Action', with little indication of how gender equality is included within other SDG activities or actions.

Similarly, with respect to Goal 5, 'Addressing Violence, Discrimination and Harassment', while it is noted that one in three women has experienced some form of violence, most of the section is spent marking the problem out as one experienced by particular women, who lie outside of the mainstream. The statistics used to represent these vulnerable women are selectively applied, and in some cases reveal no difference to the mainstream community, who is discursively distanced from the problem, and thus mainstream solutions. For example:

Some women are particularly vulnerable to violence, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australia 32 times more likely than non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to be hospitalised due to family violence-related assaults ... people who identify as LGBTI are just as likely as non-LGBTI women to experience domestic violence, with one in three experiencing violence in a past or present relationship ... Women with a disability are particularly vulnerable to family violence (p. 45).

Here, violence is presented as a problem experienced by particular kinds of women, rather than women across society. As such, the VNR implies that particular and targeted solutions rather than universal and cultural solutions are required.

While the strength of the SDGs is identified in the VNR as lying in the interlinkages between the goals, no such holistic and transformative thinking is applied to the issues that subject some of Australia's most vulnerable children and families to poverty. This is the primary weakness of the response with respect to children and families. It is in the interconnections between violence, poverty and families that solutions lie, rather than in solutions aimed at increasing individuals' capacity for employment.

Research has identified that single parent families, who are overwhelmingly headed by single mothers, are one of the most vulnerable family types in Australia (Brown 2016). In the VNR, the government repeatedly lists its aims to promote "full participation" (p. 22), "build people's capacity to participate economically ... through employment" (p. 23), "helping [individuals and families experiencing financial crisis] to improve their financial capability" (p. 24) and "boosting women's workforce participation" (p. 43). However, these aims fail to acknowledge the deeply unequal distribution of care work that limits women's capacity to participate economically. For example, mothers in de facto and married couple households contribute just over 60 per cent of the couple's time spent on housework and care work, while fathers contribute 71 per cent of the couple's time spent in employment in each of these household types (Wilkins & Lass 2018, p. 85). Upon relationship dissolution, these caring and earning patterns continue, with lone parent families experiencing significant financial hardship in Australia (ACOSS 2014; de Vaus et al 2017). In claiming success in advancing gender equality, the government's voluntary response to the SDGs obscures its own failings when it comes to improving the lives of low-income families and the children therein.

3. Which policies need to be reformed to improve Australia's performance?

Australia's voluntary review has provided a selective assessment of its response to the SDGs. The government's response to the gender equality and poverty reduction goals in particular offer significant room for improvement, and there is a need for the government to follow through on what it identifies as the "strength of the SDG framework [lying] in the interlinkages between SDGs" (p. 15).

The interlinkages between gender equality and poverty reduction are obvious to many, but are sadly lacking within Australia's action to date or plans for future action. Indeed, much of the government's proposal for policy reform would worsen rather than ameliorate either of these issues. The expansion of the ParentsNext program (Department of Human Services [DHS] 2018a), which entails compulsory 'job readiness' activities for 'unemployed' parents with children under six and sanctions including benefit withdrawal for those missing appointments or failing to take part in activities, fails to acknowledge the work or demands of caring for children.

Further, there has been no action on improving child support non-compliance, despite a series of recent reviews and inquiries (Australian Law Reform Commission 2013; Australian National Audit Office 2017; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs 2015). Debts for less than half of the caseload who transfer payments via the department currently exceed \$1.35 billion (Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee, 2013), and when private child support goes unpaid, single parent families lose both these and government Family Tax Benefit Part A payments (DHS 2018b; Cook 2013). Finally, the Government has not raised the Newstart payment for many years, despite lobbying from welfare agencies, local councils and the business sector. At the same time, already vulnerable single parent families are being transferred onto the payment as soon as their youngest child turns six, increasing distress and poverty as a result (Brady & Cook 2015; National Council of Single Mothers and their Children 2017).

Taken together, the interconnections between these policies aimed at vulnerable children and families serve to exacerbate rather than ameliorate poverty along gender lines. These stand in stark contrast to the poverty reduction and gender equality SDGs.

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Chapter 5: Foreign Aid

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1. What does the AVNR write about your field of expertise?

The 130-page Australian Voluntary National Review (AVNR) of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is an important document, if only for the reason that it has focused government attention on achieving the SDGs, and presented it as a coherent response to each SDG (DFAT 2018A). As a focus area, international aid and development is spread throughout the document and the discussion on aid ranges across several SDGs. The AVNR attempts to integrate a great deal of information, but with respect to aid it basically reformats the existing aid program expenditure to correlate with the 17 SDGs.

The links between development aid and achieving the SDGs are particularly important for SGD1: No Poverty. Aid is the principal tool through which Australia has contributed to the reduction of poverty in our region and across the world. Since the 1980s the Australian aid program has concentrated on delivering programs that support and promote health, education, good governance, and the rule of law, and many of these themes articulate with the SDGs. International aid and development is not a specific SDG itself, but the sorts of programs Australia supports through its aid program affect SDG2 Zero Hunger; SDG3 Good Health and Well-Being; SDG4 Quality Education; SDG5 Gender Equality; SDG6 Clean Water and Sanitation; SDG10 Reduced Inequalities; SDG16 Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; and SDG17 Partnerships for the Goals. Any reductions to the level of Australian aid affect not only the capacity to achieve SDG1 No Poverty, but interrelated SDGs in numerous countries.

The AVNR commits no new SDG-specific aid funding, so the document is mostly an exercise in linking existing programs to different SDGs. A review of the document finds several mentions of aid, and overall it is clear that Australian aid programs do go some way to addressing many of the 17 SDGs and their 169 associated targets. One notable example is the way that the state has contracted the “business” of aid delivery to the private sector, NGOs, international organisations (DFAT 2018A: 106) and volunteer programs (DFAT 2018A: 112-12, 109). This is in keeping with Australia’s general approach to the aid sector over the past three decades but also specifically underpins SDG17 Partnerships for the Goals.

2. Is what the AVNR writes about your field of expertise accurate and representative?

The AVNR is a helpful start, but what the document fails to mention is that overall Australia is a far less generous nation now in terms of aid and development than at any time since the late 1960s (Davies 2017). After aid spending was slashed in the 2013-14 budget, former Foreign Minister Julie Bishop was able to hold funding roughly steady in dollar terms at \$4bn for the entire Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Not all of this however was aid, as the DFAT budget is split between bilateral assistance; regional initiatives; DFAT staffing in embassies and consulates; other monies support international institutions such as the United Nations; and support for international banks and lending agencies.

The Australian aid program is concentrated in our region — the Pacific and Southeast Asia. For each aid recipient there are country-specific bilateral aid programs, as well as cross-cutting programs. Focusing on aid as just these two items, Australia’s spending attracted \$3.2 bn in the last budget from the Federal government’s total allocation of \$470 bn. As a percentage, this is not even one per cent of budget spending (0.0068%) (GoA 2018). As a ratio to Gross National Income (GNI) Australia now gives approximately 0.22% of its GNI to international aid and development, which is well short of the UN recommended 0.7% (Hawksley and Georgeou 2018).

Aid programs support several features at once — education, access to water, good governance, roads, rule of law — in an effort to boost economic growth which will hopefully create

employment and raise people from poverty. SDG1: No Poverty has to be understood in terms of both its local context and its connections to all other SDGs.

While funding for recipient countries varies, cross-cutting areas such as disability support several SDGs (SDGs 4, 8, 10, 11 and 17). Australia's aid program links with these through advocacy for the rights of the disabled, disability mainstreaming in aid programs and disability specific investments (DFAT 2018A: 16-17). Gender equality is another cross-cutting theme with links to SDG5 in particular, but also to SDGs 1, 8 and 10. Australia targets around 80% of its aid to projects that develop gender inclusion (DFAT 2018A: 28, 46), in both education (DFAT 2018A: 40) and women's economic empowerment (DFAT 2018A: 46).

There are some omissions from the Australian government's response to the SDG's, which could have even made a stronger case for Australia supporting specific SDGs. For example, there is no mention of DFAT's \$25.6 million of support for Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) through a range of research grants it is currently offering (DFAT 2018b) which directly contribute to SDG6 Clean Water and Sanitation, a particularly important issue for women in developing countries.

3. In your view, which policies most need to be reformed to improve Australia's performance in your field of expertise?

With respect to Australia's very low aid/GNI ratio, several facts are relevant. First, the Australian economy is well over triple the size it was in the late 1960s when we gave proportionally much more, so while we are relatively wealthier we are also giving less. Second, in 2013 there was a sharp decline in Australia's generosity towards our near neighbours in the Pacific and South East Asia and aid funding apparently reached its nadir. Aid funding appeared to have stabilised under the Prime Ministership of Malcolm Turnbull (2015-2018), but only time will tell if new Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Foreign Minister Marise Payne will quarantine the aid sector from future budget cuts. Third, the notion of developing countries trading their way out of poverty, and aid-for trade programs remains a key part of the government's overall approach to ending poverty and reducing inequality.

Fourth, while the dollar amount of aid has stabilised, there is a continued reliance on Australian companies to deliver the aid services in Papua New Guinea, the Pacific Islands, Indonesia and South East Asia (Hawksley and Georgeou 2018). None of this is mentioned in the first AVNR, which is now a relic of the Turnbull government, and it remains to be seen whether future Australian governments will even be committed to the AVNR exercise.

Supporting the SDGs through an increased Australian financial commitment to aid and development in our region is good economic, security and political policy. It is also beneficial to aid recipients. Three things would help in achieving the SDGs in the Indo-Pacific. First the government must reverse aid cuts to triple its current aid spending and meet the UN goal of aid as 0.7% GNI. Such a move would signal Australia's commitment to reduce the gap between the investment required to assist developing countries achieve their SDGs by 2030 and the estimated US\$2.5 trillion annual shortfall in current investment levels in the developing world (Chowdury & Sundaram 2017). Second, Australia should progressively phase out Australian-based contractors and move to local organisations to deliver aid services. This move would end Australia's 'boomerang aid', engage fully in the spirit of partnership, and promote local capacity-building. Lastly, Australia should adhere fully to the principles of the Paris Declaration (2005) and Accra Agenda for Action (2008), the two main agreements on aid effectiveness that emphasise partnership, dialogue and negotiation in aid funding (OECD 2018). These principles should be at the centre of every aid discussion so that recipient countries have more say in how aid money coming into their communities is spent, and how best they can reduce poverty and achieve their own SDGs.

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Chapter 6: Gender

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Introduction

The SDGs herald the international community's recognition that poverty is gendered. Accordingly gender equality is a standalone goal *and* an essential pre-condition for the achievement of all the 17 goals. Gender is embedded in the targets and indicators of Goal 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls) and 10 of the 17 other goals. It is important to note that while the indicators framework calls for disaggregation by sex, this is largely interpreted through the gender binary prism.

The Australian Government's VNR reveals some aspects of the gendered dynamics of poverty and inequality in Australia, however, more detailed data is required for the full picture and to inform more gender-responsive policy responses.

Of the 14 indicators for Goal 5, the Australian government has reported against (Australian Government, 2018) 57%, is exploring data sources for 7%, has not reported against 29% and 7% are not applicable. Outside the Goal 5 indicators, there are 54 gender indicators that are either gender specific (calling for sex disaggregation) or gender relevant (for example, related to maternal health or gender mainstreaming in education). Of these, just over a quarter are reported online. The remaining 39 are either not reported, deemed not applicable or data sources are still being explored.

In the following gendered analysis of poverty as it was reported by the Australian Government in their first Voluntary National Review on the implementation of the SDGs, we have focused on four key issues on gender and poverty that are included in the SDGs: poverty, work, inequality and housing. These are covered in goals 1, 8, 10 and 11 respectively.

Gender and poverty

Gender is included in four of the targets and indicators of Goal 1 on ending poverty everywhere. Target 1.2 aims to halve the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty according to national definitions. One of the indicators for this target is the proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age (UN Stats, 2018). The Government has drawn on data from the longitudinal HILDA survey to report against this indicator which shows that women live in poverty for longer. According to the VNR, 13% proportion of the Australian population currently experiences poverty. This information is not gender disaggregated, however, we know from the 2016 ACOSS Poverty Report¹ that women are marginally over-represented as a proportion of the population experiencing poverty *at any one time* (ACOSS and SPRC, 2016). Data on *duration* should be retained, but *Australia requires data on the proportion of the population experiencing poverty disaggregated by gender and age*.

Target 1.3 calls for member states to implement social protection systems and measures for all. The government has reported that they have achieved 100% of the indicators for this target on account of Australia's "comprehensive welfare system" (Australian Government, 2018). This rosy picture highlights the relatively low threshold of this target. However, we also know that this figure omits information about both the effectiveness of Australia's income support system in alleviating poverty *and* the comprehensiveness of its coverage. Over a third of people receiving social security payments are in poverty (ACOSS and SPRC, 2016) which disproportionately impacts women who derive a larger proportion of their income from income support (Wilkins, 2017) and the brutal tightening of eligibility criteria for income support is leaving many women behind (Harmony Alliance, 2018). *We should hold the government to a higher standard on 1.3 and push for reporting against this indicator which goes beyond referencing the existence of Australia's welfare system and provides gendered information as to its effectiveness.*

¹ A 2018 Report is expected to be released in October 2018 during Anti-Poverty Week.

Access, or lack thereof, to basic and essential services can compound and complicate experiences of poverty. The government is still investigating potential data sources for target 1.4 on access to services. It is critical that data for 1.4 accounts for the gendered dynamics of service access.

Ideally, indicator 1.4.1 should be considered in concert with 5.4.1 on time use (time spent in unpaid work by gender). There are data provided for 5.4.1, however, it is badly out of date. This is because Australia's last time-use survey was in 2006 and there is no political commitment to continue conducting time-use surveys. Time spent in unpaid work holds a critical and gendered relationship to basic service availability and access because *"unpaid care work absorbs the 'invisible' cost of poor infrastructure and service provision"* (Rodríguez Enríquez, 2018). *We need data that link service provision and (women's) unpaid labour.* The time women spend in unpaid work also impacts the time available for women to participate in the paid workforce.

Women and work

SDG 8 promotes sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. In accordance with indicator 8.5.2, data have been reported for unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities. Further, the hourly gender pay gap is reported in 8.5.1 in a rich dataset presenting the hourly pay gap compared over time (since 2004) and disaggregated by sector. While these data meet the indicator thresholds, *the Australian Government could provide further information and data to report against other key employment and pay equity issues that pose threats to full, productive and decent work for all.*

For example, the impacts of casualisation, insecure and low wage work are significant for women. According to analysis from the Fair Work Commission on characteristics of minimum wage earners, women make up 58.7% of workers on the national minimum wage and 55.6% of low-paid adult employees (Yuen, Ellis and Nelms, 2018). Women are also disproportionately represented in underemployment and insecure work (Jericho, 2018).

Australia's national gender pay gap has hovered between 15-19% for twenty years (WGEA, 2018). Jobs and industries that are dominated by women are those with the lowest wages. The gender pay gap becomes compounded as the gender superannuation gap. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has reported that, on average, women are currently retiring with up to 37% less superannuation than men (ABS, 2018). In fact, one in three women retire with no superannuation at all (Senate Economics References Committee, 2016). This, combined with a lack of affordable housing, means older women are one of Australia's largest growing cohorts of people experiencing homelessness (National Older Women's Housing and Homelessness Working Group, 2018).

Gender inequality within Australia

SDG 10 is on reducing inequality within and between countries. Gender income gaps exacerbate income inequality, obstructing efforts towards greater income equality (Gonzales et al, 2015). One of the indicators for SDG 10 is the rates of income growth between the bottom 40 percent of households compared to the total population. *While the government has provided inequality data all the way back to 1994, it should provide sex disaggregated data.* Further, evidence from Treasury to the 2014 Senate Inquiry on Income Inequality in Australia stated that "it is important to consider a range of different indicators of income inequality rather than one or two metrics" (Community Affairs References Committee, 2014). Such additional measures could include the gini coefficient, measures focussed on household or individual income by deciles or quintiles, and the impacts of tax on income and wealth redistribution.

Housing for women

The SDGs only cover housing in urban settings through target 11.1.1 and there is no requirement to disaggregate by gender. The VNR does not report against this as a data source is still being explored. Housing is also missing from Goal 1 on poverty and basic services. While that information is missing from the VNR, we do know that Australia's housing system is failing

people living in poverty. Women and their families are the main participants in housing support systems and services, including social housing, homelessness services and rent assistance (Gissane, 2018). Women face unique housing challenges as a result of domestic violence, unpaid care work and pay gaps. Rural women, older women and women with disabilities are at particular risk of housing insecurity and homelessness.

Access to affordable and appropriate housing is a problem in rural areas. Similar issues to that in urban areas of a lack of affordable supply can be identified in rural and remote communities and, additionally, distinct housing issues relating to the rural context (Beer et al, 2011). These encompass geography and spatial differentiation and also higher rates of poverty (NHRA, 2017), domestic and family violence (ANROWS, 2015) and fewer services (Ockenden, 2015). In spite of significant service gaps, the rate of specialist homelessness service use for women in rural and remote communities is higher than their metropolitan counterparts (AIHW, 2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Voluntary National Report has shown that the Australian Government needs a system of gender-responsive policy development, informed by gender data and processes to analyse the gendered impacts of all policy proposals.

Poverty must be addressed through a comprehensive and effective social protection system, including through income support payments. To this end, an immediate increase to the Newstart payment is required. Income support is also a critical means to value unpaid labour; accordingly, a single parenting payment must be reinstated for single parents with children up to 16 years old. Any proposed welfare and income support reform should be accompanied by a gender impact statement for decision-makers.

The government needs a comprehensive policy to address the gender pay and superannuation gaps which covers workforce casualisation and gender-based occupational segregation. Women's housing needs must be addressed through a national gender-responsive housing strategy (Gissane 2018) which ensures an increase in social and affordable housing stock and an increase to Commonwealth Rent Assistance, funded through reforms to negative gearing and

the Capital Gains Tax exemption (Equality Rights Alliance, 2017). Finally, the availability of gendered data would be greatly improved with funding for the ABS needs to recommence regular time-use surveys.

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Chapter 7: Housing

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1. What does the AVNR write about your field of expertise?

The AVNR makes some general points about housing affordability challenges but in a complacent form in order to convey the impression that Australia is on track to meet its obligations and working with other agencies successfully. It is important to recognise that reports like this one/the AVNR are intended to convey a sense of action rather than any honest assessment of the shortfalls in policymaking. On the positive side, housing affordability is recognised as an issue requiring attention.

Consider the statement below, which is representative of the level of detail in the AVNR:

‘Disadvantage also occurs in urban areas. High housing costs contribute to the rate of homelessness in Australia, with disadvantaged groups particularly affected. In consultations around the country in 2017, Australia’s UN Youth Representative reported that young Australians have identified housing affordability as a particular concern for their future independence and welfare’.

As for solutions, this is what is stated:

‘The Government is working towards a new agreement with states and territories aimed at improving housing and homelessness outcomes for all Australians across the housing spectrum, particularly those most in need. Financing initiatives will increase housing supply and provide cheaper and longer-term finance to providers of social and affordable housing.’

If we consider this statement, it is both general and vague and obscures the extent to which housing affordability problems are not being addressed in ways that might have a positive impact. More specifically there is no acknowledgement in the report of the need to commit more resources to increase the supply of social housing. The reasons why the housing affordability problems experienced by many low-income households are not being addressed can be sourced to the government's anxiety that any sustained reduction in house prices and rents would upset existing homeowners and landlord investors and potentially have electoral consequences for the government.

Motherhood statements are misleading, and it is far better to look at the budgetary commitments to see whether aspirations can be delivered. Here the document is woeful, with little information on budgets to address housing affordability concerns.

If we turn to the last Commonwealth budget to fill in the gaps, it contains a commitment that the Commonwealth will honour its current funding contribution of A\$1.3 billion for the Commonwealth-State housing agreement. However there has been no commitment to increase overall funding despite population growth, a rise in homelessness and more households in housing stress.

2. Is what the AVNR writes about your field of expertise accurate and representative?

There is very little data, I suspect because this would demonstrate that the funds that are set aside to address affordable housing problems are inadequate. There is some acknowledgement of current policy such as 'City Deals' whereby councils work with the Commonwealth government to secure investment but very little budgetary detail to provide the necessary context to gauge the effectiveness of these programmes.

Where information is provided it is selective and 'cherry picked' to give an impression of action. There is an emphasis on terms like 'community' and 'government' to convey progress but nothing that shows the budgetary commitment. A clear example is provided in the following section of the report. The section below is purposefully written and uses terms such as 'national approach' 'vision', 'productive', 'liveable' and 'shared' to convey success. Yet, when

read critically, these terms tell us little about the actual content of policy and serve as camouflage to hide the paucity of resources that are put in place for implementation.

The Australian Government's national approach to cities is set out in the 2016 Smart Cities Plan, which outlines a vision for productive and liveable cities by driving collaboration between all levels of government, the private sector, research organisations and the community. City Deals, a key component of the plan, bring together all levels of government to develop a shared vision to improve infrastructure and public transport, liveability and sustainability, innovation and job accessibility in a specific geographic area.

3. In your view, which policies most need to be reformed to improve Australia's performance in your field of expertise?

From the Commonwealth, there needs to be a substantial commitment to prioritise the lack of affordable housing and commit resources to building new public housing. There also needs to be a shift in the taxation arrangements that currently reward landlord investors (i.e. negative gearing arrangements) and homeowners (i.e. exemptions on capital gains tax at the point of selling a home and the aged pension asset test).

Over the long term, government should seek to establish a level playing field so that renters are not disadvantaged. Currently most of the tax subsidies in Australia reward homeowners and investors. Renters, especially in the private sector, have very limited rights (i.e. long-term security of tenure). Some states such as Victoria have taken steps to strengthen tenants' rights, but greater progress could be made if the Federal Government provided funds so that states and territories could effectively regulate the private sector through the enforcement of rules and sanctions on landlords who break the conditions of the tenancy regulations.

The issue of homelessness is likely to increase, and the response of government agencies operates in a way that can best be described as a 'band aid' rather than a systemic response that might help reduce the causal factors that accentuate homelessness.

State governments have insufficient resources to tackle the housing problems, but a smart policy would be to establish land taxes to generate revenue that can be then expended on an affordable housing strategy.

There is insufficient investment across all levels of government to commit to public housing. Sensible reforms for example in the area of taxation are not being adopted and money that is set aside is expended on demand side solutions rather than supply. A clear example are the cash grants provided to first time homebuyers which do little other than encourage vendors to increase the price of their property at the point of sale.

Overall, my impression is that the current Commonwealth's housing, and tax policies accentuate poverty. The high cost of housing in many Australian cities acts as a brake on overall aggregate consumer demand. The government is reluctant to take the necessary steps to address the housing shortage for fear of upsetting existing homeowners who do not want to see the value of their home fall.

Chapter 8: Social Policy

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1. What does the AVNR write about your field of expertise?

The AVR is a careful response to addressing poverty in Australia as it paints a broad picture of understanding of poverty as a complex and multifaceted lived experience. It surprisingly opens with a quote about entrenched disadvantage and social cohesion, terms that are not at all visible in current human services or social security discourses in an Australia dominated by principles of neo-liberalism. It also mentions striving for equality for all Australian citizens at a time when public discourse has become highly divisive and inequality between the rich and the poor has widened considerably. This inequality is partly due to the fact that there has been very low growth in wages over the last few years. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported in 2017 that wages grew by just 0.5 per cent in the June quarter, or 1.9 per cent over the year (compared to growth rates of 4.3% in 2008-2009, which have steadily declined since then). For working people, such factors place mounting pressure on household budgets, particularly given rising household debt and high levels of underemployment, casualisation and precarious work arrangements. This sets the stage for relative poverty, even for working families. According to an Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) report the poverty line (50% of median income) for a single adult was \$426.30 per week and for a couple with 2 children, \$895.22 a week in 2016. Based on this relative poverty measure, 2,990,300 million people (13.3% of the population), were in poverty after taking account of housing costs (ACOSS, 2016). Less researched is absolute poverty in Australia, which is measured by 'not having enough income to cover the costs of a given basket of goods that provides an agreed level of decency' (AIHW,

2017). Based on that measure the percentage of Australians in absolute income poverty was 3.9 per cent in 2014 (AIHW, 2017).

The Australian government has no cohesive poverty policy or approach and the AVNR report states that there is no official poverty measure. However, the Henderson Poverty Line has been used by poverty researchers consistently in Australia since the 1970s when it was devised. It is still a useful measure and the Melbourne Institute, based at the University of Melbourne, provides regular quarterly updates on relative poverty in Australia via an analysis of pensions and allowances or 'income support' compared to the Henderson Poverty line. The main points the AVNR makes relate to broad support for education, employment, health and welfare as the best measures for protecting against poverty in Australia. The anti-poverty policies that the AVNR puts forward are Medicare (the universal healthcare system), pensions and pharmaceutical benefits, partnerships with civil society, a focus on Indigenous people and the National Disabilities Insurance Scheme. It states that the two major thrusts for addressing poverty problems in Australia are on homelessness and regional and global action.

2. Is what the AVNR writes about your field of expertise accurate and representative?

The key measures that the AVNR highlights as actions are overshadowed by its lack of commitment to addressing poverty both within Australia and its foreign aid program. Recent welfare reforms in Australia have seen an increase in the number of people on below-poverty line incomes. This is because 'welfare reforms' aimed at reducing 'dependency' and seeking efficiencies in welfare spending have placed strict work requirements and eligibility of people with disabilities and sole parents (mostly mothers) and failed to support sufficient funding for emergency and long-term social housing and support for skills training for the long term unemployed. Reflecting a key aspect of the gendered nature of income poverty in Australia, these measures have reduced incomes substantially for targeted income support recipients and pushed sole parents with a youngest child over 7 years into being highly represented in poverty statistics (ACOSS, 2016). They have also seen a rise in homelessness for women, reflecting the failure to support women who have left violent relationships, have become single later in life

and have had low incomes, precarious, impermanent work histories and very low superannuation savings (Phillips, 2017).

The social welfare system does not lift people effectively out of poverty as it is designed as a minimal safety net. In Australia 36.1 per cent of people receiving social security payments were living below the poverty line, including 55 per cent of those receiving Newstart Allowance (unemployment benefits), 51.5 per cent receiving Parenting Payment (sole parents), 36.2 per cent of those receiving Disability Support Pension, 24.3 per cent receiving Carer Payment, and 13.9 per cent of those on the Age Pension (ACOSS, 2016: 8). This must be viewed in the context that the largest proportion of the social security budget (68%) is for aged pensioners. The majority of age pensioners have incomes just above the poverty line mainly due to the historical precedent of that generation owning their own homes. This effectively means that apart from most age pensioners, almost everyone dependent on social security, is living in poverty.

Despite calls from many sectors to increase the basic allowance (Newstart) for unemployed people, the government has been determined to keep cash transfers at a minimum and argues that work is the best form of welfare. The current Liberal National coalition government also favours increasing funds to private rather than public education. It has squeezed public health funds, which places constant pressure on the ability of the health system to provide equitable healthcare services across all parts of Australia and to all groups in need. At the same time, it wants to reduce taxes for large corporations and high-income earners, thus creating a smaller pool of funds for social services, health and education as these are all funded by tax revenue.

The AVNR also claims an important focus on the rights of people with disabilities in its international advocacy on human rights. This is contradicted domestically as funding has been ceased for disability advocacy groups based on a government claim that the new NDIS (National Disability Insurance Scheme) will represent the needs of people with disabilities. Advocacy groups argue, however, that community organisations are currently overwhelmed with people requiring advocacy to negotiate the new systems presented by the NDIS.

3. In your view, which policies most need to be reformed to improve Australia's performance in your field of expertise?

International research and evidence of failure to address the global poverty problem points to the inability of 'trickle-down economics' to provide solutions to poverty and there is extensive evidence that strong welfare state services and redistributive mechanisms such as unconditional cash transfers are the most effective sustainable solutions to entrenched poverty (Saad-Filho, 2010; OECD, 2011). The Australian government's emphasis on economic growth as the key measure to address poverty both within Australia and as its core objective in overseas aid fails to recognise the complexity and history of poverty. Indigenous Australians are overrepresented in poverty statistics due to a deliberate exclusion throughout the majority of Australia's economic and social developments in the past 150 years. The failure to address the social and economic exclusion of Australia's own First Peoples through collaborative and collective responses could be addressed by building a stronger welfare state that recognises social citizenship over economic citizenship.

The current dominance of neo-liberal solutions to social problems has been shown to fail and indeed increase rather than reduce inequalities. Stalled wage growth, the destruction of unions that work collectively to improve conditions and wages of working people, lower investments in public education, failure to recognise Indigenous Australians rights to land and self-determination and a very low safety net for unemployed people need to be addressed. Improvements in these areas would result in strengthening local economies and communities. These fundamental shifts in approach would also inform how foreign aid is spent and would shift ideas of empowerment away from an individualistic approach to a collective community-based approach that would have to address not only economic inequalities of women and people with disabilities, for example, but deep social inequalities that are often entrenched in forms of governance and access to basic human rights such as security, education and access to housing.

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Chapter 9: Disability inclusive development

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Introduction

Disability was notably absent from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Adoption and subsequent ratifications of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006 (CRPD) have since focused governments' attention on the need for disability inclusive development. In response, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development reaffirms commitments to universal human rights and freedoms and pledges to leave no one behind.

At the Nossal Institute for Global Health, our work on disability inclusion and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is focused more on the international than the domestic sphere. We commend the extension of the development goals to tackle poverty in all forms in all countries; however, this commentary reflects our focus. In reading the Australian National Voluntary Review on the SDGs (ANVR) our attention is drawn to how key global advocacy points that Australia raised in the drafting of the 2030 Agenda are reflected in Australia's own reporting. With space limited, comments are confined to the challenge of disability disaggregated data.

Disability, the SDGs and Australia's advocacy

The 11 direct references to people with disability in the 2030 Agenda mark a historic break from the MDGs; however, we should be wary of complacency. Of the Agenda's 17 SDGs, only 5 reference disability directly.¹ Considering mounting evidence of the bi-directional link between disability and poverty, the lack of mention of disability in key goals on ending poverty (Goal 1),

¹ Goal 4, education; Goal 8, economic growth and work; Goal 10, reduce inequality; Goal 11, cities and settlements; Goal 17, the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

ending hunger (Goal 2) and ensuring healthy lives and well-being (Goal 3) is an obvious concern. It is worth remembering that the achievement of the CRPD was not in establishing new rights for people with disability, it was in reaffirming existing rights applied to all. The hard won lesson was: if disability is not specifically mentioned, it is overlooked or ignored, as was the case in the MDGs. When considering the SDGs, we should be mindful that the 2030 Agenda pledge to leave no one behind applies to all people and to all Goals.

Australia has taken a lead in promoting disability inclusive development since the launch of Australia's first Development for All strategy in 2008. A recent review by the Office of Development Effectiveness notes Australia's global advocacy positively impacted on ensuring disability inclusion in the 2030 Agenda.² &³ The importance of evidence to inform disability inclusion was a key advocacy message in the run up to 2015 and the need for strengthened and consistent disability data collection are emphasised in the current Development for All strategy.⁴

The ANVR aligns with Australia's 2030 Agenda advocacy and from the outset disability is referenced and the commitment to not leave anyone behind reiterated. The ANVR does not shy away from the heart of the matter and notes people with disability as a group in Australia experience 'deep and persistent disadvantage' and lower educational attainment (p.22); poorer health (p.33), 'are less likely to be employed, more likely to be dependent on income support and more likely to live in poverty' (p.16). The situation painted for Australia parallels the global condition for many of the world's largest minority.

² Dunn L, Ovington K & McClain-Nhlapo C. 2017. *Unfinished business: Evaluation of Australian advocacy for disability-inclusive development*. Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra. <https://dfat.gov.au/aid/how-we-measure-performance/ode/strategic-evaluations/Documents/evaluation-australian-advocacy-disability-inclusive-development.pdf>

³ AusAID. 2008. *Development for all: Towards a disability-inclusive Australian Aid program 2009-2014*. Australian Agency for International Development, Canberra. <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/dev-for-all.pdf>

⁴ DFAT. 2015. *Development for all: Strategy for strengthening disability-inclusive development in Australia's aid program*. Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra. <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/development-for-all-2015-2020.pdf>

Disability data

While the ANVR includes examples of disability initiatives from home and abroad, the review does not detail who is included and who is not. Neither does the review examine the extent to which initiatives are impacting on poverty nor how different groups may be benefitting under the SDGs. These observations illustrate the importance of disability disaggregated data for monitoring and reporting.

Australia's advocacy push for better disability disaggregated data under the SDGs seems to come up short at home. SDG 17 includes a commitment to support capacity building to developing and least developed countries and small island developing states to improve the availability of quality disaggregated data by 2020. Australia has provided support to the UN Statistics Division and, as noted in the ANVR, the Washington Group on Disability Statistics to improve internationally comparable disability data.⁵ The last annual meeting of the Washington Group was hosted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in Sydney, 2017. For those concerned with disability inclusive development, the review reads well and builds promise and, as such, the section on Data for the Goals (p.113) is a little deflating.

The ANVR notes the complexities of aligning multiple data sets across government and the challenges of disaggregating data from multiple sources. In terms of examples, the ANVR provides little on the application of disaggregated data and the reader is referred to the Australian SDG data platform to find that disaggregation by disability is a work in progress.⁶ The review provides two examples of disability disaggregated data. The first is at the programming level and notes that 5% of New Colombo Plan participants identified as having a disability (p.41). The second is that women with disability in Australia are twice as likely as women without disability to experience partner violence (p.45). While the latter should cause clear

⁵ See: Various. 2017. *Joint statement by the disability sector: Disability data disaggregation*. Fifth meeting of the Inter Agency Expert Group on the SDGs, Ottawa, March 2017. <http://www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/data-joint-statement-march2017>

⁶ Australian government's reporting platform on the SDG indicators. <https://www.sdgdata.gov.au/>

concern, it is precisely this kind of data that can provide a basis for evidence informed policy and action. Compared to many countries, Australia has a robust and comprehensive approach to disability data collection and considering the emphasis Australia quite rightly places on the need for better disability disaggregated data for monitoring SDG progress globally, perhaps we may have expected more?

Looking ahead

The ANVR hits many of the right notes in terms of disability inclusive development. However, with no consistent application of disaggregated data we are left to question whether the examples provided in the ANVR are based on evidence and the extent to which these initiatives are positively impacting on people with disability or not. The policy challenges the ANVR highlights relate to alignment and implementation. This concerns how to align externally focused commitments to disability inclusion under the 2030 Agenda across multiple ministries at home. More importantly, how can we put 2030 Agenda policy related commitments to disability inclusion into action both at home and abroad? Disability disaggregated data has a role to play in both. The collection of disability disaggregated data is a 2030 Agenda commitment and an end in itself. Crucially, the considered application of disability disaggregated data will allow us to know how far we may have come in achieving the Goals themselves.

It is hoped that Australia will continue to advocate and support the need for better disability disaggregated data abroad and in any future review lead by example at home. If not and if we are unable to effectively monitor progress towards inclusion for the most marginalised in communities, the pledge to leave no one behind may very well have been in vain.