

MGOS VNR 2022 STATEMENT Eswatini: delivered by a representative of the NGO Major Group

Thank you, chairperson, for the opportunity to comment on the Eswatini VNR.

In our view The Swaziland Government has dismally failed to engage rightsholder groups in the implementation of almost all the areas of the SDGs.

In education, the government has failed to engage with both the students organisations and the teachers union to improve the quality of education. On free primary education, government has compelled parents to pay 'top up fees' thus denying some children access to education because principals are compelled to expel the pupils, for failure to pay such top up fees.

At tertiary institutions, many students are unable to pay their fees, and often than not government has not been able to pay subsistence allowance to those that have been admitted and secured government scholarships. Students who have stood up to demand the right to quality education have been abused by the army and the police who have invaded university precincts in breach of academic freedom and to an extent compromising the quality of education and credibility of the institutions of higher learning. Students have been forced to write examinations under the barrel of a gun.

The same applies with the health sector. The health sector has collapsed due to the government's failure to engage with relevant stakeholders in the sector, including the nurses' union and other health practices. In essence the Swaziland government is not inclusive in its approach to promoting and implementation of the SDGs.

Unfortunately, vulnerable groups continue to be excluded in the country. A clear example is the denial of members of the LGBTQBI community of the rights to freedom of association and assembly as well as freedom of expression. In a judgment of the High Court delivered on April 29 2022, the court after government refused to register the Eswatini Sexual and Gender Minorities [ESGM], the court refused an application for the registration of the association as a not-for-profit.

Persons with disabilities continue to be sidelined as well as young people. Women continue to be subject of patriarchy and abuse given that Swaziland continues to be a traditional society where traditional values continue to be the basis of Swazi life.

Elderly people continue to be subjected to hunger and poverty because of the government's failure to provide elderly grants in a timely and consistent manner and the grant is too small to sustain them just for a month.

Civil society continues to fight sectoral battles to promote the rights of the vulnerable populations. But overall, we work together for the creation of a democratic society based on the values of the rule of law, where the rights of every person will be respected without discrimination.

Towards 2030 we are campaigning for a transition towards a democratic dispensation that will ensure an inclusive society as opposed to the current system which by character, nature and form is exclusionary.