

# COUNTING THE INVISIBLE

USING DATA TO TRANSFORM THE LIVES OF GIRLS AND WOMEN BY 2030



Because  
**I am a Girl**



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Walking to school  
in Moyamba district,  
Sierra Leone.  
*Plan International/  
Vincent Tremeau*







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## FOREWORD

## FROM AGENDA TO ACTION



**Anne-Birgitte Albrectsen**, Chief Executive Officer of Plan International, explains why the organization has committed to a

partnership to make sure every girl and woman counts and can be counted.

The commitment to leave no one behind is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. How to turn that promise into a reality for girls and women was a prevailing theme at Women Deliver's 4th Global Conference held in Copenhagen, in May 2016. This was one of the largest women's conferences in the past decade – bringing together nearly 6,000 advocates, activists, policymakers and practitioners – and one of the first major forums after the adoption of the Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Several strong themes echoed throughout the conference: a sense of optimism, a renewal of purpose, and the need for more and better data to accelerate progress. As Melinda Gates said so succinctly, "We can't close the gender gap without first closing the data gap."<sup>1</sup>

That is why Plan International mobilized like-minded civil society and private sector partners at the conference to launch an independent initiative for tracking girls' and women's progress over the 15-year lifespan of the Global Goals.

Members of a Girl Leadership Project in Brazil pose for a 'selfie'.  
Plan International/Natalia Moura

The vision is simple: a world in which improved gender data inform the decisions and investments that can transform the lives of girls and women by 2030.

There was a strong call at the Women Deliver conference for bringing the Global Goals to life by doing things differently, including new ways of thinking and new ways of working together. Our partnership, which brings together organizations from different sectors and regions of the world, as well as from the girls' and women's movements, is a step in that direction – and so is this report.

From 2007–2015, Plan International used its annual *State of the World's Girls* report as an advocacy tool and an opportunity to highlight some of the challenges girls are facing. These reports focused on a theme each year and helped place girls' issues firmly on the international agenda.

*Counting the Invisible* is a transition – building on the foundation of the *State of the World's Girls*, paving the way for

a series of innovative reports that explore what the data tell us in depth, and delivering a strong focus on data, partnerships and the Agenda for Sustainable Development.

As the partnership grows, we will continue to bring visibility to the invisible by more effectively using what we know and by shining a light on what we don't know. We will work to make the data and analysis that matter for girls and women available to all, targeting those who need the data, communicating where progress is being made and highlighting where more needs to be done. We will work with grass-roots organizations to ensure that the tools and skills are in place to vigilantly hold national governments to account for their global commitments.

Throughout, we will raise our voices on issues that matter and amplify the voices of girls and women – presenting 'data with a soul' by also revealing first-hand insights into the barriers girls and women face and their experiences with overcoming these barriers.





## INTRODUCTION

# JOINING FORCES FOR AND WITH GIRLS AND WOMEN

Women tend plants at a school garden in Koupela, Burkina Faso.  
*Plan International/Alf Berg*



The Sustainable Development Goals – or ‘Global Goals’ – promise to transform our world by 2030. They include commitments to end poverty and hunger, tackle inequality, improve health and education, and combat climate change.

To fulfil these ambitions, a stark reality must first be confronted: most of the goals and targets cannot be measured completely. Take, for example, the 14 indicators that will be used to measure Goal 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Only three of the indicators are regularly collected in most countries and have agreed statistical methodologies.<sup>2</sup> The others need more work and/or need to be collected more widely.

The problem persists throughout the goals. Fewer than half of the 231 official indicators have available data at the global level and agreed standards and methodologies.<sup>3</sup> This must be urgently addressed, because progress for girls and women is not limited to just one goal. Every goal must be adequately measured as each one directly or indirectly touches the lives of all people.

Data are not the only answer, but they are an essential ingredient in creating transformative change. Sound, credible data help uncover the root causes of inequality, measure what works and what does not, and determine where programmes and policies can be most impactful.

The success of the Global Goals depends in part on improving the way data are collected, analysed, disseminated and used. There are no easy or quick fixes. Along with patience and persistence, a gender data revolution will require increased investment, capacity, political will and public demand. Governments, academia, civil society and business will all need to be actively engaged in tracking progress, ensuring accountability and eliminating gender bias.



*Counting the Invisible: Using data to transform the lives of girls and women by 2030* explores the current state of gender data. This report identifies some of the approaches that will be needed during the next 15 years, and introduces a vibrant new partnership that Plan International is spearheading.

**Chapter 1** describes a new coalition of partners brought together by Plan International to measure and monitor progress for girls and women across the Global Goals. It presents information on six of the founding partners and sets out the partnership's vision and intention to become the leading source of information for holding governments and other stakeholders accountable to deliver on their commitments to gender equality.

**Chapter 2** explains what is meant by 'gender data' and why it matters. It explores the need for better disaggregation to expose differences and inequalities between and within groups, and identifies some of the indicators that need to be strengthened in order to track progress for girls and women over the next 15 years.

**Chapter 3** details some of the limitations and challenges involved in data collection and analysis, looks at issues related to data ethics, protection and human rights issues, and offers examples of how data can play a role in driving transformative change.

**Chapter 4** shows how qualitative research can reveal valuable insights that complement quantitative data. Exploring the realities and experiences of girls who report feeling marginalized, it presents key highlights of primary research and first-hand accounts from adolescents in Nicaragua and Zimbabwe.

**Chapter 5** presents the concluding component of this report: **a call to action** for those who produce data to publish it and make it user-friendly, for those who have data to use it in ways that highlight the situation of girls and women, and for those who do not have it to demand it. Specific recommendations are made on the need to:

- **Accelerate efforts to fuel a gender data revolution.** Advancements in our current knowledge about the lives, well-being and welfare of girls and women are critical to reach the Global Goals by 2030.
- **Invest in and strengthen national statistical capacities.** Only with robust and reliable data will the ambition to reach the most excluded and leave no one behind be achieved.
- **Embrace different types and sources of data collection and analysis.** A range of information will be needed to ensure that we accurately measure and respond to the experiences and realities of girls and women during the next 15 years.
- **Use data and evidence to drive action and build a movement.** Data – not just the numbers, but also the stories behind them – can be powerful tools in the hands of advocates for girls' and women's rights.
- **Ensure data collection and analysis are safe and ethical.** Not only is it vital to share data, but it is everyone's responsibility to keep people safe from the potential damage that could be caused by abuses of data.

*Counting the Invisible* also features the perspectives of leading advocates, data experts and researchers, who provide commentary on what needs to be done and examples of how to do it.

Katja Iversen of Women Deliver discusses how investing in girls and women – including investing in data for and about them – is among the smartest ways to advance progress for all.

Mayra Buvinic and Ruth Levine of Data2X detail the problems stemming from 'bad data' and 'no data', concluding that substandard data about girls and women are often more insidious than no data at all.

Eloise Todd of ONE Campaign explores the role of data in effective advocacy, using the example of the organization's Poverty is Sexist campaign and the challenges that were faced because of sparse data.

Finally, Gaëlle Ferrant, Keiko Nowacka and Annelise Thim of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Centre describe how the Social Institutions and Gender Index can be used to track changes in attitudes, perceptions and norms, giving the example of a country study in Uganda that highlights how social norms and customary practices affect trends in girls' early marriage.



## CHAPTER 1

# THE REVOLUTION MARCHES ON



Budding radio journalists attend a training in Makeni, Sierra Leone.  
Gina Nemirosky/10x10act.org



## Gender equality remains an unfulfilled promise in most parts of the world.

The prospects for girls and women have advanced substantially during recent decades. Fewer girls and women now die in childbirth.<sup>4</sup> More girls are enrolled in primary education.<sup>5</sup> Rates of child marriage are declining,<sup>6</sup> and the number of female parliamentarians has increased over the past decade.<sup>7</sup> And, every day, new voices speak up with revitalized energy to ensure that girls and women are not just included in the development agenda, but are central to it.

It has not been an easy road, however, and gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment remains an unfulfilled promise in most parts of the world. In 2014, over 100 million young women in low and lower-middle income countries could not read all or part of a sentence.<sup>8</sup> Girls who are out of school are more likely than boys to remain excluded from education.<sup>9</sup> Women in every region spend more hours than men on unpaid work such as caregiving and on the household tasks of cooking and cleaning, leaving them with less time to learn, rest and take care of themselves.<sup>10</sup> In all countries with data, women earn less than men.<sup>11</sup>

All this in spite of widely adopted international agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the Agenda for Sustainable Development.

That agenda, and the Global Goals embedded in it, include a specific ambition to achieve gender equality and empower girls and women. There is also an explicit recognition that girls' and women's contributions are essential to progress across the entire agenda. Thanks to the efforts of tireless advocates, most goals have specific targets and indicators related to girls and women.

But what good are goals and targets if efforts to reach them cannot be adequately measured?

Though considerable gains were made during the Millennium Development Goals era, while working to achieve those goals, countries largely used national averages to measure success. Strategies to achieve broad coverage often focused on the people who were the easiest to reach or whose situations were most easily improved.

Many of the poorest, hardest to reach and most excluded – including millions of girls and women – were left invisible and struggling on the margins of society.

Throughout the next 15 years, the global community must measure progress by looking at more than statistical averages. We must make sure no one gets left behind, least of all those who face major disadvantages due to factors such as their gender, age, race, ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, disability, migratory or economic status.

This will require addressing a number of key challenges, including building political will to close gaps and ensure progress for all, increasing the amount and quality of data on girls and women against which to measure progress, and strengthening accountability structures to hold governments to their global commitments.

### A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

As a contribution to global monitoring and accountability, Plan International is leading a coalition of partners to measure progress for girls and women over the next 15 years. The goal of this partnership is to produce an independent tracking method, or 'tracker', designed to become the leading source of information for advocates, activists, governments, civil society partners and others working to achieve gender equality. The ultimate aim is to fuel a movement to push governments to meet their commitments.

What makes this partnership unique, beyond its specific focus on gender, is the range of experiences and abilities being brought together from different regions of the world and across various fields of work. From the grass roots to the private sector, partners and donors have been chosen to ensure the initiative is a bold, independent and globally representative voice.

The importance of such multi-sectoral partnerships was recognized in the final 2030 Agenda, which calls for a "revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity."<sup>12</sup> Partnerships like this one can share knowledge, expertise



**Children play in the water in Colombia.**  
*Mauricio González*



and technology and mobilize financial resources to support the achievement of the Global Goals in all countries.

To ensure the tracker is as useful as possible for evidence-based advocacy and policymaking, partners will develop reports, scorecards, data visualizations and other materials tailored to the needs of two main audiences – girls’ and women’s civil society movements, and government decision makers.

These target groups were chosen because girls’ and women’s civil society movements, especially grass-roots organizations or networks, are best positioned to press governments for policies that are most likely to transform the lives of girls and women. Government decision makers, in turn, set the policies and investments that directly affect whether commitments for girls and women are met.

Additional targets may include media, the private sector and multilateral institutions as they are also valuable partners and share accountability in ensuring equality and girls’ and women’s empowerment.

Recognizing that many others are involved in accountability for achieving the Global Goals, the partners will strive to work closely with as many stakeholders as possible, including United Nations agencies and national governments, to ensure efforts are complementary,

consistent, and use the most relevant and up-to-date data.

Going beyond official United Nations data monitoring efforts, the partners will draw on original qualitative and perceptions data to more fully reflect girls’ and women’s realities. By asking questions directly of girls and women, this will complement the statistical data and provide richer evidence of whether governments are truly meeting their commitments.

In the first phase of the initiative, partners will present selected priority indicators to be tracked and provide commentary on why each indicator is crucial to tell the story of girls and women during the Global Goals era. An analysis will be conducted to determine what official data are available to track the priority indicators and where gaps remain to be filled.

The tracker is intended to be global, but will also allow for country-specific, regional and thematic deep dives. Partners will develop joint global communications and advocacy plans, and will work directly with girls’ and women’s movements in selected countries to ensure that the results, insights and recommendations motivate policymakers, decision makers and others to take action. We will also make sure this compelling data land in the hands of those who can drive positive and lasting change at the global, national and local levels.

## INTRODUCING THE FOUNDING PARTNERS

Significant outcomes can be accomplished when a range of actors work together towards a common purpose. The following organizations have already committed to collaborating on this important initiative.



partnering for a  
gender data revolution

**Data2X**, an initiative of the United Nations Foundation, is a collaborative technical and advocacy platform dedicated to improving the quality, availability and use of gender data in order to make a practical difference in the lives of women and girls worldwide. Motivated by the belief that there is no gender equality without data equality, Data2X works with United Nations agencies, governments, civil society, academics and the private sector to close gender data gaps, promote expanded and unbiased gender data collection, and use gender data to improve policies, strategies and decision making in support of gender equality.

Data2X seeks to shift how gender data are understood, collected and used, through a combination of strategic policy advocacy and technical partnerships to promote filling data gaps in five development domains – health, education, economic opportunity, political participation and human security. A gender data revolution is necessary to track progress towards, and ultimately achieve, the Sustainable Development Goals.



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S  
HEALTH COALITION

Since 1984, the **International Women's Health Coalition (IWHC)** has taken courageous stands to advance girls' and women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, and has achieved political victories for girls and women globally and in local communities. IWHC builds bridges between local realities and international policy by connecting women and young people in the Global South to key decision makers. In doing so, IWHC brings local voices to global debates and, in turn, makes global processes and policies more understandable and actionable at the local level.

IWHC is deeply committed to helping young women become the new champions of the global women's movement. The organization gives young feminists the tools and training they need to advocate effectively with their own governments and at the United Nations. Through its Advocacy in Practice workshops, IWHC has supported more than 200 young activists from 54 countries to become leading advocates. In turn, these advocates are taking an active role in promoting policies and securing funding for effective programmes.



**KPMG International** has a long history of working within the development sector to help governments, businesses and civil society organizations achieve their objectives. As a leading provider of professional services to the development sector, the company brings extensive cross-industry expertise in responding to today's challenges of delivering bold solutions to meet the Global Goals for Sustainable Development.

In this increasingly complex environment, KPMG understands the opportunities and issues related to transparency, governance, accountability, risk management,

monitoring and evaluation, and project oversight, among others. With a global network of experts to deliver innovative solutions, KPMG leverages data and analytics to enhance decision making, and has developed tools such as the Change Readiness Index to drive strategic insight and action.

KPMG has a deep appreciation for the transformative impact of empowering women and girls. The company is engaged across the public and private sector in implementing solutions and working in partnerships that seek to create a more prosperous, resilient and inclusive world.





**ONE** is a campaigning and advocacy organization of more than 7 million people around the world taking action to end extreme poverty and preventable disease, particularly in Africa. Whether lobbying political leaders in capital cities or running cutting-edge grass-roots campaigns, ONE Campaign pressures governments to do more to fight AIDS and other preventable, treatable diseases in the poorest places on the planet, empower small-holder farmers, expand access to energy, and combat corruption so governments are accountable to their citizens – all with the goal of ending extreme poverty.

The fight to end poverty goes hand in hand with the fight to end gender inequality, as investments focused on girls and women pay dividends in lifting everyone out of poverty more quickly. Recognizing that these investments are fundamental to ending extreme poverty, ONE's Poverty is Sexist campaign aims to influence leaders to adopt the key policies and decisions that place girls and women at the heart of the global development agenda.



**Plan International** strives for a just world that advances children's rights and girls' equality. For more than 75 years, the organization has been building powerful partnerships for children, and today it is active in over 70 countries.

Plan International works alongside children, young people, supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the discrimination facing girls and all vulnerable children. Using its reach, experience and knowledge, the Plan International approach is to drive change in practices and policies that benefit children at the local, national and global levels.

Through research, advocacy and grass-roots community development, it promotes children's and young people's rights and enables them to prepare for and respond to shocks and adversity.

Throughout its work, the organization seeks to value girls and end injustice against them so they can realize their rights. Because I Am a Girl is currently its most significant global initiative, a movement propelled by Plan International to ensure that girls everywhere can learn, lead, decide and thrive.

## WOMEN DELIVER

As a leading global advocate for girls' and women's health, rights and well-being, **Women Deliver** catalyses action by bringing together diverse voices and interests to drive progress, with a particular focus on maternal, sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The organization is recognized for impactful communication and advocacy strategies, access to world

influencers, participation in key coalitions and initiatives, and building the capacities of young people and civil society. Using a multitude of platforms – conferences, initiatives and communications tools – Women Deliver brings the best ideas forward, highlights what works and calls for action, equipping civil society to advocate for investing in girls and women.



# WHEN WE INVEST IN GIRLS AND WOMEN, EVERYBODY WINS

**BY KATJA IVERSEN, PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, WOMEN DELIVER**

Evidence from around the world demonstrates what experience has told us for decades: girls and women are drivers of development. Give them access to health care, and they will deliver more resilient families. Give them the potential to learn and earn, and they will deliver stronger economies. Give them opportunities, and they will deliver solutions.

We know that investing in girls and women – particularly in their sexual and reproductive health and rights, education, and economic and political empowerment – is among the smartest ways to advance progress for all.

Yet, despite the overwhelming evidence, decision makers again and again fail to include and prioritize girls and women. They are denied access to health services, confront barriers to education, are vulnerable to gender-based violence, and face discrimination when seeking a seat in government and when trying to secure property or financing to propel their families out of poverty.

In spite of tangible development gains – including progress in gender parity in the classroom and reductions in maternal mortality – efforts to truly level the playing field for girls and women have fallen short. Why? Partly, because of a lack of data and evidence, funding and policy focus on girls and women. Partly, also, because existing initiatives have been working in silos, failing to recognize the cross-cutting nature of the problems at hand.

It takes much more than enrolling girls in school, for example, to increase parity in education, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels. It requires a holistic approach that eliminates school fees, considers safety issues and travel restrictions for students in remote areas, ensures gender-segregated water and sanitation facilities, prevents child

marriage, and focuses on the quality of education so girls are able to enter the formal economy after they finish school.

We need to eliminate the silo mentality so that development efforts over the next 15 years focus on women's health, rights and well-being, and are built on a foundation of cross-sectoral collaboration and integration.

## DELIVERING FOR GOOD

Since 2008, Women Deliver has helped develop and continues to champion the investment case for girls and women with partners including the World Bank, McKinsey & Company and others – and this was the main focus of Women Deliver's 4th Global Conference, held in May 2016. Articulating the investment case for girls and women is also the centrepiece of a new multi-year campaign – Deliver for Good – which Women Deliver and partners launched at the 2016 conference.

Investing in the health, rights and well-being of girls and women is not only the right thing to do from a human rights perspective, it is also the smart thing to do from an economic perspective. Governments and others need to invest – politically, programmatically and financially – in girls and women, because that is how we will achieve the Global Goals and reap considerable social and economic returns during the decades ahead.

There are many positive models that can be emulated and adapted, including initiatives that are bringing water and sanitation to schools in Zambia,<sup>13</sup> working to end child marriage in Malawi,<sup>14</sup> educating husbands about the importance of contraception in Niger,<sup>15</sup> and improving midwifery care in Cambodia.<sup>16</sup>

These are all savvy investments, and data have been instrumental in proving their worth. Consider family planning services: every dollar spent could yield as much as

\$120 in benefits,<sup>17</sup> making investments in sexual and reproductive health and access to contraception both essential to women's health and well-being and cost-effective.

Women who have equal property and inheritance rights earn nearly four times more income than those without.<sup>18</sup> Investing in women's secure land tenure and property rights represents another effective long-term solution to advancing economic empowerment and eliminating poverty.

One investment that will fuel progress across the board is supporting civil registration and vital statistics: data gathering and data management. Girls and women count, so we need to count them.

Current data and statistics, to a large extent, fail to include girls and women properly. We must close the gender data gap in order to help uncover both the needs for, and the opportunities that arise from, investing in girls and women. Without reliable data, decisions are made on a faulty footing. By increasing the visibility of girls' and women's lives, reliable data can inform more effective programmes and policies. And in the hands of civil society, reliable data can contribute to holding governments and other influencers responsible and accountable.

Girls and women are powerful change makers. With major challenges ahead, the world can no longer afford to ignore them. We must count them, and count them in. Their voices need to resonate in households, communities, societies and halls of power.

Women carry much more than babies. Or water. They carry families. They carry businesses. They carry communities. They carry potential and solutions. And when we count them and invest in their health, rights and well-being, they lift up entire countries – and everybody wins. ■



## CHAPTER 2

# INVISIBLE GIRLS, INVISIBLE WOMEN



Students in Myanmar learn how to respond to disasters and mitigate the risks of climate change.

*Plan International*

## Millions of girls are invisible because of a lack of credible and timely data.

For many people, a simple swipe, click or keystroke can reveal valuable details about who we are, where we live and the kinds of products, services and experiences we might enjoy – as well as life-saving information about health or safety.

Widespread use of technology has – for better or worse – led to huge changes in the way individuals, companies and governments are able to record, collect, store and analyse information, so much so that many say we are living through an information revolution.

But the revolution has not reached everyone equally, and millions of people remain invisible because of a lack of credible and timely data. Girls and women are among the most invisible, because some of the data that are currently being collected fail to accurately reflect the specific challenges they face – and other data relevant to their lives are not being captured at all.

We may know how many girls are in school, for example, but we do not adequately measure how many leave school for various reasons, including marriage, pregnancy, sexual violence, school fees or a lack of employment opportunities following school. How can we hope to increase every girl's access to education if we do not track some of the most important factors that limit their opportunities?

Most official sources collect data only about girls and women aged 15–49, so very little is known about the 2 million children born to girls under age 15 each year in low and middle-

income countries.<sup>20</sup> Young adolescent mothers are virtually invisible to decision makers. How can we understand their lives and tackle the problem of child pregnancy if official figures ignore their existence?

Information on girls' and women's experience of and vulnerability to poverty is not available for many countries.<sup>21</sup> While more than half of all countries report data on intimate partner violence,<sup>22</sup> variations in quality and definitions make it difficult to compare these results from country to country. Fewer than half of all developing countries have sex-disaggregated information on unemployment, participation in the labour force, status in employment, and employment by occupation for at least two periods between 2005 and 2014.<sup>23</sup>

There are many other gaps in our knowledge. We have little information on women's access to social protection. We have few measurements of the quality and quantity of women's work, whether it is paid or unpaid, formal or informal. Many countries are still unable to accurately determine where and when girls are born, where and for how long they attend school, how many hours girls and women work, whether they get paid for that work, if they experience violence, and how, when and where they die.

During 2000–2015, when the Millennium Development Goals were in effect, at most, only 70 per cent of the necessary data to track core indicators were available for any five-year period.<sup>24</sup> This lack of quality information often resulted in poor planning, decision making and allocation of resources.

With the Global Goals, we have the potential to do better. But first we need to address two fundamental issues – filling gaps where no data exist, and improving the quality of some of the data we do have.

### DEFINING GENDER DATA

The term 'gender data' refers to data that adequately reflect differences and reveal inequalities in the situation of girls, boys, women and men. Gender data can inform policies and programmes that benefit all of society, and include:

- sex- and age-disaggregated data
- data that reflect gender issues and inequalities
- data that highlight the realities and diversity in the lives of girls, boys, women and men
- data collected using methods and concepts that account for gender biases in classification and collection.<sup>19</sup>

### THE NEED FOR DISAGGREGATION

Disaggregating data – breaking down information into smaller subsets – is an important way to uncover differences and inequalities between groups. Disaggregating the number of children enrolled in, attending and completing different levels of schooling by age and sex,<sup>25</sup> for example, can reveal whether there are significant disparities between girls and boys at different stages of their lives.

Age disaggregation is particularly important to distinguish and respond to the specific challenges people face during the life cycle. For example, household surveys define 'reproductive



age' as 15–49 years old, but for many girls and boys, the sexually active and reproductive phase of their lives begins before age 15 and extends beyond age 49. To understand the situation for groups who are often invisible, indicators must include younger adolescents and women older than 49.

Disaggregated data are particularly useful in humanitarian settings, where girls and women face unique risks and vulnerabilities. A 2013 review of monitoring and evaluation indicators used by 11 agencies in the humanitarian sector found that only about 2 per cent of the 1,680 indicators were disaggregated by sex.<sup>26</sup>

There is increasing recognition and awareness of the valuable role sex- and age-disaggregated data can play from the outset of an emergency. This information is vital in identifying protection gaps, properly designing and targeting interventions, and evaluating responses. But collecting reliable disaggregated data requires resources that are often urgently prioritized for other parts of a humanitarian response.

In both development and humanitarian settings, disaggregation must also go beyond age and sex, as people do not fall into homogeneous groups and generalizations can be misleading. Capturing disaggregated data by other characteristics – such as ethnicity, religion, disability, location, marital status, wealth, sexual orientation and gender identity – allows for a more nuanced analysis of how sex and age interact with other characteristics, which sometimes put girls and women at a compounded disadvantage.

For certain groups of people, systematic social exclusion resulting from multiple and overlapping inequalities severely constricts their life chances. Exclusion can occur when some people are seen to have a lesser status or worth than others, when people live in places that are hard to reach or make them easier to ignore, when they are disadvantaged by unequal access to assets and opportunities, or when they are forbidden from having a voice on issues that affect their lives.<sup>27</sup> While each of these injustices has an effect, when they overlap and intersect with each other, the social exclusion becomes much harder to overcome.

Without disaggregated data, it will be impossible to know whether the goal to leave no one behind in the 2030 Agenda has been met. While Goal 17 includes a specific target that calls for disaggregation by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographical location and other relevant characteristics, the means to achieve this are not yet clear.

## MEASURING PROGRESS FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN

The 231 indicators that form the basis for reviewing progress towards the Global Goals have been called the “last missing piece” of the 2030 Agenda. It is clear, however, that a lot of work is yet to be done for the indicators to truly be able to

measure the impact of policies, strategies and practices, particularly for the most excluded.

The United Nations Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators has divided the indicators into three tiers, noting whether the indicators are conceptually clear, have an established methodology and standards available, and have data regularly produced by countries:

- In Tier I, methodology and standards are fully developed, and data are available.
- In Tier II, methodology and standards are developed, but data are very sparse.
- In Tier III, methodological work is needed to develop the indicator, and no data are available.

The completion of the indicator framework is a beginning not an end – only 40 per cent of the indicators are in Tier I; 50 indicators are categorized as Tier II. Tier III includes 78 indicators, which need further work before they are ready to be used, and 15 indicators have not yet been assigned to any tier.<sup>28</sup>

The framework will need to evolve and be refined over time, with an urgent focus on the indicators that cannot currently be measured adequately. It is also important to recognize that the official indicators are not fully sufficient. Additional indicators, even if they are not considered official, will be important for understanding progress on priority targets for girls and women.

While all the official indicators have a degree of relevance to girls and women, some are more specifically applicable, for example, the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel. This is considered a Tier I indicator as data are broadly available across all regions, with more than 150 countries reporting data between 2010 and the present. There is also an established methodology that has been tested and an agreed international standard, although more work is being done on developing an agreed definition of ‘skilled birth attendant’ that can be used across various data sources.

Other indicators important to girls and women fare worse. Target 5.1 calls for ending “all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.” However, the indicator selected to measure this – “whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and nondiscrimination on the basis of sex” – is classified as Tier III. This means we currently have no way to officially measure whether discrimination against girls and women is decreasing.

To highlight just some of the work that lies ahead, the table overleaf presents the status of 10 priority targets and indicators for girls and women.

## HOW TO MEASURE PROGRESS FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN

INDICATOR	STATUS
<b>Tier I: Methodology and standards fully developed; data available</b>	
Proportion of population covered by social protection floors/systems, by sex, and distinguishing children, unemployed persons, older persons, persons with disabilities, pregnant women, newborns, work-injury victims, and the poor and vulnerable (1.3.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● An established methodology has been tested, and an international standard is in place. However, national availability of data varies by the type of benefit recipient, e.g., children, 109 countries; unemployment, 79 countries; disability, 171 countries; old age, 175 countries; pregnant women, 139 countries; work-injury victims, 172 countries.</li> <li>● Conceptual clarity on defining the 'poor and vulnerable' needs to be further developed.</li> </ul>
Proportion of women of reproductive age, 15–49 years old, who have their need for family planning satisfied with modern methods (3.7.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● An established methodology has been tested, and an agreed international standard exists. Work is ongoing to extend estimates and projections for this indicator from women of reproductive age who are married or in a union to all women of reproductive age, regardless of their marital or union status, based on statistical models.</li> <li>● Survey data are available for 90 countries; modelled data would be available for all countries.</li> </ul>
Adolescent birth rate, aged 10–14 or aged 15–19, per 1,000 women in that age group (3.7.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Data are currently available only for adolescents aged 15–19 years old, though data are widely available for this age group.</li> <li>● Methodological work is ongoing to be able to estimate fertility rates for girls under age 15.</li> </ul>
<b>Tier II: Methodology and standards developed; data very sparse</b>	
Proportion of ever-partnered women and girls aged 15 and older subjected to physical, sexual or psychological violence by a current or former intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by form of violence and by age (5.2.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Many countries do not have available data on intimate partner violence, and among those that do, data cannot always be compared. Disaggregated data by age and type of violence can be easily obtained, but disaggregation by other characteristics (such as disability or ethnicity) may be challenging to include.</li> <li>● To date, only about 40 countries have conducted more than one survey on violence against women.</li> </ul>
Proportion of women and girls aged 15 and older subjected to sexual violence by persons other than an intimate partner in the previous 12 months, by age and place of occurrence (5.2.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In most available surveys on violence against women, only some aspects of sexual violence are captured. Sexual violence against women by non-partners is usually defined as forcing someone into sexual intercourse when she does not want to, as well as attempting to force someone into sexual intercourse or to perform a sexual act against her will.</li> <li>● Other important areas of sexual violence, such as sexual harassment, unwanted attempts to stroke, fondle, grab or kiss, and indecent exposure, are less widely captured and measured.</li> </ul>
Average hourly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age and persons with disabilities (8.5.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Data are regularly available for 66 countries, but many others do not report it regularly. Some countries do not have any reliable source to report, and work should be done to have the data estimated.</li> <li>● The gender wage gap is calculated for paid employees only, as earnings data are typically available for employees. Hence, the gender pay gap does not cover large numbers of own-account workers or employers – especially in the informal sector, where income differences between men and women may be larger.</li> <li>● The gender pay gap also does not capture income differences between women and men that result from uneven access to paid employment.</li> </ul>
<b>Tier III: Methodological work needed; no data available</b>	
Proportion of children and young people: (a) in grades 2/3, (b) at the end of primary, and (c) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex (4.1.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A methodology has been established and tested, but there is currently no agreed international standard – although work is ongoing to develop one.</li> </ul>
Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex (5.1.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work is ongoing to develop and test a methodology and develop an agreed international standard.</li> </ul>
Number of countries with laws and regulations that guarantee women aged 15–49 access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education (5.6.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Although there is a suggested methodology, it has not been tested. There is currently no agreed international standard, but work is ongoing to develop one.</li> </ul>
Proportion of persons who were victims of physical or sexual harassment, by sex, age, disability status and place of occurrence, in the previous 12 months (11.7.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● While there are already agreed international standards on measuring physical and sexual violence through specialized surveys on violence and victimization, there is currently no agreed international standard on the measurement of physical and sexual harassment.</li> <li>● No data are currently available that measure harassment.</li> </ul>





# ARE BAD DATA WORSE THAN NO DATA AT ALL?

BY MAYRA BUVINIC, SENIOR FELLOW,  
AND RUTH LEVINE, CO-CHAIR, DATA2X

Particular forms of gender bias are revealed in the way we measure – or fail to measure – aspects of people’s lives. For many of the development outcomes aimed for in the Global Goals for Sustainable Development, information about current conditions is not disaggregated by sex, precluding any possibility of understanding gender differences. For others, gender bias is ingrained in the measurement process. These measurement challenges can be described as issues of ‘no data’ or ‘bad data’.

## THE DATA WE DON’T HAVE

An absence of information about girls’ and women’s lives is one of the problems we face in applying gender data to measure achievements across the Global Goals. Goal 16, for example, speaks to the importance of peaceful and inclusive societies and establishes a target for “responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making” at all levels.<sup>29</sup> But for most countries in the world, there are no sources of data that measure differences between male and female participation in civil society organizations, or in local advisory or decision-making bodies. This is just one instance in which we would likely understand current conditions and progress differently if the data made it possible to distinguish between women’s and men’s experiences.

A lack of data – particularly on topics that relate to the lives of girls and women – has serious consequences when it comes to policy and programme design. For example, limited data on unpaid household work has fed the myth that housewives have free time available for training and other development interventions. There are many examples of projects designed on this false premise, which have seen high dropout rates from female participants as a result.<sup>30</sup>

To determine the scope of missing data, Data2X reviewed and mapped out 28 global, policy-relevant areas for which there were no data on the lives of girls and women as of 2013 (*see the Annex for a listing of the results*).

## BAD DATA VS. GOOD DATA

Having no data is bad enough, as it forces policy decisions to be made without crucial information. But having substandard data is often more insidious, particularly when the data systematically misrepresent reality in such a way that women appear to be more dependent and less productive than they actually are.

Surveys are often designed in ways that reproduce traditional gender norms and further minimize the role of women in family and economic life. For example, many socio-economic and agricultural surveys of households are constructed using the (male) head of household as the anchor for the household, and other family members are defined in relation to the (male) head. The assumption that men are most often the heads of household – a view explicitly stated in many survey module instructions, and held by enumerators and respondents alike – undercounts women who fulfil this role.

If the number of female-led households is under-reported, these households may be overlooked in the distribution of productive resources and may receive fewer benefits from anti-poverty programmes, especially those that aim to reach the head of household. In a World Bank rural database of 6 countries that make up more than 40 per cent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa, for example, female-headed farm households had less access to fertilizers and other agricultural inputs than male-headed ones, were less likely to have received credit in the past year, and were less likely to have land titles and own agricultural land.<sup>31</sup>

**Having no data and bad data on women and girls has hampered the ability to influence policy, track progress and demand accountability.**



**Mais, a refugee from Syria, plays at a child-friendly space in Alexandria, Egypt.**  
*Plan International/  
Hassan Amin*

Labour force surveys may also reinforce sex-role stereotypes: the male as breadwinner, the female as housekeeper. These surveys often ask only about a person's primary economic activity. In so doing, they vastly underestimate the economic contribution of women, for whom paid work can often be a secondary occupation, with 'housewife' being considered the primary activity. As a result, decision makers who depend on these surveys have little understanding of how women add value to the economy.

Above all, good evidence on girls and women is of high quality. It is reliable, valid and representative, and free of gender biases. Good evidence also has good coverage, including country coverage and regular country production, and is comparable across countries in terms of concepts, definitions and measures.

There are two primary desirable features of good evidence: 'complexity', meaning that data from different domains in girls' and women's lives – such as health and employment – can be cross-referenced and cross-tabulated; and 'granularity', whereby the data can be disaggregated into smaller units by race and ethnicity, age and geographical location, as well as sex.

### THE OPPORTUNITY

Having no data and bad data on women and girls has hampered the ability to influence policy, track progress and demand accountability. Data can be powerful tools in the hands of women's rights advocates. The most notable advances in gender equality and women's rights have been in education and in sexual and reproductive health, both areas where better data are available.

Meanwhile, areas with no data, such as unpaid work, or bad data, such as economic participation, have seen less progress.

For every political exhortation about the importance of bettering the lot of girls and women, we need gender-specific information about areas where gender data have been historically unavailable – work, personal security and freedom, and protection from environmental harms – as well as the more typically available information on health and education.

None of this will be easy, but all of it is essential to realize the potential of the Global Goals. ■

*Note: This content is an adapted excerpt from an article published in Significance Magazine, April 2016.*



## CHAPTER 3

# WHAT DATA CAN AND CANNOT DO



Fuseima walks home with water from a river in the Upper West Region of Ghana.  
*Plan International/Nyani Quarmyne*

Used judiciously, data can be a particularly effective way to explain the world around us, but there are also many limitations and challenges.

**Data alone do not change the world.** The availability of good gender data and analysis can help governments, the private sector and civil society advocate for and implement gender-transformative policies and programmes – and measure their effectiveness. But simply having the information will not automatically lead to better policy and programme choices, or to more effective implementation. Clearly, there are other constraints to policymaking beyond a lack of information, including but not limited to a lack of political will and the presence of entrenched gender and social norms.

The analysis of data can, however, lead to knowledge that can inform decision making and change processes by revealing insights, identifying needs, and gauging what works and what does not. Quality, relevant and timely data also give civil society the evidence needed to challenge the priorities or actions of governments and other decision makers, sound the alarm and demand more or faster action.

It is easier to ignore a problem when there is little evidence of how pervasive it is or how deeply it affects people. That is why it is so important to have accurate and relevant quantitative and qualitative data that capture the realities of girls' and women's lives.

Data can tell stories, because behind each statistic is a life. We must do a better job of capturing, listening and responding to those stories and using them to make sure the most excluded do not continue to get left behind.

**Flawed data collection and analysis can lead to flawed conclusions.** Sometimes, even with the best intentions, data results can be skewed because the data are biased or those who collect and analyse data are biased. Good gender data ensure that the concepts, definitions and methods used in collection and analysis accurately reflect real lives and avoid bias as much as possible.

One example of survey design that can lead to biased results is the way in which household surveys are usually

directed to one individual, who represents the 'head of household' and is responsible for answering questions relevant to the entire household and the individuals who live within it.

In many contexts, it is automatically assumed that this person is a man rather than a woman, and older rather than younger. But in some cases, a man may know little about the details of a woman's daily reality, and vice versa, so the responses may not give the full picture.

Individually interviewing everyone in the household would, of course, have huge logistical and cost implications. But there are other ways to avoid gender bias, for example, by ensuring same-sex interviewers and respondents for questions that can have a particularly strong gender bias.

Even the use of 'the household' as a unit of measurement, loosely defined as a group of related or unrelated people living under one roof, poses challenges to collecting good gender data. Female-headed households and complex family structures, such as informal or polygamous marriages, can be obscured, as can questions about whether women participate equally in decision making on allocation of resources in the household, including their own earnings and inheritances. Additionally, household surveys often do not include people who live outside 'typical' households, or who are homeless or displaced.

In a similar vein, labour surveys often struggle to capture the different roles and expectations of women and men with regard to family, domestic life, and participation in work and social activities. Women's economic contributions can be overlooked or go uncounted because of how 'productive' labour is defined or interpreted. Although time spent cooking, cleaning and caring for children, the ill and the elderly, doing housework or doing voluntary community work is difficult to measure, these activities should be considered as productive labour – and taken into consideration in policy decisions.

**Data need to be presented in context.** Numbers alone may not reveal the full story. The realities of girls' and women's lives can be masked if qualitative and quantitative indicators are not analysed in a combined and holistic way.



## THE IMPORTANCE OF SURVEY DESIGN

Statistical results can depend on the way questions are asked and to whom they are asked, as revealed by an experiment in Tanzania in 2010.

When asked a simple question – “Did you do any work in the last 7 days, even for one hour?” – women tended to report lower levels of employment. But when they were asked detailed questions about a list of activities that are considered to be ‘work’, their reported levels of employment were higher.

Who answered a question also had a bearing on results. Employment levels were higher when men were asked to self-report their main activity than when someone else in the household reported on their behalf.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, when detailed screening questions were used in Uganda, broader economic participation was more effectively captured.

In a 1992–1993 survey, respondents had the option to record their primary employment status as ‘inactive’ for reasons such as ‘domestic duties’, ‘student’ or ‘too old or young to work’. Many of those who reported a ‘non-economic’ activity as their primary employment status also reported an economic activity as their secondary employment status. Many respondents who were actually economically active considered such economic activities as secondary to other non-economic activities they perform – such as going to school or caring for members of the household – and were therefore misclassified as ‘inactive’ and out of the labour force.

Expanding the analysis to cover secondary activities increased the percentage of working-age Ugandans in the labour force from 78 per cent to 87 per cent, a difference of more than 700,000 people.<sup>33</sup>

For example, data may exist on the number of girls who have access to public transportation in a particular city, but there may not be data on whether girls think it is safe to use that transportation. If girls do not feel safe riding a bus or walking the distance it takes to get to the bus, then the number of girls who have access to public transportation has little practical meaning.

Similarly, time-use surveys can complement labour surveys by showing differences in how people allocate their time. These surveys ask respondents to report all their activities during a prescribed period of time and how long they spent on each activity. They can reveal valuable insights into unpaid and paid work, work-life balance, how much time individuals invest in education and health, and where inequalities may exist within the household and between households.

### DATA AND HUMAN RIGHTS

In the drive for increased knowledge and information to inform decision making, it is imperative to keep in sight the fact that most data are about people, and people have rights.

Even as we grapple with large gaps in official data, more and more data are being generated from ‘passive’ sources, often collected without any overt user interaction. Largely linked to the use of digital technologies such as smartphones and the internet, information collected in this way can include data on a user’s location, how long they spend on a web page, what apps they install, and which links they follow, along with much more.

Whether collected actively or passively, some information could put people at risk, if data on their whereabouts, movements, likes, dislikes, social interactions, health status, sexual orientation or gender identity are made public with malicious intentions. Damage can also be caused unintentionally, but can still lead to public embarrassment, social isolation, discrimination, safety concerns or far worse.

While the rights of the individual must be balanced with benefits to the wider community, there needs to be a high degree of trust and responsibility so that people feel confident in consenting to have data about them used for the social good, such as tracking disease patterns or revealing social inequalities.

Based on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights approach to data collection and use,<sup>34</sup> the following principles are essential to ensure that the data revolution upholds human rights.

**Participation:** All data collection efforts should include a way for relevant stakeholders to freely, actively and meaningfully participate, with a particular focus on the most vulnerable and excluded groups of people. A participatory



Children play on swings at a centre for refugee children in northern Uganda.  
*Plan International*

approach can enhance the relevance and reliability of data collection and analysis.

**Disaggregation:** Breaking data into smaller subsets allows for comparisons between different population groups, which can help reveal the extent of possible inequalities and discrimination. A lack of disaggregated data can mask underlying disparities. Disaggregated data should be published in a format that allows for the detection of multiple and intersecting disparities and discrimination.

**Self-identification:** Respecting and protecting personal identity are central to human dignity and human rights. The overriding human rights principle ‘do no harm’ should always be applied, including in data collection and analysis. Censuses, population surveys and vital statistics should not create or reinforce existing discrimination, bias or stereotypes against population groups, including by denying their identities.

**Transparency:** Statistics play a fundamental role in a democratic society and honour a population’s entitlement to public information, as well as provide a resource for

government and business.<sup>35</sup> Data should be disseminated as quickly as possible after collection. Distribution should be in an accessible language and format, taking into account disability, language, literacy levels, cultural background and other characteristics of the population. Civil society should be able to publish and analyse statistics without fear of reprisal. And, for the sake of credibility, the legal, institutional and policy frameworks under which national chief statisticians and statistical systems operate should be publicly available.

**Privacy:** Access to information must be balanced with rights to privacy and data protection. Personal data – including but not limited to data on ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or health status – should be handled only with the express consent of the individual concerned. Data collected to produce statistical information must be strictly confidential, used exclusively for statistical purposes and regulated by law. Data should not be published or publicly accessible in a way that permits identification of individual data subjects, either directly or indirectly. Data should be secured against both natural and human dangers, and deleted when no longer required.



**Accountability:** Independent statistics, free from political interference, are fundamental tools to inform and hold those in power accountable. Putting collected data back in the hands of citizens and strengthening their capacity to use the data are essential for accountability.

## USING DATA TO FUEL A MOVEMENT

Good data and analysis lead to information that governments can use to decide which issues are urgent. They also give advocates a strong base from which to influence and persuade decision makers to take action on issues that have not received the attention they deserve.

For example, joint lobbying efforts over many years led the Government of Kiribati, a small island nation in the Pacific Ocean, to conduct its first study on violence against women and children, in 2008. Prior to this study, gender-based violence was considered an issue to be dealt with in private. No policies or laws were in place related to violence against girls and women, gender equality or the status of women, and police procedures for responding to violence against women lacked clarity and accountability.<sup>36</sup>

The results of the study, which were released in 2010, revealed the shocking extent of the problem in Kiribati: nearly 70 per cent of ever-partnered women reported having

been victims of physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner.<sup>37</sup> In releasing the findings, the government expressed deep concern and called on people across the country to challenge the prevailing idea that domestic violence happens behind closed doors and is an accepted part of life.

This new information gave the government, civil society organizations, United Nations agencies and international donors the fuel they needed to begin making some significant legal and social changes.

In 2012, the government passed the Family Peace Act for Domestic Violence and provided training for police officers, school authorities, counsellors, and health-care and social services providers on how to implement it. National education curricula were reformed to teach children about respectful relationships, gender equality and preventing violence. Teachers learned how to counsel students who experience violence. Civil society engaged men and boys in advocating against gender-based violence.

As a result, advocates say awareness of the effects of violence on girls and women is increasing. Free services are provided to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence – including a 24-hour hotline – and police units have been set up to deal with domestic violence and promote safer communities.<sup>38</sup> As this example shows, data can be a powerful force for policy change.

Data can also help uncover and tackle issues that arise from deeply entrenched attitudes and beliefs. In India, for example, the 2011 census raised alarms about the ratio of girls to boys in the newborn to 6-year-old age group since the previous census. For every 1,000 boys, there were only 919 girls.<sup>39</sup> In some states, the ratio was as low as 846 girls to 1,000 boys.<sup>40</sup>

The Let Girls Be Born campaign, led by Plan International India and others in the girls' rights movement, used these numbers to challenge gender-biased sex selection and to support families and communities to ensure their girls can survive and thrive.

Over three years, the campaign reached approximately 1.2 million people in the 12 districts with the lowest ratio of girls to boys.<sup>41</sup> Villages were encouraged to celebrate the births of their daughters, girls from poor families were offered scholarships, and community-based organizations held street plays, rallies, debates, poster competitions and interactive discussions.

The impact of the campaign is being seen in the form of increased birth registration, greater awareness of girls' rights, more girls going to and completing school, and an increase of cases lodged against clinics for performing sex-selective abortions.



**Mahesh holds his daughter Mohini in Uttar Pradesh, where the ratio of girls to boys is among the lowest in India.**

*Plan International Netherlands*

## ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN GUATEMALA



Until recently, it was legal for a girl in Guatemala to marry at age 14, with the consent of a parent or a judge. This legal provision, along with poverty, discriminatory gender norms and a lack of access to education, led to thousands of child marriages each year.

Child marriage is a fundamental violation of a girl's rights and acts as a brake on progress because it deprives society of the potential and innovation that girls contribute. Child brides often live in isolation, dependent on their husbands and with little access to health, education or protection from violence and abuse.

Through its Because I am a Girl initiative, Plan International Guatemala, in coordination with a group of partners, took steps to campaign for a change in the law to raise the minimum age of marriage for both girls and boys.

Strong data played an important role in the advocacy strategy. Civil society advocates used evidence on the

prevalence of child marriage and its impacts on children's lives, as well as an analysis of traditional Mayan laws, to successfully influence lawmakers and reduce opposition to the reform. Congress approved the new law in August 2015, raising the minimum age of marriage to 18 for girls and boys.

Girls were important agents of change and an integral part of the campaign. "When I heard that they had approved the new law, I felt so much happiness because I had helped make it happen," said Mayra, a young campaigner from Carchá municipality. "I collected signatures and was part of a team of people who had brought about change. I felt so proud."

But Mayra and other campaigners acknowledge that the law is just the beginning, and their work is far from over. Data, evidence and advocacy will still be needed to measure progress, promote awareness of the law and overturn traditional beliefs to ensure that child marriage becomes a thing of the past.

Young campaigners from Carchá municipality helped raise the legal age of marriage in Guatemala.  
*Plan International*





# POVERTY IS SEXIST; THE GLOBAL GOALS SHOULDN'T BE

**BY ELOISE TODD, GLOBAL POLICY DIRECTOR, ONE CAMPAIGN**

In 2014, we began to notice that in all the key policy areas ONE works on – agriculture, health, nutrition and economic development – women and girls were most impacted by poverty. This observation was backed by growing evidence based on research and what ONE witnessed in Africa.

In 2015, we kicked off our Poverty is Sexist campaign with an inaugural report,<sup>42</sup> laying out the premise that women and girls in the poorest countries are hit worst and hardest by poverty, but when we strategically invest in women and girls, everyone is lifted out of poverty more quickly.

As a global campaigning and advocacy organization with more than 7 million members around the world, ONE is dedicated to taking action to end extreme poverty and preventable disease, particularly in Africa. We lobby political leaders and run grass-roots campaigns to compel decision makers to do more to fight AIDS and other preventable, treatable diseases in the poorest places on the planet, to empower small-holder farmers, to expand access to energy, and to combat corruption so governments are accountable to their citizens.

**Good data are indispensable to demonstrate where governments are not delivering for their own people.**

As we have seen time after time, effective advocacy is built on solid policy asks that are developed by clearly identifying – and backing up – the desired change. Quality data are essential to identify where change is most needed and where investments will have the greatest impact. Building advocacy on the foundation of good-quality data provides an evidence base to support our arguments and, ideally, proof that the policies and investments for which we are advocating will actually deliver results.

## THE CHALLENGE OF SPARSE DATA

We know that poverty is sexist. Girls and women around the world are being left behind, and ONE believes that until something is done to bring them along, development results will be stalled for everyone. However, the data to back up these assertions are, in some places, spotty at best.

The initial *Poverty is Sexist* report, published in 2015, lays out the argument for why girls and women must be at the heart of the fight to end extreme poverty. It calls for refocusing the development agenda, placing girls and women centre stage and better targeting investments to empower girls and women around the world to lift themselves and their families out of poverty.

The report examines the challenges and opportunities women in low-income countries face in a number of different areas, including agriculture, health and education; financial, legal and economic empowerment; and access to energy and technology. While putting the report together, it was incredibly difficult to find data sets large enough to provide information about how women across the globe were faring. We also had a hard time finding data that illuminate the opportunities that arise for women when they are the beneficiaries of increased investment.

For example, when looking at the potential benefits of increasing women's

access to energy in the developing world, ONE cited a 2007 case study from South Africa. The study found that women's employment increased by 9.5 per cent where electricity was provided.<sup>43</sup>

However, no data on the specific impacts of electricity access in these women's lives were collected for the study in South Africa. And there were no large-scale data sets on the impact of access to electricity for women in low-income countries. To provide a more complete picture and to properly correlate electricity access with increased employment rates, we need larger data sets, in terms of both geography and inclusivity of household measurements.

The 2016 edition of *Poverty is Sexist* includes an index in which ONE attempts to determine the toughest places in the world to be born a girl.<sup>44</sup> We looked at a variety of indicators to create this index, taking into account some of the biggest threats and opportunities a girl may face during her lifetime.

The index was not meant to be comprehensive. In fact, due to the lack of available data, finding even seven indicators for the index was a serious challenge. We chose the indicators that served as a reasonable guide to a girl's chances in life, through her health and nutrition, educational and economic opportunities, and ability to participate in political life.

However, a huge determining factor in these indicators was the availability of data. The selected indicators had the broadest available data, but they were not universal and, in the final analysis, required taking data gaps into account.

Other organizations have faced similar challenges. Bread for the World's 2015 *Hunger Report* examined the United Nations minimum set of gender indicators established in 2013 as a guide for producing national gender statistics and found that more than half of the 52



quantitative indicators averaged less than one data point per country from 1990–2013.<sup>45</sup>

### GOOD DATA ENABLE EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

The Poverty is Sexist campaign is propelled by ONE's fundamentally held belief that good data are the bedrock of strong advocacy: necessary to identify not only what the problems are, but where the gaps in progress exist, and necessary to accurately show donors the potential impact of their investments.

Good data are also indispensable to demonstrate where governments are not delivering for their own people, particularly women and girls. This information should be available to the women in Niger, Somalia, Mali, the Central African Republic, Yemen and the Democratic Republic of Congo – the

six countries, according to our index, where it is toughest to be born a girl. Putting quality data in the hands of women, activists and leaders in these countries will enable them to make strong arguments to their governments for better service delivery and support.

Data also support civil society organizations to hold governments, in both low- and high-income countries, accountable to deliver results and demonstrate progress in all areas of development.

To solve the sexist data crisis, we need to expedite an approach that brings visibility to the specific challenges faced by girls and women. In particular, this requires the prioritization of the collection of data on domestic unpaid work, along with the disaggregation of all relevant statistics. ■

**Adolescent girls in Niger, which ONE ranked as the toughest place to be born a girl in its 2016 *Poverty is Sexist* report.**

*Plan International/Olivier Girard*



## CHAPTER 4

# GIRLS SHARE THEIR VIEWS



Girls at a shelter in Nicaragua that is working to reduce violence and teenage pregnancy.  
*Plan International*

One of the greatest promises of the Global Goals is that the lives of millions of girls could be positively transformed within 15 years.

Transformative change begins with understanding the challenges and root causes of inequality and exclusion, and that understanding begins with listening to girls themselves, particularly the most excluded. Hearing first-hand their needs and priorities is crucial as the world begins to take action to implement the Global Goals.

A 2015 survey by Plan International in Ecuador, Nicaragua, Pakistan and Zimbabwe – *Girls Speak Out: A Four-Country Survey of Young Women's Attitudes and Recommendations for Action* – shed light on the attitudes and experiences of over 4,000 girls in those countries. The girls spoke about how safe they feel in school and public places, how much control they feel they have over their lives and bodies, and how they view violence. The study set the scene for a more in-depth analysis of their daily realities.

Girls' lives are shaped by intersecting vulnerabilities, including the economic well-being of the household in which they live, their own marital status, and whether or not they are a parent. Their identities are also defined by a variety of characteristics, including ethnicity, class, race, disability and sexual identity. The intersection of more than one vulnerability – being out of school and being a young married mother, for example – can make it more difficult for these girls to realize their rights.

To better understand the distinct and specific experiences of certain groups of girls, Plan International conducted research in 2016 in two of the previously studied countries – Zimbabwe and Nicaragua. The objective of the research was to explore the realities of girls who report feeling marginalized, and to learn more about their specific experiences.

## GAINING A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

Based on analysis of the Global Goals and targets that could have the most impact on a girl's life, the following areas of exploration were selected: girls' enabling environment, care and domestic work in the home, education quality and value, early pregnancy, early marriage, violence against girls and women, safety in public places, social relations and interpersonal communications.

A total of 240 girls, age 15–19, were interviewed to explore the differing perspectives, attitudes and experiences of a diverse group: young mothers, married girls, school dropouts, girls from ethnic minorities and girls at risk of intersecting vulnerabilities.

The research used both quantitative and qualitative methods, including an attitudinal and perceptions-based survey, open questions, and context-specific questions designed with researchers from each country. Participative, creative and critically reflective methods were used, in conjunction with focus group discussions. To make the research as meaningful and collaborative as possible, young women were employed as research assistants (6 in Zimbabwe and 10 in Nicaragua). After these assistants participated in training on research methods and gender and protection issues, they conducted the field research and took part in a workshop to analyse the findings.

The results of this research are not representative of the population at large in either country, and should only be presented and understood as insights into specific groups of girls who share similar characteristics in a specific geographical location and context at a particular moment in time. However, the findings illuminate the daily reality of the girls who were interviewed, and reveal how they feel things should be. Asked whether they thought they should have more opportunities to get on in life and achieve their life goals, girls in both countries overwhelmingly answered 'yes'.

**“No one tells us anything or explains anything related to sexuality.”**

(YOUNG MOTHER FROM MANAGUA)



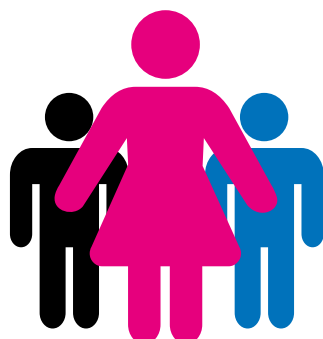


## MOST GIRLS DO NOT FEEL SAFE IN PUBLIC PLACES



**65%**

do not feel safe on public transport



**59%**

do not feel safe walking on their own in public places



**77%**

do not feel safe in public places after dark

Percentage of respondents out of 119 total

## COUNTRY FINDINGS: NICARAGUA

Girls in Nicaragua spoke of widespread violence against girls and women. Respondents frequently talked about the prevalence of sexual abuse in their surrounding environments. They felt particularly vulnerable to their rights being abused because of their age and because they are girls.

The fear of being sexually abused was strongly linked to the associated risk of becoming pregnant, a result they feared would negatively impact their opportunities and well-being and restrict their progress in life. Girls reported concerns about their physical capacity to conceive and give birth without any damaging or fatal health impacts. Those who did become pregnant at a young age also spoke about concerns over their capacity to be a mother and the social stigma attached to being young and pregnant.

Most of the girls interviewed reported feeling unsafe in their homes, in their relationships, and on the streets. Girls reported not feeling safe on public transport, walking on their own in public, or being in public after dark. In addition to the threat and fear of physical and sexual violence, they reported being verbally harassed by boys and men in the street.

“Girls are abused at home and in the community. Some of them are raped,” said one girl during a discussion group in San Rafael del Sur, a town south-west of Managua. Participants in the same discussion felt that those who were poor or who had fewer resources were perceived to be at a greater risk. “A rapist thinks if the girl to be raped is poor, she is more vulnerable and less likely to report the case,” one of the girls said, “Meanwhile, a person with enough resources has a better knowledge of law and will be more easily heard.”

Out of all the girls interviewed in Nicaragua, the majority agreed that sexual abuse should be reported and said they know where to go to do this in their community. They also noted that they would feel more confident reporting violence to the authorities than to a family member.

Problems in the home and poor treatment by parents negatively affected their well-being and life choices, according to a group of young mothers. They discussed the lack of love, care and support they experienced in their home environment. Physical, sexual, verbal and emotional abuse from family members led to feelings of insecurity and loneliness. The girls said they felt they were not listened to or given good advice, particularly around sexuality. In many cases, girls said they sought comfort and love outside the home, hoping they could have a better and happier home life with a boyfriend.

“No one tells us anything or explains anything related to sexuality,” said a young mother from Managua. “Girls have problems at home and get a partner or get pregnant to avoid



Nury, who became pregnant at age 14, with her mother at their home in rural Nicaragua.  
(Plan International/  
Miguel Alvarez)

suffering in their homes,” she explained, detailing such challenges as being raped by their fathers or someone close to them, and the lack of education girls receive.

In many cases, mothers were held to blame for not protecting their daughters from sexual violence or for allowing them to become pregnant. “Many of the girls are raped because of their mothers’ carelessness,” said a respondent from Boaco. Several girls said that mothers give their daughters too much freedom and do not teach them how to say no. While some respondents felt that a mother is responsible for keeping girls inside the house and off the street, others complained that their movement was too restricted by their protective mothers and wished they had more independence. Mothers were also blamed for withholding information and support from their daughters. Young mothers frequently discussed the neglect they felt from their own mothers.

In general, there was a lack of reflection on the accountability of fathers, boys and men in the communities to address and change violent or sexually abusive behaviour. However, a small group of young mothers did raise the issue, saying that boys cannot be left out. “They have responsibility too,” said a young mother in Managua. “We should tell them if you don’t want responsibility, use protection.”

While the majority of girls felt they had adequate information to avoid pregnancy, one third said they did not. Perceptions over access to contraception were evenly split: almost half of the girls agreed that they were able to access contraceptives (44 per cent), with a slightly lower proportion disagreeing (41 per cent).

For girls who are in relationships, negotiating condom use can be difficult. The large majority of girls interviewed (92 per cent) said they can ask their partner or boyfriend to use a contraceptive. But only 22 per cent of girls said their partner or boyfriend would actually do so. These unequal power relations increase girls’ risk of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Girls reported that they received sexual education in school, but felt that it could be more effective and that a greater focus should be placed on how to correctly use contraception to avoid pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

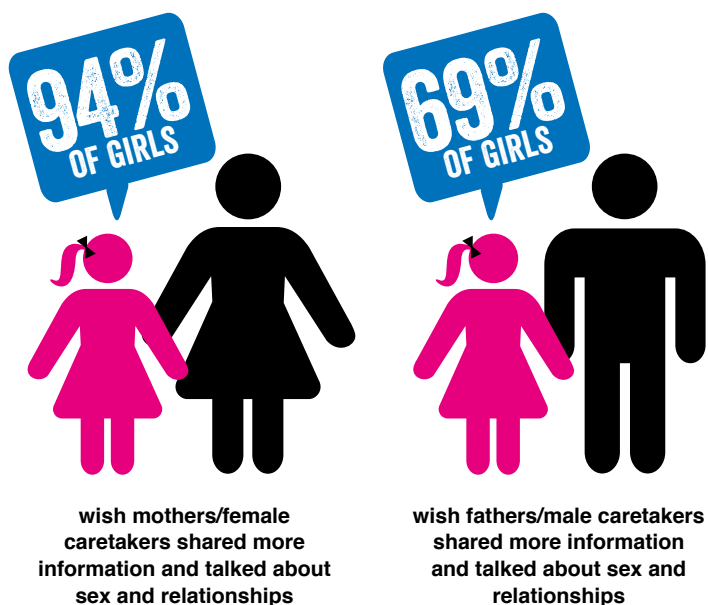
The overwhelming majority of girls said that although their mothers talked to them about sexual education and relationships to some degree, they wished this would happen more. One third said they wished their fathers would talk to them about these issues more.



Young mothers learn about childcare in a Miskito community in northern Nicaragua.  
Plan International



## GIRLS WANT TO TALK ABOUT SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR PARENTS



Percentage of respondents out of 119 total

“There is no communication or trust with parents,” said one girl during a group discussion. “They think we are dating somebody or that something may happen and we might get pregnant.”

While the home environment often seems to fall short of girls’ expectations, they said family relationships are pivotal to their well-being, their sense of self-esteem and their ability to set goals and act upon them.

Girls stressed the importance of having someone to talk to and share their problems with. Receiving advice and emotional support was overwhelmingly discussed as being crucial to their well-being. The vast majority of girls reported that this support came from female family members, including mothers, grandmothers and aunts. However, the group of young mothers more frequently mentioned friends, psychologists and community organizations as important sources of support rather than members of the family.

A minority of girls (10 per cent) said they had no one to talk to, indicating a level of isolation, and risk to their well-being. A majority of these girls were young mothers, mostly aged 16 or younger, and the challenges they most frequently reported were sexual abuse and violence in the home.

Given the centrality and importance of family support cited by the majority of girls in the Nicaragua sample, the loss of this support and the incidences of violence in the home are particularly devastating to those girls who feel they have no one to talk to or nowhere to turn.

School was seen as a refuge for many of the respondents. For all girls, the importance of education in later adolescence was strongly linked to feelings of becoming more capable and positive and having more self-esteem, and to the idea of 'being someone'. In addition to the value of being taught core school subjects – which increased their knowledge and capabilities – girls also linked their education to knowing their rights.

Miskito girls, in particular, linked the education of women to reducing levels of violence in the home. Girls in that community talked of school as an environment where they were informed about their rights and where values that might be taught at home were reinforced. One girl from Boaco said that her education “helped me to be more positive and think that I am capable and that not only men have that right.”

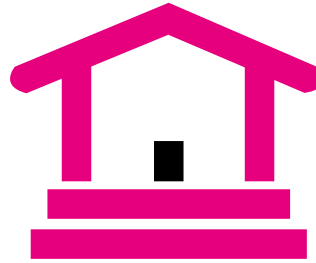
Continuing education and transitioning to employment or a successful career was repeatedly mentioned by girls when defining their life goals. Encouragingly, the large majority of girls involved in the survey were happy with both the quality of and their access to education and said they believed it would lead to good employment opportunities.

However, while girls mostly reported they have the opportunity to finish secondary school, almost a quarter of the girls interviewed stated that they had to stop their education due to pregnancy or sexual harassment. Safety in schools continues to be a problem, with girls – particularly those who are poor or from rural areas – facing the additional risk of being abused by teachers.

The largely positive perception of satisfaction with education is not shared by all the girls interviewed. Girls from the indigenous Miskito community expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of education they receive, and reported problems with teachers' attendance and with language barriers. A girl in a focus group in Sisín said, “When we speak Spanish, our classmates mock us. That is why we don't continue speaking or try to continue learning Spanish and why we cannot progress with our education.”

Girls in this group also felt that their access to education and their opportunities to finish secondary education were restricted by their parents' belief that education for girls is a waste of money because they will just get married or pregnant. There was a strong sentiment from the Miskito girls that the education system is leaving them behind, and that their specific needs are not being addressed.

## GIRLS EXPRESS SATISFACTION WITH EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES



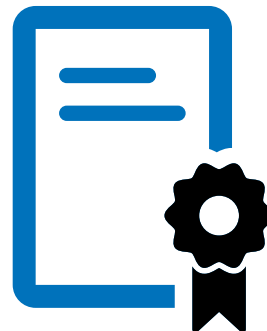
**79%**

say girls always have opportunities to attend secondary school



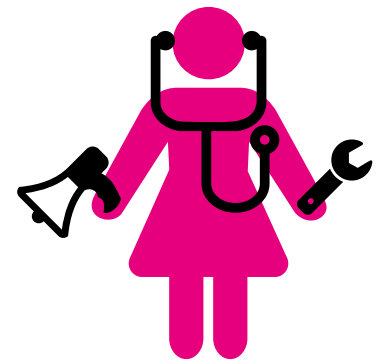
**66%**

say girls always have opportunities to finish school



**91%**

say they were satisfied with the quality of education they received



**90%**

believe finishing education will lead to decent employment opportunities

Percentage of respondents out of 119 total

**“Education helped me to be more positive and think that I am capable.”**

(GIRL FROM BOACO)





### COUNTRY FINDINGS: ZIMBABWE

While girls in Nicaragua repeatedly discussed their fear of violence and its consequences, for girls in Zimbabwe, the main concerns were economic.

Widespread poverty not only had an impact on their health and well-being, it also increased the risk of dropping out of school, which in turn exposed them to early marriage and early pregnancy. Their ability to exercise their rights was often discussed as interrelated or dependent on the economic well-being of their household, which also had an impact on girls' ability to complete their education.

Out of the girls interviewed, 81 per cent reported that at one point or another they had to drop out of school, either temporarily or permanently. The overwhelming majority said the reason behind this was economic, while others cited early pregnancy, early marriage and menstruation as barriers to continuing education. The low value placed on educating girls meant that when resources were scarce, parents opted to educate sons instead of daughters.

Once out of school, girls said the risk of early marriage and early pregnancy increased. They reported feeling pressure from families and guardians to marry in order to relieve the financial burden of the household and also to avoid girls being 'idle at home'. Girls themselves also expressed a fear of 'being idle' and linked this to the problem of having too much freedom, which often resulted in early pregnancy.

Girls in Zimbabwe value learning and want to finish their education – but those who were interviewed for this research expressed dissatisfaction with their ability to access and stay in school. Although the large majority of girls (88 per cent) in the study said they had the opportunity to regularly attend secondary school, the temporary or permanent dropout rate is alarmingly high.

Only a third of girls we spoke with agreed that girls their age always have the opportunity to finish secondary school. Many girls said they were regularly forced to drop out. One girl from Redcliff said, "I am not happy about the education I received because it was hard to attend school, since I did not have school fees."

More marginalized groups, such as girls from the Ndebele ethnic group, reported an even less positive experience with school. One girl from the remote community of Silobela reflected on a particularly harrowing educational experience. "Going to school inflicted pain in my life," she said. "I was always depressed at school seeing other children affording even a decent meal for break time, when I had nothing. I could only go with wild fruits, so I would spend the day very hungry. I could not even listen to the teacher."

Another girl from the same community said failing to finish school meant girls like her have "no bright future." Others

### MOST GIRLS BELIEVE EDUCATION WILL LEAD TO A BETTER LIFE



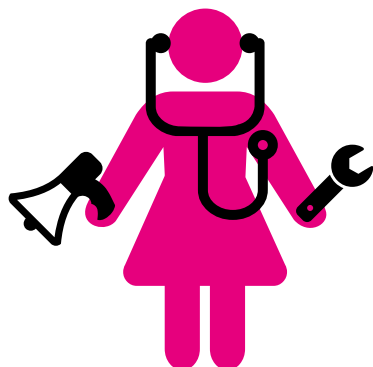
**72%**

say girls always have opportunities to attend secondary school



**33%**

say girls always have opportunities to finish school



**89%**

believe finishing education will lead to decent employment opportunities

Percentage of respondents out of 121 total

said they regretted attending school, that they found it useless, and that they wished they had not wasted their limited resources on it.

All the girls in the Zimbabwe study linked the value of education to better life opportunities and, specifically, to jobs that help increase their economic well-being and that of their families. Nine out of 10 girls interviewed believed that finishing their education would lead to decent employment opportunities.

The hope of finishing school or going back to school was clearly linked with finding ways to earn money through jobs or other income-generating projects, such as raising chickens. Interestingly, the small group of girls who did not report that they had stopped school at some point expressed higher aspirations concerning their life goals, and talked about furthering their education and securing professional careers.

Compared to education, a higher value is sometimes placed on marriage, for example, in Ndebele families and communities, leading some girls to view marriage as an achievement. Not all agree, however. One girl said, “They are forced to marry at a tender age ... because that is what our culture is like. The elders should change our custom of early marriage.”

Most girls felt that girls who were married early had more complications to face. “Their life gets hard,” said a non-married girl in Epworth, an urban settlement near Harare. “They will not have a better future or any plans for a brighter future. They will now have to stop going to school to look after their children.”

The majority of girls agreed that if girls marry before age 18 they are less likely to complete their education. Out of the 44 married girls interviewed, the large majority mentioned poverty, hunger and lack of economic resources as the main drivers for marrying early. Forty-two of the married girls reported that they had to interrupt their education, either temporarily or permanently.

Reflecting on the impact of early pregnancy in their lives, young married mothers talked about birth complications, leaving school early, being beaten by their husbands, regretting their decision, and the struggle to provide and care for their child. These challenges were often interlinked.

“I want my husband to stop beating me,” said one girl from Silobela. “I want to support my family. I want my husband to support my baby as well.” Married girls were more likely to disagree when asked if they had enough opportunities to get on in life and achieve their goals, and three out of four married girls stated they do not have the same opportunities as boys to get on in life.



**Hope, a youth leader, at her school in Epworth, near Harare, Zimbabwe.**  
*Plan International/Flemming Gernyx*



**“My husband takes me for a punching bag each and every day. He gives me hard blows. My mother-in-law told me to be silent and told me this was how marriages are.”**

(YOUNG MARRIED GIRL, SILOBELA)

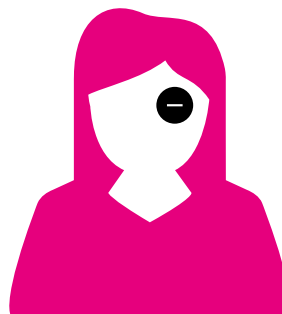
In addition, the large majority of married girls interviewed agreed with the statement that girls who marry young are more likely to experience violence in the home. “Those who are married experience violence as their breakfast, lunch and supper,” said a girl in Silobela. “These girls are impregnated at a very young age. This is because they are struggling to survive. They did not go to school, they did not have the school fees to go to school. They are left with no option other than marriage. In the marriage they usually experience violence. I am tired of the way my husband gives me blows every day.”

Violence was also a reality for unmarried girls, particularly those who were orphaned or sent to live with extended families, including step-mothers and uncles.

Faced with such challenges, having someone to talk to about their problems was very important to most of the girls interviewed. As with the girls in Nicaragua, girls in Zimbabwe who did have someone to talk to highly valued this relationship and found a great comfort in being able to discuss their problems and receive advice. The majority of girls said they talked to their mothers, aunts or other female relatives and referred to them as a source of support and strength.

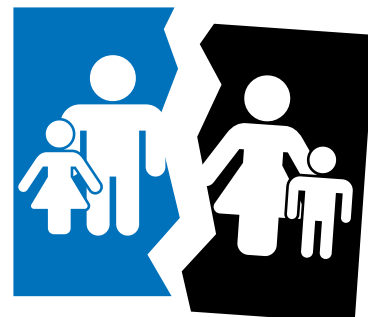
However, 15 girls – more than 10 per cent of the girls interviewed – said they had no one to talk to. The majority of these girls were not in school or employment, and three of them identified themselves as 24-hour caregivers in their families, highlighting the extent of their social isolation and restrictions on movement.

## GIRLS THINK THEY SHOULD ACCEPT VIOLENCE FOR THE FAMILY’S SAKE



**84%**

feel it is unacceptable for a boy to hit or use violence against his girlfriend/wife



**68%**

agree that women put up with violence in order to keep the family together

Percentage of respondents out of 121 total

Married girls who had support said their mothers or female relatives often talked to them about marriage and relationships, particularly around issues of violence within the marriage. The findings show how violence is normalized by many people.

“My husband takes me for a punching bag each and every day. He gives me hard blows. I am in trouble with this husband of mine,” reported one girl. “My mother-in-law told me to be silent and told me this was how marriages are ... My mother-in-law is my comforter. She helps me in life.”

Overall, girls did not think it was acceptable for boyfriends or husbands to hit them or use violence, however, they did feel it is acceptable for women to put up with violence in order to keep the family together. Violence is viewed as something to be expected by both older and younger women.

Just under half of the girls interviewed did not agree that girls their age had sufficient opportunities to get on in life and achieve their life goals. Disagreement levels rose to over two thirds when asked if girls had the same opportunities as boys to achieve their goals. Asked if they should have more opportunities available, 9 out of 10 girls said yes.

Girls in Zimbabwe want a better life but struggle to overcome the many barriers they face, including poverty and violence. Their drive and passion to achieve their goals, stay in school, finish their education, find employment and generate income to transform their lives was clearly articulated throughout the research. They feel more should be done to allow them to effectively participate in their homes and their communities.

## INSIGHTS FROM THE PRIMARY RESEARCH

Analysing specific identities and the intersecting vulnerabilities that girls experience creates a better understanding of the specific challenges and barriers they face in achieving their life goals and improving their condition and position in society. For example, in both countries the experiences of education for girls from ethnic minority communities were more negative than the experiences of the wider groups of girls. In order to reach the most excluded and create conditions that allow for transformative change, more detailed understanding and analysis of these intersecting vulnerabilities is needed.

Looking at inequalities by gender and other dimensions can help identify particularly vulnerable groups and enables the development of appropriate policy and programme responses.

An intersectionality approach does not always present a consistent set of findings. Rather, it exposes the complexities ingrained in the lived realities of girls and boys and highlights the diversity of responses needed in order to be effective. For example, to understand the experience of a girl from an ethnic minority, it is not enough to understand how she experiences gender inequality and how she experiences ethnic discrimination. A full understanding of how these two interact and reinforce each other is needed.

Policy and programme responses must also consider the importance and complexity of the family, either as an environment that empowers girls or acts as a driver of exclusion. In both countries in this research girls talked about the centrality of family in their lives, and how they highly valued having a family member to talk to about their problems, for support and advice. On the other hand, many girls described their home environment as being the root of the problem, where they were badly treated, undervalued on account of being a girl, or seen as an unnecessary cost to the household. These challenging family and household conditions often lead girls into early unions, early marriages or early pregnancies against their will or before they felt they were ready.

This study poignantly demonstrates the need for a nuanced and holistic approach to addressing violence against girls and women. Progress towards meeting the Global Goals to end violence against girls and women must take into account the perspectives of those affected by it. For example, many of the girls interviewed placed the responsibility for preventing sexual violence on girls' shoulders.

A normalization of violence in both countries cultivates a belief and attitude among girls that sexual abuse, violence and risky sexual relations can be avoided if they themselves change. Many girls said they could reduce their risk by moderating their own behaviour, for example, by dressing appropriately and restricting their presence in public places. This is in contrast to approaches that aim to end violence against girls

and women by challenging the status quo and/or advocating for and with boys and men to promote equality for girls and women.

Similarly, exploring girls' attitudes and perceptions around household chores offers insights into gender norms in a given context. Focus group discussions with boys in both countries acknowledged that girls comparatively spend more time in the household completing household chores, but boys considered these chores to be 'light', while their own chores were more masculine and required more strength. In addition, both girls and boys acknowledged that boys have more leisure time than girls and more opportunities for play and study.

When questioning girls on whether the division of labour should be more equally distributed, two distinct perceptions emerged: girls in Nicaragua expressed a sense of injustice and unfairness, while most of the girls interviewed in Zimbabwe did not feel a need to change the division of labour, and 70 per cent said they believe they should not have as much free time as boys.

Some girls in Zimbabwe responded with astonishment at the suggestion of changing the well-established gender roles and responsibilities in the household, and talked about the disgrace and embarrassment a brother or husband would feel if he was found cleaning the house.

To create transformative change for girls over the next 15 years, more emphasis will be needed on creating caring and supportive environments in which all girls can access knowledge and encouragement in safe spaces. By tackling unequal power relationships and addressing attitudes, behaviours and social norms, girls can have increased autonomy, choice and control over their own lives.

A combined approach to quantitative and qualitative research – such as the studies in Nicaragua and Zimbabwe – contributes to a stronger gender analysis, allowing us to go beyond the numbers to reveal and respond to the daily realities of girls and women, and providing tremendous support for real change.

**Progress towards meeting the Global Goals to end violence against girls and women must take into account the perspectives of those affected by it.**





# MEASURING THE DRIVERS OF GENDER INEQUALITY

**BY GAËLLE FERRANT, ECONOMIST, KEIKO NOWACKA, GENDER COORDINATOR, AND ANNELISE THIM, JUNIOR POLICY ANALYST, OECD DEVELOPMENT CENTRE**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development holds great promise for achieving gender equality through its ambitious goals, targets and indicators, which take into account the systemic barriers girls and women face in enjoying equal rights, opportunities and well-being.

An important departure from the Millennium Development Goals is the recognition that social norms play a significant role in girls' and women's rights and well-being. Targets on unpaid care work, harmful practices and early marriage are examples of the inclusion of this social norms lens into the new development framework. Measuring social norms and tracking change over time will be critical to supporting progress towards these targets.

Tracking changes in attitudes, perceptions and norms has often been seen as elusive, complicated or controversial. For the past eight years, the OECD Development Centre's Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) has proposed an innovative approach and methodology to tackle this. With a database and country profiles for 160 countries, this cross-country measure of discriminatory social institutions has allowed for detailed insights and new research into the relationship between social norms and development outcomes.

By measuring social institutions that discriminate against women, the index reveals the gender gaps created by legislation, practices and attitudes in terms of rights and opportunities.

Discriminatory social institutions include formal and informal laws, social norms and practices that restrict or exclude women, and consequently curtail their

access to rights, justice, resources and empowerment opportunities. A life-cycle approach aims to capture how discriminatory social institutions intersect throughout girls' and women's lives, undermining their agency and ability to make life choices.

Importantly, the SIGI shows that such discrimination and inequalities not only adversely impact girls' and women's lives, they can also hinder positive results for development objectives. Research using SIGI data reveals that gender gaps in social institutions translate into gender gaps in key empowerment areas such as labour force participation and education.<sup>46</sup>

For example, higher levels of discriminatory social institutions are associated with lower economic empowerment opportunities for women. Social expectations that women should be the primary caregivers within the family mean that they tend to have less time to devote to paid activities, explaining some of the existing labour market inequalities.

When gender disparities in time devoted to unpaid care work increase, gender gaps in labour force participation and in wages also tend to be higher. Where women spend twice as much time on unpaid care work as men, they earn 65 per cent of men's wages. Where women's share of unpaid care work increases to five times more than men, their wages decrease to only 40 per cent of men's wages.<sup>47</sup>

Similarly, taking the example of child marriage, SIGI research has shown that in countries where girls are more likely than boys to be married early, they are less likely to complete secondary school.<sup>48</sup>

By restricting women's access to education and labour force participation, discriminatory social institutions adversely impact economies and reduce

potential economic growth. Gender discrimination in social institutions represents a considerable cost of an estimated income loss of \$12 trillion globally – or 16 per cent of global income.<sup>49</sup>

## CAPTURING SOCIAL NORMS AT THE COUNTRY LEVEL

SIGI country studies in Uganda and Burkina Faso are complementing the global evidence, and generating new knowledge and understanding of how social norms have an impact – both positively and negatively – on gender equality and development outcomes. These studies provided an opportunity to carry out tailor-made national questionnaires, with questions for women and men on areas ranging from entrepreneurship to gender-based violence.

This experience at the global and national levels highlights the significance of social norms in development processes, and on how countries and organizations can – and should – integrate a social norms lens into their evaluations, policies and strategies.

The Uganda country study took a participatory approach to ensure that it corresponded with national priorities on gender equality and captured specific forms of discrimination existing in the country. This included national consultations with policymakers, researchers, civil society organizations and development experts; establishment of a technical advisory group; and development of an in-depth background paper by national experts on discriminatory social institutions.

Employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture discriminatory social institutions and fill data gaps, the study included focus group discussions in 28 districts and key informant interviews. This helped fine-tune the design of the quantitative module, added complementary

information to the quantitative survey's findings, and enabled further refinements in identifying how gender inequality issues are perceived in the participating communities.

The Uganda questionnaire included two modules (household and individual) and the survey was conducted across all districts and regions of the country. The sample size of over 3,600 households was designed to allow for estimates at the national, rural-urban and subregional levels. For each household, one man and one woman older than 18 were interviewed – a total of more than 5,700 individuals.

## ENDING EARLY MARRIAGE

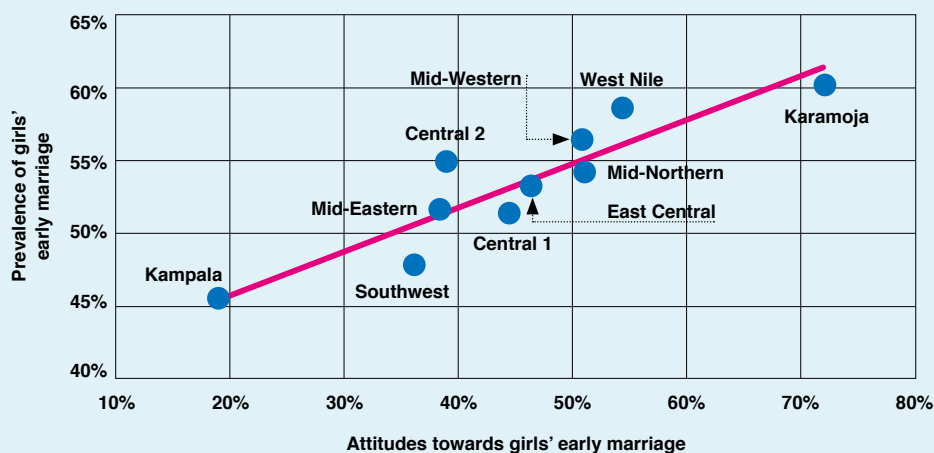
The results bring to the fore how social norms and customary practices affect trends in girls' early marriage. While the campaign to combat early marriage in Uganda has made strong headway due to legal reforms, a focus on changing social norms could accelerate progress in stopping early marriage.

Although the Ugandan Constitution sets the legal marriage age for both girls and boys at 18,<sup>50</sup> the Customary Marriage Act allows exceptions for girls to be married when they are 16 years old.<sup>51</sup> These discrepancies within the legislative framework explain the halting performance on eliminating this discriminatory social institution.

While the proportion of women married by age 15 has declined over time – from 19 per cent among women aged 45–49 to 3 per cent among women aged 15–19<sup>52</sup> – early marriage is still widely practised in Uganda. And the disparities for girls and boys remain high: as of 2011, nearly half of all women aged 20–49 were married by age 18, compared with only 9 per cent of men aged 25–49.<sup>53</sup>

While girls' early marriage rates are lowest in urban areas like Kampala, they are higher in the Mid-Northern, Eastern

## EARLY MARRIAGE RATES ARE HIGHER WHERE IT IS VIEWED MORE POSITIVELY



Source: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Uganda Gender and Institutions Database (Paris: OECD), <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=GID2>

and East-Central regions of Uganda – where two in three women were married before turning 18, and one in three girls were married before age 16. Customary laws and practices that allow for early marriage help explain these variations in prevalence rates across different regions.

Attitudes towards girls' early marriage are also an important factor in prevalence rates. In regions where early marriage for girls is seen as positive, prevalence rates are higher. Again, this affects girls and boys differently: almost 50 per cent of respondents in the SIGI Uganda survey agreed that girls should get married before age 18, but only 15 per cent agreed that boys should marry before age 18. In Karamoja, these figures climb to 72 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively.

Other marriage customs in Uganda also reflect and impact on a girl's status within the family. Bride price is a traditional marriage custom in which the girl's family receives a gift from her future husband and his family. Bride price was considered as a 'common' or 'necessary' practice among 78 per cent and 92 per cent of respondents, respectively.

For most Ugandans, bride price confers to the husband ownership of his future bride (72 per cent) and grants status to a girl (93 per cent). This is particularly true in Karamoja, where almost all the

population agrees with the following statements: "a marriage requires a bride price," "if a man pays a bride price for his wife it means that he owns her" and "a bride price gives status for a girl."

## UNPRECEDENTED OPPORTUNITIES

The SIGI and its social norm approach raise important new questions on how to better advance gender equality, particularly relevant for the vision of social transformation set out in the Global Goals. As the SIGI Uganda results for early marriage show, laws, social norms, attitudes and perceptions form the key parameters that shape a girl's ability to exercise her rights and to enjoy empowerment opportunities.

Although typically seen as too complex to measure, the findings from Uganda indicate that asking new questions on social norms offers unprecedented opportunities to tackle the root causes of inequality and fast-track progress.

Further investments in gender statistics, in particular social norms data, will improve understanding on how discrimination in social institutions intersects and influences outcomes for girls and women. Translating social norms data into effective policy solutions that can counter and transform such barriers will be key to both tracking and supporting the types of change that are central to achieving the 2030 Agenda. ■



## CHAPTER 5

# A CALL TO ACTION



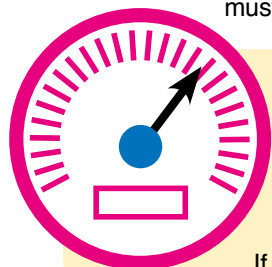
Girls in Guangnan county, China,  
laugh while having lunch at school.  
*Plan International*

As a global community, we must do everything in our power to translate the ambition of the Global Goals into action. Investments and innovations from governments, development partners, civil society and the private sector will be crucial. Measuring and monitoring progress towards the Global Goals will require a major, coordinated effort in the coming years – an effort that is estimated to cost about \$1 billion a year.<sup>54</sup>

True commitment to the implementation of the Global Goals comes with governments translating promises into national priorities and investments – and accepting responsibility to be held to account for progress. Political leaders and civil society must demand the data tools and analysis that

are needed for informed decision making and implementation. Robust and participatory accountability mechanisms must be put in place to demand that governments uphold their obligations at the national, regional and global levels.

As a first step, this partnership maintains that a world in which every girl and woman counts and can be counted is not only possible, it is an essential part of measuring progress. We commit to collating what we do know, assessing what we don't know, and providing useful analysis on how to fill the gaps in what we need to know. We will advocate with donors, United Nations and multilateral organizations, governments, the private sector and civil society, calling on them to:



## Accelerate efforts to fuel a gender data revolution

Efforts to achieve gender equality are hampered by a lack of comprehensive, reliable information about women and girls. If the Global Goals are to be reached by 2030, advancements in our current knowledge

about the lives, well-being and welfare of girls and women are critical. These advancements must include filling gender data gaps and improving current data collection and analysis to provide better information about gender and the barriers that can hold girls and women back.

## Invest in and strengthen national statistical capacities

We already have some of what we need to begin telling the story of girls and women, although information on the experiences of the most excluded is still severely lacking. We know some of what is missing, many of the gaps that need to be filled, and where data exist but are not being analysed or used effectively. As our work begins to fill those gaps, we also need to strengthen, analyse, disaggregate and supplement the rich data that already exist.

Improving gender data will inevitably pose challenges to the statistical community, for a number of technical, legal, capacity and political reasons. But it is imperative to find ways to bolster capacities and overcome those challenges. Only with robust and reliable data will the ambition of the Global Goals to reach the most excluded and leave no one behind be achieved.



## Embrace different types and sources of data collection and analysis

Official indicators can be made far stronger if they are complemented by perceptions-based data, qualitative data and citizen-generated data, as well as data from reliable non-governmental institutions and organizations. All these types of data can be used to stimulate public debate, draw attention to otherwise under-reported issues and provide a fuller picture of reality. Asking people for their perceptions about their own well-being can also lead to more public accountability.

Alternative and complementary research and reports by

civil society, think tanks, foundations and academics are also crucial to ensure a balanced and analytical view of the situation and to complement official national reporting efforts. Alternative reports allow civil society to contribute to global accountability when citizens otherwise have no opportunity to participate in governmental reports, and to highlight issues not raised and/or overlooked by governments.

All of this information will be needed to ensure that we are accurately measuring and responding to the experiences and perceptions of girls and women during the next 15 years.



## Together!

### Use data and evidence to drive action and build a movement.

The best, most complete data set is irrelevant if it is not disseminated and used to inform decision making, investment and action, or if the data and evidence that are used do not accurately reflect the realities of the population. Without increased capacity to ethically produce, access and analyse data in ways that can drive action, transformative change will remain elusive.

It is important to remember that behind each data point there is a life, or a family, or a group of people with stories

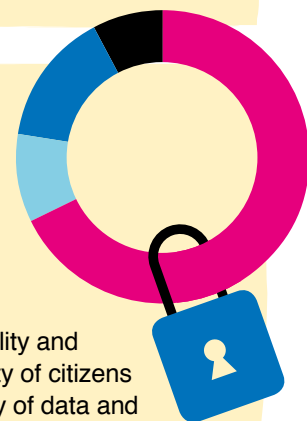
to tell. As data points change, the impact is not just seen on a chart or a graph, but very much felt by the people those points represent.

Data – not just the numbers, but also the stories behind them – can be powerful tools in the hands of advocates for girls' and women's rights. Those advocates need to have the skills to use gender statistics effectively, and national statistical offices need strong capacity to present data in user-friendly and youth-friendly ways. Turning data into knowledge that people can use, and providing opportunities for them to act upon it, will allow them to improve their lives and the world around them.

### Ensure data collection and analysis are safe and ethical.

We know that knowledge is power, and power can be easily abused. When dealing with data – particularly data about some of the world's most vulnerable and excluded people – issues of privacy and public trust are foremost. Keeping all people safe from the damage that can be caused by potential abuses of data is imperative to the success of the gender data revolution, and safety is everyone's responsibility.

For there to be trust and consent, the public must feel confident that all stakeholders can and will fulfil their duties, including creating and enforcing legal frameworks that guarantee data privacy and security, ensuring data quality and independence, and enhancing the ability of citizens to participate in and evaluate the quality of data and to use data to make decisions about their own lives.



### JOIN THE MOVEMENT; THERE IS A ROLE FOR EVERYONE

The gender data revolution for girls and women will be built on collaboration: organizations and experts from various fields and disciplines must come together to share knowledge, information and best practices, identify areas where working together can help solve common problems, and work to fill critical data gaps.

Political will is a fundamental building block. As part of their duty to uphold human rights, governments are responsible for ensuring the capacity exists to produce, analyse and disseminate gender data in a way that does not cause any harm. Donors can support these efforts in a number of ways, not least with financial and technical assistance for capacity building, advocacy and accountability.

Private sector partners can get involved by sharing relevant data with governments and civil society, and by helping to develop innovative ways to gather and organize information – and deliver it to those who need it.

NGOs and civil society organizations can continue to advocate for more and better data, complement official data with citizen-generated data or data gathered by reliable

organizations and institutions, and highlight examples where data have an impact. They can also improve data literacy skills in the communities where they work, share data back to those communities, and ensure their own data-sharing is accountable and based on human rights.

The media has a role to play in covering the issues, assisting people to understand the need for and use of gender data, and helping to fuel and amplify the calls to action and build the knowledge base around girls' and women's equality.

Citizens can participate by actively using and sharing data, seeking opportunities to build their data literacy skills, and holding data collectors and producers accountable.

Ultimately, this is a call to action for all people, in all countries. It is a call for those who produce data to publish it and make it user-friendly, for those who have data to use it in ways that highlight the situation of girls and women, and for those who do not have it to demand it.

We all must play our part to make the invisible visible and make sure every girl and woman counts and can be counted.

## CRITICAL GENDER DATA GAPS IDENTIFIED BY DATA2X

In its work to improve the quality, availability and use of gender data, Data2X has identified some key gaps based on need, population coverage and policy relevance. The following table outlines the 28 identified gaps across five domains: health, education, economic opportunities, political participation and human security.

For more information see <http://data2x.org>

**data2x**  
partnering for a  
gender data revolution

DOMAINS	GENDER DATA GAPS			
	Lacking coverage across countries and/or regular country production	Lacking international standards to allow for comparability	Lacking complexity: Information across domains	Lacking granularity: Detailed data sets allowing for disaggregation
<b>HEALTH</b>				
Maternal morbidity and mortality	●			●
Women's excess disease burdens	●			
Violence against women	●		●	
Mental health	●		●	●
Adolescent health	●		●	●
Utilization of health services by women	●			●
<b>EDUCATION</b>				
Learning outcomes	●	●		
Excluded girls	●	●		
Transition rates	●			
<b>ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES</b>				
Unpaid work	●			
Informal employment	●			
Earnings and opportunity cost of paid work	●	●		
Conditions of migrant workers	●	●		
Employment mobility	●	●		
Entrepreneurship	●			
Asset ownership	●			
Productivity in agriculture	●	●		
Access to financial services	●			
Access to childcare	●	●		
Access to mobile phones and the internet	●	●		
<b>POLITICAL PARTICIPATION</b>				
Representation in local governance, political organizations and the professions	●			
National identity documentation	●			
Voter registration and turnout	●			
<b>HUMAN SECURITY</b>				
Conflict-related mortality and morbidity	●			
Forcibly displaced and migrant profiles	●			
Impact of conflict on gender variables	●			
Conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence	●			
Participation in peace and security processes	●			

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## ABOUT PLAN INTERNATIONAL

Plan International strives to advance children's rights and equality for girls all over the world. We recognize the power and potential of every single child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it is girls who are most affected.

As an independent development and humanitarian organization, we work alongside children, young people, our supporters and partners to tackle the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children.

We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood, and enable children to prepare for and respond to crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge.

Throughout our work, we seek to value girls and end injustice against them so they can realize their rights. Because I Am a Girl is currently our most significant global initiative, a movement propelled by Plan International to ensure that girls everywhere can learn, lead, decide and thrive.

For more than 75 years we have been building powerful partnerships for children, and we are active in over 70 countries.

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