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Gender indicators and sex-disaggregated data

What are gender indicators and sex-disaggregated data and why do we need them?

Sex-disaggregated data is data collected on a specific topic, such as secondary school enrolment rates, disaggregated, or separated, into figures for both girls and boys. A 'gender-responsive', 'gender-sensitive', or just 'gender' indicator measures gender-related changes over time. Gender indicators can refer to 'quantitative' or 'qualitative' indicators based on sex-disaggregated statistical data. 'Quantitative' gender indicators measure numerical changes over time, for instance, the increase in school enrolment of boys versus girls, while 'qualitative' gender indicators measure changes in experiences, attitudes or perceptions, as in women's levels of empowerment or in attitudes towards gender equality¹. The Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) also recommend: "SDG indicators should be disaggregated where relevant by income, sex, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability and geographic location, or other characteristics, in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics."²

The ambitious strategy to address worldwide poverty, the Sustainable Development Agenda for 2030, commits states to meeting the SDGs "for all nations



and for all people and all segments of society" and most importantly, pledges to "leave no-one behind". This means disaggregating data into previously undefined categories, since the collection and analysis of gender data across the SDG indicators is critical for gauging progress on global gender equality. Of particular relevance to the vision and mission for Graduate Women International (GWI) are the indicators for SDGs 4 and 5.

Now is the time to record baselines and make individual activities as measurable as possible, as the world moves into the implementation stage of Agenda 2030. Governments, academia, civil society and business will all need to be actively engaged in tracking progress, ensuring accountability and eliminating gender bias. Every goal must be adequately measured, as each one directly or indirectly touches the lives of all people. Fewer than half of the 231 official indicators across the 17 SDGs have available data at the global level and agreed standards and methodologies³. This must be urgently addressed, because progress for girls and women is not limited to just one goal.

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Issues and impact - *what can data achieve?*



There are 1.1 billion girls in the developing world that are at risk of being left out of progress⁴. The global launching of the SDGs and their accompanying indicators is an opportunity to advance the well-being and empowerment of these vulnerable girls. Accountability for progress during the SDG era will depend on data, yet their availability for two-thirds of the SDG indicators relevant to girls is either limited or non-existent; where data do exist, they are not always utilised or made available in user-friendly formats – ‘open data’.

The lives of girls have improved compared to preceding generations. They are more likely to survive childhood, attend school and complete their education. Yet girls and women everywhere still suffer from persistent discrimination, and disadvantages may be further compounded by location, race, ethnicity, or migration status. Being able to identify the areas

where girls are most disadvantaged will help to even out gender disparities. For example, it has recently been acknowledged that girls spend 50% more time on domestic chores than boys⁵; meaning less time to learn, play and

network. Harvesting of such data could explain why early childhood development rates for boys and girls remains the same, but at lower secondary level these differences start to widen, and discrimination becomes apparent. GWI’s position on the empowering effect of quality education for girls and women is its far-reaching positive impact on the lives of the individual and society. Thus, there is a convincing argument for accelerated progress on SDG 4 - inclusive, quality education for all - to impact on all 17 global goals. There is already a strong link between higher levels of education in girls and an increase in income; each extra year of schooling increases a girls’ earning capacity by 10-20%⁶ (impacting positively on goals 1, 4, 8). Education leads to better nutrition and reduced childhood mortality (goals 2,3,6), it drives sustainable growth (goals 9,11) and educated citizens are more likely to conserve resources and live environmentally responsibly.

Why establishing baselines and monitoring gender data is so critical - achievement of the SDGs will not be possible without reaching all girls⁷

Goal 4 of inclusive, quality education for all will not be achieved if girls remain notably disadvantaged in educational access, completion and learning outcomes in a number of countries.

Goal 5 calling for gender equality and ending all forms of discrimination against girls and women will not be achieved if one in four girls still marry in childhood and the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) continues unabated in some countries.

Goal 16 to promote peaceful and inclusive societies cannot be attained if prevailing gender discrimination and norms in many parts of the world continue to relegate girls to a lower status within society and their own families, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and violence, including trafficking and sexual abuse.

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

- MAYRA BUVINIC, SENIOR FELLOW & RUTH LEVINE, CO-CHAIR, DATA2X

“We can’t close the poverty gap without first closing the data gap”

- MELINDA GATES: CO-FOUNDER, BILL AND MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

Challenges on using and improving *gender indicators and sex-disaggregated data*

With any thorough monitoring and evaluation there is the dimension of cost. For the SDGs, collecting high quality data across such a wide number of indicators will of course be an additional financial consideration, in the order of hundreds of millions of dollars in every country as well as other challenges of capacity to collect, analyse, disseminate and ultimately, to act. Much data does not exist yet: e.g. 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 2014.⁸ Financing of data is an issue that has been recognised at high level - the outcome document of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, adopted at the Third International Conference on Financing for Development⁹ noted that “High-quality disaggregated data is an essential input for smart and transparent decision-making,” and “A focus on quantitative and qualitative data, including open data, and statistical systems and administrations at the national



and subnational level will be especially important in order to strengthen domestic capacity, transparency and accountability in the global partnership.” The question remains that while the need for gender indicators and sex disaggregated data has been recognised, will resources permit states to honour their commitment? It is also critical that financing for data is not to be diverted away from other essential activities e.g. investment into quality teacher training. However much investment is required, the gains from high quality data will mean better informed policy decisions.

Data gaps have already been identified: E.g. on adolescent fertility, existing data are limited to older adolescents aged 15 and above, missing the population of adolescent girls aged 10-14 years¹⁰; data is missing on the main difficulties faced by girls

on menstrual hygiene¹¹. Data collection needs refining in order to reduce underreporting: to collect certain kinds of data requires training to collect accurate information in an ethical and non-invasive manner. This requires additional time and resources. Often, collecting data may require a level of trust that is hard to build from survey questions, which means investing time to get to know a community. Conversely, girls and women may not wish to divulge sensitive information with a local data collector. Social and cultural awareness is paramount to detect factors of bias - women may be dependent on their male partners, influencing responses. This kind of knowledge elevates data collection to a specialised skill. Gender data needs to be disaggregated by other variables (age, race etc.) to reflect gender dynamics, and must be open and easily accessible for maximum uptake and impact¹².

“To achieve gender equality, we must commit to data equality”

- KATHY CALVIN, CEO UNITED NATIONS FOUNDATION

How GWI members, National Federations and Associations (NFAs) can take action *for more and better gender data*

GWI has integrated a call to action for more and better data in its advocacy messages and encourages members to undertake advocacy on different aspects of this issue. Civil society is a powerful partner in holding states and institutions accountable to their commitment to fair and open gender data. Members of GWI, with an interest in real change taking place in the lives of girls and women, can push for policy change on gender indicators and sex disaggregation of data. Forming consensus on action, and forming coalitions with like-minded rights groups or stakeholders can direct coordinated pressure to bring about positive change by highlighting specific gender data gaps relevant to the local context. Advocates can directly approach key influencers in the media, private sector and multilateral institutions to raise visibility on the significance and the impact of gender Indicators and sex disaggregated data.

For advocacy at high level, a gender-responsive data collection approach needs to be taken in national follow-up and review of the SDGs, using the agreed global indicators. Technical and financial assistance needs to be provided where necessary to systematically design, collect and ensure access to high quality, reliable and timely data.

GWI is fortunate to count gender statistics experts amongst its membership; members from the Australian Federation of Graduate Women (AFGW) have been contributors to the Australian Gender Statistics Advisory Group (GSAG); developing the Gender Indicators product for Australia plus monitoring of the Australian Bureau of Statistics transformation of their survey program occurring over the next five years. Part of GSAG's work in the last two years has been the development of standards for the definition and classification of sex and gender variables in the country's official statistics.

How GWI members can advocate on gender indicators and sex disaggregated data

- Push for states and institutions to use the data, once collected, to inform policy and drive action
- Stress the importance of having all data collection and analysis ethically sourced and used
- Advocate for data to be collected on indigenous or disadvantaged groups including those in remote settings, displaced women and girls and those with disabilities
- Call for data to be open and accessible, for all development implementing and monitoring mechanisms

Members can advocate to call for data collection on specific missing data, 'gender data gaps' that are contextually relevant to women's empowerment and education; e.g.

- Learning outcomes
- Digital literacy
- Asset ownership
- Voter registration and turnout

GWI's Advocacy Toolkits elaborate further on the above concepts and provide background and tips to approaching advocacy. These are available to download from the Member's Corner of the GWI website here: <http://www.graduatwomen.org/members-login/tools-resources/toolkit/>

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3. United Nations Statistics Division, Provisional Proposed Tiers for Global SDG Indicators (New York: UN, 2016), pp. 17-19.
4. Harnessing the power of data for girls brochure 2016, data.unicef.org
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6. World Bank, Returns to Investment in Education, 2002, siteresources.worldbank.org/EDUCATION/
7. Data2X, Ready to Measure 2015, http://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/Ready-to-Measure_September-2015_WEB_1.pdf
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10. UNICEF | Data and Analytics Section | Division of Data, Research and Policy | 3 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017 | data.unicef.org
11. Ibid.
12. World Economic Forum - Data will only get us so far (2016) <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/data-will-only-get-us-so-far-we-need-it-to-be-open>

"What gets measured gets managed"

- PETER DRUCKER, MANAGEMENT GURU