

# Improve Data & Accountability for Girls and Women

Facts, Solutions, Case Studies, and Calls to Action

## OVERVIEW

Achieving progress for girls and women is dependent upon gender-sensitive, relevant, and accurate data to fuel data-driven advocacy, guide interventions, and hold governments accountable. Armed with evidence, national authorities and development actors can make informed decisions about gender-related legal frameworks, provide inputs into policies and programs, monitor their implementation, and advocate for change. This policy brief explores the critical contributions of data and accountability to gender equality, as well as data and accountability mechanisms and initiatives that have been established to drive progress for girls and women at the national, regional, and global levels.

## SECTION 1: FRAMING THE ISSUE

The data value chain is the process of designing measures for, collecting, analyzing, disseminating, managing, and using data, and all these points require a gender lens. Reliable and timely data can be used by governments and organizations to identify citizens' needs, make informed decisions about policies and programs, monitor their implementation, allocate resources efficiently, and fuel accountability efforts<sup>1,2</sup> Accountability—a process that allows governmental and other stakeholders to assess progress, identify problems, and take corrective action where necessary<sup>3,4</sup>—ensures that these same actors are held responsible for the commitments they have made as part of their national and international development agendas. Many issues that are under-studied from a gender perspective—or even entirely omitted from the official SDG framework—are nonetheless critical to gender equality as well as to the achievement of specific SDGs and targets. With input from actors across sectors, data provide critical information people can use to drive and monitor progress toward the SDGs and gender equality.

However, timely and relevant data are often lacking, or they are not disaggregated to assess inequities such as access to social services, or to identify underserved communities such as indigenous groups; people living with disabilities; refugees; people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC); rural communities; and people living in informal slum settlements.<sup>5</sup> There is a paucity of data on issues that are particularly relevant to girls and women, such as property ownership, economic empowerment, and other social determinants of health, wellbeing, and empowerment. For example, only slightly more than half of all countries report data on intimate partner violence, and the quality of these data are often inconsistent and mismanaged.<sup>6</sup> Data related to sexual and reproductive health (SRH) of the most marginalized—young girls ages 10 to 14 years old, unmarried girls and women, SOGIESC populations, people with disabilities, and people engaged in sex work—are also lacking.<sup>7,8</sup> These issues are exacerbated in humanitarian crises, such as a conflict or natural disaster, where populations are displaced either internally or across borders, and access to information, social services, and essential needs is limited.<sup>9</sup>

Some of the challenges related to the lack of gender data emanate from the fact that many countries do not have robust national statistical or information systems to collect or track critical statistics.<sup>10</sup> No data is available for about two-thirds of the 232 SDG indicators.<sup>11</sup> Only 12, or 22 percent, of the 54 gender-specific indicators in the SDGs have data that is regularly produced and can be used to monitor progress.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, six of the 17 goals do not have gender-specific indicators.<sup>13</sup> Statistical capacity remains low, with more than 100 low- and middle-income countries lacking adequate civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, sufficient funding is not allocated to gender statistics, with merely 13% of countries having a gender statistics budget.<sup>15,16</sup> A 2018 Gender Advocates Survey of more than 600 gender advocates from 48 countries found that 91% of gender equality advocates in the global survey thought that “collecting data on issues that affect women and girls isn't prioritized” by governments, even though 89% of advocates agreed that achieving the SDGs for girls and women will not be possible without the right data.<sup>17</sup>

Where gender disaggregated data do exist, they are not always made available to or used by government departments and civil society organizations (CSOs) to drive accountability efforts, programming, and influencing. This is a critical gap in capacity and political will that can undermine the efficacy of accountability processes. Accessible and available data can increase citizen participation and improve governance. Processes that help ensure accountability between a government and its citizens can be both formal (e.g., independent ombudsmen, human rights mechanisms) and informal, often citizen-led social accountability (e.g., citizen scorecards, budget monitoring).

A number of global accountability mechanisms and initiatives have been established to drive progress on data and accountability generally, and more specifically when it comes to issues affecting children, adolescents, and women. They include the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) and the related presentation of the countries' voluntary national reviews (VNRs); the Universal Periodic Review; the

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**Meeting the demand to improve data and accountability to achieve progress for girls and women is linked to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and targets, including:**

**SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere**

- **1.4** By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance
- **1.b** Create sound policy frameworks at the national, regional, and international levels, based on pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies, to support accelerated investment in poverty eradication actions

**SDG 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture**

- **2.3** By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment



Independent Accountability Panel (IAP); Equal Measures 2030 (EM2030); Data2X; Making Every Woman and Girl Count; Countdown to 2030; the UN System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality (UN-SWAP); national audits of gender equality; the SDGs; and others. Many initiatives to create accountability mechanisms in humanitarian settings also exist, including the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance; Humanitarian Accountability Project; the Agenda for Humanity, the Sphere Project; People in Aid; and the rollout of the Core Humanitarian Standard.<sup>18</sup>

Launched by UN Women in 2012 and updated in 2018, the UN-SWAP on Gender Equality is an accountability framework to mainstream gender equality and empower women.<sup>19</sup> The UN-SWAP 2.0 assigns common performance standards for the gender-related work of all UN entities, ensuring greater coherence and accountability across 17 performance indicators.<sup>20</sup> It establishes a common understanding of gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as monitors activities and outcomes for gender-related SDG results.<sup>21</sup> This innovative approach has triggered shifts in how the UN system approaches work related to gender equality and women's empowerment. Consequently, it has served as an inspiration for other theme areas, including the UN Youth SWAP.<sup>22</sup>

Countdown to 2030, a global, multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional collaboration of academics, governments, international agencies, healthcare professional associations, donors, and CSOs, has been tracking progress on maternal, newborn, and child survival for more than a decade.<sup>23</sup> It focuses on monitoring and reporting coverage levels of effective interventions and health system functionality, as well as health policies, financing, and equity. Using country report cards, Countdown to 2030 has tracked progress in the 81 countries where the vast majority of maternal, newborn, and child deaths occur. Its reports provide a mechanism to promote accountability from governments and development partners, highlight evidence and knowledge gaps, share evidence-based interventions, and propose actions to reduce child mortality and improve maternal health.<sup>24</sup>

Following the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Secretary-General established the Every Woman Every Child's Independent Accountability Panel.<sup>25</sup> The IAP is charged with evaluating progress on the Every Woman Every Child's Global Strategy on Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health 2016-2030 to help further the SDGs. IAP's work is rooted in human rights principles and centers on fostering an enabling environment for accountability processes—monitor, review, act, and remedy—as it relates to the implementation of the Global Strategy. The IAP aims to engage various stakeholders in the accountability process and ensure commitments to marginalized populations are met. To this end, the IAP 2017 report focused on accountability to adolescents,<sup>26</sup> and the 2018 report focused on driving accountability in the private sector.<sup>27</sup> IAP has also advocated for accountability mechanisms for universal health coverage, and submitted a statement to the UN High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage during the 2019 UN General Assembly.<sup>28</sup>

As part of the follow-up and review mechanism of the SDG agenda, member states are encouraged to submit voluntary national reviews at the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. VNRs highlight successes, challenges, and lessons learned regarding the implementation of the SDG agenda by including the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. The information is used as an accountability mechanism, helping monitor progress and identify areas where countries need further support. To date, 212 voluntary reviews have been submitted.<sup>29</sup> In 2019, 47 countries conducted voluntary national reviews, with seven countries submitting for the second time.<sup>30</sup> However, voluntary national reviews could benefit from stronger guidance regarding gender across the SDGs. An analysis by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) noted that during the 2018 VNRs, equity and gender-responsive evidence was a blind spot. In particular, many countries failed to address the full set of targets and indicators related to gender, and few countries managed to show progress for girls and women despite stating that gender equality is a priority and establishing institutional structures to reach gender-related goals.<sup>31</sup> Stronger evaluation of country efforts mentioned in VNRs is necessary moving forward to better assess progress made towards improving the lives of girls and women.

Equal Measures 2030, an independent civil society and private sector-led partnership, launched the EM2030 SDG Gender Index in June 2019, providing a comprehensive gender lens across 51 issues in the SDGs for 129 countries or 95% of the world's girls and women.<sup>32</sup> Its Gender Advocates Data Hub provides data, stories, training, and resources to gender equality advocates globally to better support their access to and understanding of gender-related data for the SDGs.<sup>33</sup> Equipped with this data, advocates can monitor progress for girls and women across the SDGs in their own countries and use this information to hold their governments accountable to their commitments.

## SECTION 2: SOLUTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS

In addition to governmental and international organizations' efforts to improve data and accountability, a number of civil society-led strategies have proven effective in holding governments accountable to commitments they have made at regional, national, and global levels. As "watchdogs" of society, a knowledgeable and empowered civil society can hold governments accountable to keeping their promises to girls and women.<sup>34</sup> Civil society groups are the link between the public and government policies. Their independence from governments allows them to represent communities and amplify the voices of citizens, families, and communities, and ensure that policies and budgets reflect their needs.

Civil society groups and organizations have employed the following approaches to ensure that governments and other stakeholders have the data they need to drive progress for girls and women and fulfill their commitments:



### SDG 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages

- **3.1** By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births

### SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

- **4.3** By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

### SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

- **5.5** Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life
- **5.a** Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws
- **5.c** Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels



- Strengthen national statistical systems to improve the collection of gender statistics.
- Leverage big data to close gender data gaps.
- Employ strategic litigation leveraging international human rights agreements as a tool for accountability.
- Utilize social accountability efforts to identify and address needs.
- Hold “duty-bearers” accountable through gender-responsive auditing and budgeting.

### Strengthen National Statistical Systems to Improve the Collection of Gender Statistics

Strong civil registration and vital statistics are at the core of well-functioning national statistical systems. They play an important role in spotlighting gender inequalities in birth, marriage, and death statistics and provide vital information for targeting essential social services, such as health and education.<sup>35</sup> However, many countries’ national statistical systems lack the capacity or funding to meet the increased demand for gender-related and disaggregated data driven by the “leave no one behind” movement, which focuses on multiple disaggregations for SDG indicators. Based on data from 161 countries, UNICEF estimates that 27% of children under the age of 5 are not registered at birth.<sup>36, 37</sup> Furthermore, two-thirds of all annual deaths are not registered.<sup>38</sup> The lack of data on cause of death by gender is a barrier to the allocation of resources toward projects that can help decrease preventable causes of death for women.<sup>39</sup> Barriers to establishing functioning CRVS systems include lack of awareness regarding the importance of registration, discriminatory laws and attitudes that impede registration, confusion, issues with data entry, and uncoordinated data collection systems.<sup>40</sup>

There are multiple efforts to improve the collection and use of gender statistics. In 2013, the UN Statistical Commission agreed on the Minimum Set of Gender Indicators as a guide for “national production and international compilation of gender statistics.”<sup>41</sup> It is a collection of 52 quantitative indicators and 11 qualitative (legal or policy) indicators covering a wide range of gender equality issues included in several SDGs and national norms and laws on gender equality.<sup>42</sup>

There are also numerous efforts to prioritize gender data. For example, the UN Women flagship program, Making Every Woman and Girl Count, focuses on how gender statistics are used, created, and promoted at the global, regional, and national levels.<sup>43</sup> The program provides technical and financial support to countries to improve the production and use of gender statistics to monitor the SDGs.<sup>44</sup> The Ready to Measure (R2M) study by Open Data Watch and Data2X, first produced in 2015, aims to improve the knowledge and availability of gender data by identifying what data for gender-related SDG indicators are currently available and the key instruments used to collect them.<sup>45</sup> It presents 20 indicators (16 identical to or closely related to the official SDG indicators and four complementary indicators) that are currently ready to report across several goals.<sup>46</sup> The purpose of the R2M database is to provide readily accessible information about the R2M study, highlight gender data gaps, and amplify the need to fill existing gaps.<sup>47</sup>

#### Case Study: Integrating Gender Into Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems<sup>48</sup>

*The Center of Excellence for CRVS Systems, with support from the United Nations Population Fund, is conducting a pilot project across Burkina Faso, Jordan, and Morocco to create gender-sensitive CRVS systems. To do so, the project will use a new questionnaire throughout 120 population censuses to be conducted in the 2019-2024 period. The project will also train young people to become population data scientists. While still in its implementation phase, the project will collect data on the social and economic consequences of non-registration of vital events for women and evaluate the impact of using new technologies to increase registrations.*

### Leverage Big Data to Close Gender Data Gaps

Big data holds the potential to fill many existing gender data gaps. The term “big data” refers to large amounts of data collected passively from digital interactions.<sup>49</sup> The wide variety of digital interactions, including geospatial, social media, and cell phone records, allows for data to be captured in a timely manner and improves the statistical data available on girls and women.<sup>50</sup> In particular, use of big data, collected with innovative tools from varied sources, can provide the much-needed information on girls’ and women’s status in humanitarian settings, where collecting data is harder in part due to increased movement and lack of infrastructure and resources.<sup>51</sup> UN Member States can benefit from using big data in their voluntary national reviews to better monitor their progress toward the SDGs and understand the status of girls’ and women’s health and wellbeing in their countries.<sup>52</sup> However, privacy concerns, the gaps in girls’ and women’s access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), and data ownership are a few of the many challenges that must be addressed in order to use big data to its full potential.<sup>53</sup>

Multiple data collection initiatives have been created to address information gaps and facilitate and assess progress toward Agenda 2030, especially in countries where comprehensive data are unavailable. The Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data is committed to supporting stakeholders across countries to harness data through the design of data roadmaps.<sup>54</sup> These roadmaps are intended to improve data ecosystems, better disaggregate data, and utilize innovative approaches—such as Earth observation and satellite technology—to help identify interventions and solutions to achieve the SDGs.<sup>55</sup> The United Nations, for example, launched Global Pulse in 2009 to harness data for sustainable development and humanitarian action.<sup>56</sup> Using big data, the initiative continues to forge public-private partnerships for data sharing, produce high-impact analytical resources and approaches, and promote the adoption of useful innovations across the UN System.<sup>57</sup> Because the private sector owns a large portion of big data, innovative public-private partnerships are necessary to harness the power of big data for social change.



### SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

- **10.2** By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic or other status
- **10.3** Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies, and action in this regard
- **10.4** Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage, and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality

### SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels

- **16.3** Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all
- **16.6** Develop effective, accountable, and transparent institutions at all levels
- **16.10** Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements
- **16.b** Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development



### Case Study: Using Big Data to Understand the Lived Realities of Girls and Women

In 2019, Data2X launched the Big Data and Gender Brief Series, which summarizes the main findings of 10 projects funded through its Big Data and Gender Challenge competition.<sup>58</sup> One study, which used mobile phone records in Chile to examine the gendered aspects of mobility, found that women travel to fewer locations than men and their radius of movement is shorter.<sup>59</sup> Low socioeconomic status further impacts mobility, and women with larger households had a greater mobility gap. These findings can be used to design gender-inclusive urban transport systems.<sup>60</sup> Another project used geospatial data from Google Maps to assess how safety concerns and street harassment affect women's educational choices in New Delhi. It found that women chose to attend lower-quality colleges in order to travel by a route that offered increased safety.<sup>61</sup> These findings show that addressing safety during travel can have a major impact on reducing gender gaps in education. Similarly, UN Women launched the Gender Equality and Big Data report in 2018, highlighting 15 big data innovation projects related to gender and the SDGs, including their risks, benefits, and policy implications.<sup>62</sup>

### Employ Strategic Litigation Leveraging International Human Rights Agreements as a Tool for Accountability

Human rights are essential entitlements due to all people and recognized by governments in national legislation, and international agreements and declarations. A rights-based approach involves integrating human rights norms and frameworks within policies and programs—from conceptualization to evaluation.<sup>63</sup> The rights-based approach builds upon existing international human rights declarations, prioritizes the health and wellbeing of individuals, and acknowledges the central role of gender equity.<sup>64</sup>

A range of international agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)<sup>65</sup> and Convention on the Rights of the Child,<sup>66</sup> as well as regional agreements such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights and the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) adopted by the African Union,<sup>67</sup> specifically address rights related to girls and women. By signing on to these agreements and declarations, countries commit to respecting, protecting, and fulfilling these rights. Countries around the world have included human rights language in national laws and policies. South Africa, Kenya, and Ecuador, for example, incorporate the health, rights, and wellbeing of girls and women into their constitutions.<sup>68</sup> Countries may also have national human rights institutions that address social issues such as women's and children's health, which can serve as a platform for promoting accountability.<sup>69</sup>

Civil society actors can utilize a range of mechanisms to ensure that duty-bearers—governments and aid organizations—are held accountable for guaranteeing the right to health for all citizens. Non-judicial (e.g., health facility complaint procedures, maternal death reviews, the United Nations' Universal Periodic Reviews), quasi-judicial (e.g., health tribunals, optional protocols), and judicial (e.g., local courts, civil tribunals) mechanisms can operate at the community, regional, national, or global level.<sup>70</sup>

### Case Study: Using International Legal Mechanisms to Address Girls' Rights in Mali<sup>71</sup>

In May 2018, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights issued a landmark judgment in the case *Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA) and the Association pour le Progrès et la Défense des Droits des Femmes (APDF) v. the Republic of Mali*, finding for the first time in its history a legal violation of the Maputo Protocol. The civil society organizations filed the case, arguing that the Malian family code adopted in 2011 violated the Maputo Protocol in regard to provisions concerning the minimum age of marriage for girls, forced marriage, the right to inheritance, and traditional practices that undermine the rights of women and children. The court agreed, finding the new family code provisions to be blatant violations of the state's obligations under international law and ruling that the state should modify the legislation.

### Utilize Social Accountability Efforts to Identify and Address Needs

Social accountability encourages citizens—including girls, women, communities, the media, and others—to use their voices to hold public officials and service providers accountable during the development process, as well as to improve the quality and accessibility of public services.<sup>72</sup> Social accountability efforts can focus at the micro-level (e.g., by monitoring health services at facilities) or at the macro-level (e.g., by supporting civil society participation in policy and program design, resource allocation, and tracking commitments).

Social accountability employs a range of tools and tactics—including community report cards, social audits, citizen charters, and citizen committees—to help communities monitor and provide feedback on government services and spending.<sup>73</sup> Citizen report cards, for example, provide a mechanism for users/clients to provide information on the type of care they received,<sup>74</sup> while social audits ensure that community voices and perspectives are integrated within the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of health services through participatory approaches.<sup>75,76</sup> In humanitarian settings in Lebanon, for example, approaches have leveraged the voices of affected populations to assess water and sanitation needs to develop and implement water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) projects.<sup>77</sup> The Core Humanitarian Standard, a set of nine commitments and quality criteria, places communities at the center of aid efforts by ensuring a humanitarian response is based on communication, participation, and feedback from the population affected by a crisis.<sup>78</sup>

Experiences from countries around the world indicate that social accountability strategies have contributed to improvements in health services and in strengthening accountability at the local level in particular.<sup>79</sup>

### Case Study: Strengthening Health Systems Through Social Accountability in Indonesia<sup>80</sup>

The Citizen Voice and Action for Government Accountability and Improved Services: Maternal, Newborn, Child Health, and Nutrition Services project was implemented by the Global Partnership for Social Accountability and Wahana Visi from 2013 to 2018 in Indonesia. It found that participation of citizens led to an increased awareness of rights for patients and the reallocation of resources and staff in order to provide services that meet adequate standards. The project provided transparent platforms for collective opinion, which served to empower women and ensure different voices were heard throughout the decision-making process. Through the use of scorecards and social audits, the percentage of respondents who said that services were good or very good almost doubled throughout the course of project implementation.

### Hold "Duty-Bearers" Accountable Through Gender-Responsive Auditing and Budgeting

Gender auditing is the process of reviewing the institutionalization of gender equality across an organization, including in its policies, programs, projects, services, and budget. Having clear gender-auditing mechanisms, either driven by internal organizational practices or by external accountability efforts, ensures there is no blatant discrimination within the organization, helps identify and understand gender patterns, and helps assess the impact of organizational efforts on gender equality. Performance audits can identify weaknesses in government programs and services—in terms of their economy, efficiency, and effectiveness—and give recommendations for improvements.



Gender auditing should be combined with specific gender-responsive budgeting practices. How governments choose to spend their money has an enormous impact on citizens' lives. Civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations can influence these decisions by engaging their governments on financial resource allocation. Transparency in this process is critical. Without it, governments may channel funds inappropriately, leaving room for corruption.<sup>81</sup> Many government taxes and expenditures are not gender neutral. Fiscal openness and budget monitoring allow citizen groups to monitor financial allocations to improve effective budgeting and transparency of financial reporting at the national and sub-national levels.<sup>82</sup> By compiling data on the needs and priorities of the public through their links to citizens and communities, and by taking action to help shape how budgets are developed and spent, civil society groups can hold governments accountable across sectors.<sup>83</sup> In the humanitarian sector, there are multiple aid-flow tracking initiatives. For example, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) gender equality policy marker is a qualitative statistical tool created by the OECD that tracks whether an aid activity targets gender equality.<sup>84</sup>

#### **Case Study: Gender Auditing in Canada**

*The Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is Canada's analytical tool designed to assess government policies, programs, and legislation through an intersectional lens, considering gender, age, religion, ethnicity, disability, and other identity factors. Using this tool has allowed the government of Canada to assess the impact of laws on diverse groups of people, as well as their changing realities and inequalities. The 2015 audit of the gender-based analysis in Canada noted that more efforts were needed to ensure GBA+ was formally implemented across federal departments.<sup>85</sup> In response, the Status of Women Canada, the Privy Council Office, and the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat committed to working together to achieve this goal. In 2017, the Canadian Armed Forces declared a strong commitment to diversity and gender equality across its defense policies and started using GBA+ throughout its programs and services for personnel, as well as in the planning and execution of operations to improve effectiveness.<sup>86</sup>*

#### **Case Study: Global Guidance for Auditors to Drive Accountability<sup>87</sup>**

*In August 2017, the Canadian Audit and Accountability Foundation, in partnership with Women Deliver and the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), developed and launched guidance for national government performance auditors—known as supreme audit institutions—to provide independent, fact-based, and objective information, enabling them to hold governments accountable. The Practice Guide to Auditing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: Gender Equality helps auditors understand gender equality and its place in the 2030 Agenda, and plan either an audit focused on SDG 5—gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment—or an audit that examines gender equality within other SDGs, such as poverty, hunger, health, and education.*

#### **Case Study: South Africa to Ensure Funding for HIV and AIDS Treatment**

*During the late 1990s, the South African government did not support the introduction of drug-based prevention and HIV/AIDS treatment regimens due to their high costs.<sup>88</sup> The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), an advocacy group run by people living with HIV and AIDS, used different strategies to convince the government to change its position. Utilizing a combination of budget monitoring, litigation, and mobilization—sometimes simultaneously—TAC was able to convince the government to introduce a national program for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV through access to a short course of AZT (an antiretroviral drug). TAC subsequently worked with scientists and researchers to develop plans and policy proposals for a national antiretroviral (ARV) program. In 2003, a national ARV program was approved by the cabinet, and in 2007 the government committed to spending \$6 billion on HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment between 2007 and 2012. This plan allowed for 1.6 million people to receive ARV treatment by 2011.<sup>89</sup>*

### **SECTION 3: THE BENEFITS OF INVESTMENT**

Dependable statistics portray the reality of everyday lives, including critical information on underserved populations and unmet needs. Evidence is the foundation upon which governments and partners develop effective policies and programs, enabling them to target resources where they are most needed. As such, reliable, disaggregated data is critical to ensuring good governance, fair allocation of resources, and accountability, providing the means to manage effective service delivery, track progress, and assess the impact of policies and programs.

Yet those countries that stand to gain the most from more and better data in general—and disaggregated data specifically—are often the least able to gather it.<sup>90</sup> Many developing countries still lack the ability to produce, analyze, and translate findings and statistics into effective development outcomes.<sup>91</sup> Consequently, policy may not reflect the needs of society. Strong statistical systems are needed to ensure the efficient and effective use of capital for development spending, particularly in countries where resources are scarce.<sup>92</sup>

Data are crucial to supporting civil society advocacy strategies, pushing for political and social change, and solving complex problems, including health, education, infrastructure, and employment. Strengthening CRVS systems, for example, can reduce child marriage rates<sup>93</sup> and improve school enrollment, access to financial services, and participation in politics,<sup>94</sup> as it provides girls and women with the documentation needed to exercise and protect their rights. Research shows that investing in data collection systems can add great economic value. While the benefits are often country and context specific, one study does point to the massive potential return of investing in data. In 2013, the McKinsey Global Institute estimated that more open data can generate more than \$3 trillion of economic value per year across seven sectors.<sup>95</sup>

Investing in data collection reaps significant returns, enabling countries to get the most out of their allocated resources. And adopting a gender perspective to information gathering helps countries accelerate progress toward gender equality through policy change, a goal that cannot be achieved without the backing of sound data, evaluation, and accountability mechanisms. Introducing gender indicators and gender auditing has the added advantage of capturing qualitative changes, such as levels of female empowerment or changes in societal attitudes toward the rights of girls and women.

When girls and women move closer to gender equality, they move closer to realizing their full potential, which boosts their ability to participate within the formal economy, break the cycle of poverty, and improve the wellbeing of their families and communities.

### **SECTION 4: CALLS TO ACTION**

In order to improve data and accountability to measure progress for girls and women, governments need to strengthen civil registration and vital statistics systems, including by gathering and using disaggregated data, as well as by establishing national accountability mechanisms that are transparent and inclusive, and providing opportunities for review and action.<sup>96</sup> Civil society actors should play a key role in these national accountability processes and mechanisms. For their part, funders and multilateral organizations need to support national statistical



systems and capacity, as well as the role of civil society, by investing in capacity building. This will make them better equipped to hold governments accountable and promote the collection of disaggregated data by gender, age group, income, and geographic location to encourage the allocation of resources and services for underserved and hard-to-reach populations.

In order to power progress for all, different constituents must work together—governments, civil society, academia, media, affected populations, the United Nations, and the private sector—to take the following actions for girls and women:

- Make gender-based analysis, budgeting, and auditing mandatory. (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, the United Nations, and the private sector)
- Ensure that all policies, plans, data, budgets, and audits related to the implementation of the SDGs and other strategies are publicly available, transparent, and accessible to non-technical audiences. (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, the United Nations, and the private sector)
- Ensure there is adequate public financing for core national statistics systems to enable SDG monitoring. (Most relevant for: governments, the United Nations, and the private sector)
- Invest in the collection of data disaggregated by gender, age, race, ethnicity, migration status, disability, income, geography, and other characteristics relevant to national contexts in order to strengthen policymaking, programming, and accountability for all and to leave no one behind. (Most relevant for: civil society, governments, and the private sector)
- Invest in gender expertise and capacity within national statistical offices. (Most relevant for: governments)
- Align data collection approaches, national censuses, and internationally supported surveys with best practices, including the Agenda for Humanity, to track the status of the Sustainable Development Goals and indicators. (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, the United Nations, and the private sector)
- Facilitate partnerships between governments, multilateral organizations, civil society, and other stakeholders to share experiences around demands for data collection and to support data collection, data management, and accountability efforts. (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, academia, media, affected populations, the United Nations, and the private sector)
- Perform research and data collection in humanitarian settings, including data disaggregation beyond age and sex, and research proposals on a variety of needed services, such as improving the availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality of sexual and reproductive health services. (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, academia, the United Nations, and the private sector)
- Conduct gender auditing of tax and expenditure policies to identify non-gender-equitable policies. (Most relevant for: governments, the United Nations, and the private sector)
- Monitor the progress of policy commitments and budget allocations at the national and sub-national levels and advocate for adjustments to these policies and budgets as needed. (Most relevant for: governments, civil society, academia, media, affected populations, the United Nations, and the private sector)
- Support global and national advocacy and accountability through a thriving civil society, including the women's movement. (Most relevant for: civil society)
- Boost data literacy across civil society to support uptake and understanding of data ecosystems and how data can be used for influencing. (Most relevant for: civil society, donors, academia, and the private sector)

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*Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this technical paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of all partnering organizations.*

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