

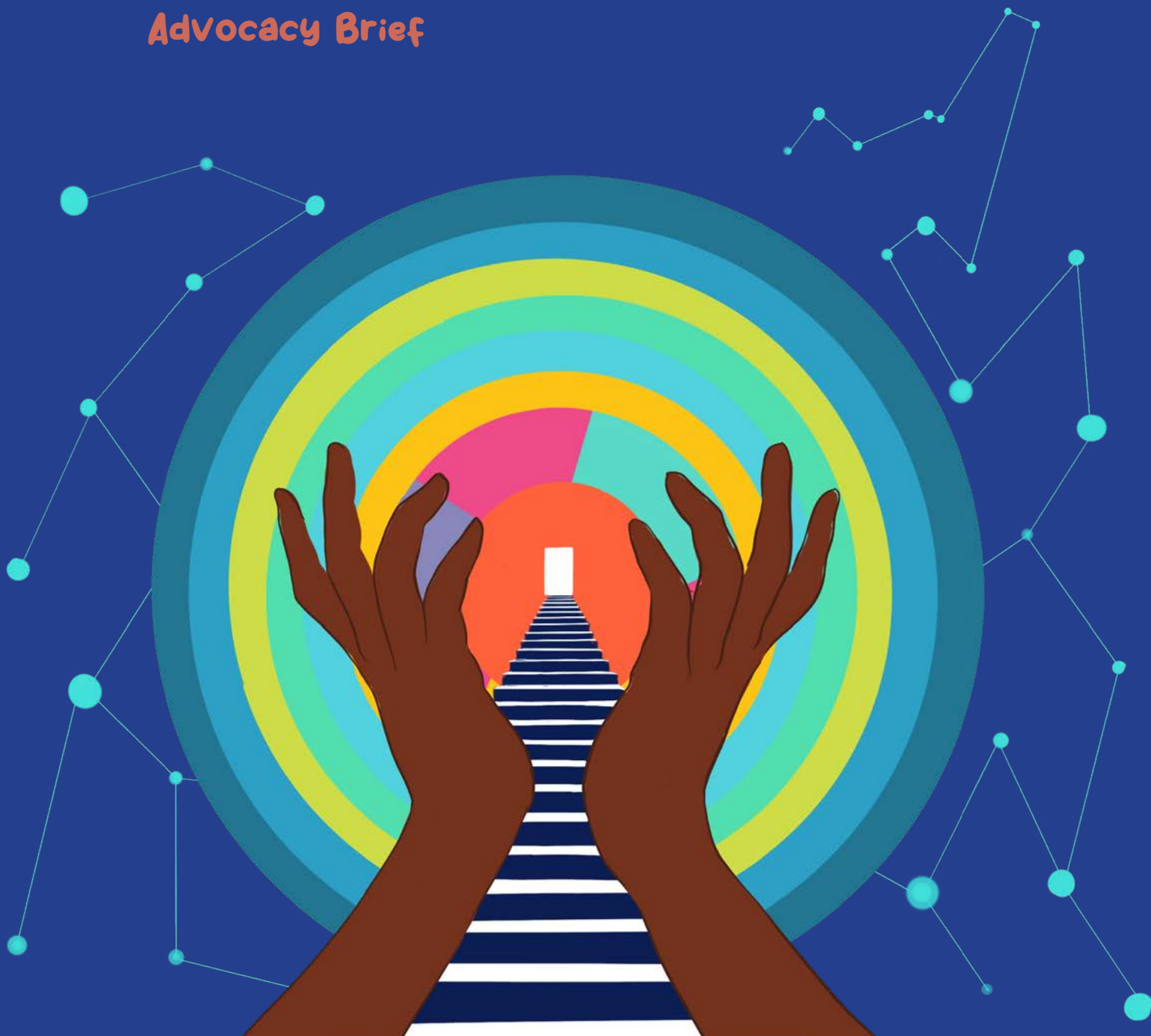
She  
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2030

# Closing gaps, opening doors

Promoting Inclusive Data Collection for Girls' and Young  
Women's Leadership and Participation

Advocacy Brief



## Overview

Enabling girls and young women (GYW) to take on leadership roles in their communities is key to promoting gender equality. To facilitate this leadership, and to monitor whether various approaches are working, we need data and evidence. Although some limited data about women's leadership exist, the information is rarely disaggregated by age or other identity factors, leaving GYW as a specific group who are often invisible in data. The She Leads research set out to explore the data gaps around GYW leadership. The aim was to better understand the current data landscape and to identify key barriers and opportunities to advance progress.

## Key Findings

- **96 per cent** of survey respondents said collecting data on GYW leadership, participation and decision making is important.
- Only half of survey participants (**50.2 per cent**) were aware of the data that exist on GYW leadership.
- **78 per cent** of respondents said it is important to collect GYW data to raise awareness in the community or society around the value of GYW leadership.
- **65 per cent** said data are important to influence policies that aim to increase GYW leadership.

Our research highlights that, at present, there are significant gaps in the data about GYW in leadership. This limits our understanding of the situation and, in turn, the progress that can be made on gender equality for this group. The same barriers that restrict girls' access to leadership and power also impact data collection and production. Just as social norms shape discriminatory practices so that girls are not listened to or allowed to lead, those same discriminatory practices also shape whose experience is considered worthy of being captured in data. Thus, any organization producing data about GYW must ask themselves how they can avoid replicating those barriers and perpetuating the power imbalances that contribute to gender inequality and lack of access to power for GYW. The research findings are explored through three overarching themes:

1. What data are collected?
2. What barriers affect data collection?
3. How are the data used?

## What data are collected?

Data on GYW's lives are limited and incomplete. Where data do exist, they usually address aspects of GYW's health and rights (for example, sexual and reproductive health access, or child and early marriage). GYW's leadership does not feature highly in available data, if at all. Further to that, scant data exist on vulnerable groups, for example girls with disabilities.

In the research, we observe a **gap in perceptions** between what different organizations are actually measuring and what GYW consider to be leadership and participation in decision making. Their ideas have not always reflected the way data producers have decided to categorize information. Where data are available, the majority have focused on political forms of participation. Yet a picture has emerged from this research to show that GYW's perceptions of leadership also encompass **non-political and community-focused leadership** and participation (e.g., advocating for the interests of other GYW or volunteering), as well as decision-making at a personal level (e.g., making informed and autonomous decisions around one's own professional development).

In data collection, GYW are not one category and without **intersectional data** that capture GYW in all their diversity, we cannot achieve an accurate picture of what is happening. In addition to this, **if GYW don't see themselves – including their diverse identities and experiences – reflected in the data, they will not trust that these data represent them.**

## What barriers affect data collection?

The research reveals that the data that do exist on GYW leadership are mainly collected by large organizations, rather than through community-led efforts. It also identifies numerous barriers that prevent data collection on GYW leadership and participation:

1. **Resource and infrastructure barriers** include physical infrastructure challenges in rural areas and accessibility barriers faced by GYW to freely participate in their communities due to social and physical constraints.
2. **Institutional and policy barriers** include insufficient public investments, along with a lack of political will around GYW leadership.
3. **Societal and cultural barriers** include social and cultural norms (e.g., GYW leadership being poorly understood or outright opposed in some contexts), the need to safeguard GYW (e.g., while travelling to participate) and a lack of trust in government by GYW.



"[One barrier is] the fear of community backlash. Even if you want to be involved, or take part, you are always worried about what they will say. That it is not right for a girl to be there." - FGD participant, Jordan



To disrupt power imbalances and harmful gender-based social norms, data producers have the opportunity to find ways for GYW themselves to play a more active role in the research process. GYW can participate by collecting data themselves, or by helping to contextualize and disseminate results. Their knowledge is grounded in an understanding of local culture and contexts, which is valuable in capturing the nuanced insights on GYW. The research concludes that, if the data around GYW leadership improve, GYW's trust in data will improve too. Better data collection approaches and greater use of qualitative methods can address power imbalances and amplify GYW's voices. Research may then align better with GYW's perceptions of what leadership means to them.

"We, the girls, can do the best research on girls and young women because everything begins with us. We have the best access because we are already in our communities or ghettos." - FGD participant, Uganda

## How are the data used?

Another important research finding is the lack of clarity about what happens after data collection. Some surveyed GYW, and organizations that advocate for their interests, indicated that they had participated in data collection activities, but they were unable to access the collected data and were unsure what actions were taken thereafter.

In other cases, when data on GYW were available, the information was already being used by GYW, by organizations that advocate for their interests, and by policymakers and decision makers. The research reveals how GYW make use of data as a tool to influence policies and raise awareness. GYW also identified key areas where data have helped in their programme activities and advocacy work.

"We collect data about girls' and young women's thoughts on topics about teenage pregnancy, leadership and gender quality. We use it to formulate our programmes and projects in a way to bridge the gaps from the information collected for the girls to fully understand their rights and responsibilities in fulfilling these rights." - Young woman from Uganda

However, the study also finds that many GYW and GYW-focused organizations still feel they lack the knowledge and skills to use data effectively in their work and would benefit from capacity strengthening in this area.

## Key messages and recommendations for action

Current data gaps hinder our understanding of GYW leadership and participation. We must disrupt power imbalances and bridge the data divide to empower GYW voices. This requires advocating for inclusive data collection, supporting GYW-focused organizations and demanding evidence-based policymaking.

### To make change happen for GYW, those who collect or process data can:

- **Disrupt power imbalances in data production** by critically reviewing how they define GYW leadership and by asking how these definitions can align better with the perceptions of GYW themselves.
- Use an intersectional approach in data collection by interrogating sampling methods and research methodologies. **Ask whose voices are not captured** in the data; who are we excluding?
- Be **accountable** for the data:
  - » Show how data are used.
  - » Make data accessible to the people who have contributed the information.
  - » Commit to communicating data effectively to maximize impact, and in the languages and formats (digital, visual, etc.) that are accessible to the GYW the data refer to.
  - » Seek out new and innovative ways to **collaborate** in data sharing and to **learning** from data collection.

"So many people come and do surveys and ask the same questions, and then we never hear from them again, so now we don't take it seriously." - FGD participant, Jordan



## Academics and those who produce data (including foundations, and large international and national organizations) can:

- Ensure future research into GYW leadership takes **non-political and community-focused leadership** into consideration. This includes:
  - » GYW leadership **beyond the senior, political level**. Instead, look for GYW experiences at the community level (e.g., advocating for the interests of other GYW or being part of community-level and local committees).
  - » GYW participation through **informal participation** (e.g., community volunteering, supporting family members, working for local organizations).
  - » GYW **volunteering**, which requires particular attention.
  - » GYW making **autonomous and informed decisions** in their lives, such as around their professional development (deemed most important by surveyed GYW), family planning, and their bodies and physical appearance.
- Embrace **feminist research principles** that prioritize participatory, collaborative and co-creation methods to ensure the involvement of GYW in the research process. In turn, this will help address a significant research barrier: the need for more **trust**.
- Seek to utilize all forms of data and enrich quantitative data collection tools by combining qualitative or creative approaches. Invest in more nuanced data collection methods like walking interviews, photovoice and roleplay to generate higher-quality data that more accurately reflect the experiences of GYW.

## Those who fund GYW leadership can:

- Invest in strengthening the data capacity, knowledge and skills of GYW-focused and -led organizations through **sustainable, long-term funding** and **support**. Provide opportunities and **platforms for shared learning spaces** on this subject.
- Create opportunities for **multi-stakeholder** information sharing and collaboration.

## Governments and local, national, regional and international bodies can:

- Focus on the specific **disaggregated category of GYW** – separate and distinct from women and from youth.
- Ensure that it is **GYW who define what leadership means** to them, and **involve GYW** in data collection and production.
- Embrace **GYW-led data production methods** and treat these approaches with equal credence.



**“Together, let’s build a future where every GYW is seen, heard and empowered.”**

### Learn more

Read more findings and insights in the full research report, which can be accessed [here](#)

**She Leads** is a joint programme of Plan International Netherlands, Defence for Children – ECPAT Netherlands (DCI-ECPAT), the African Women’s Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Terre des Hommes Netherlands (TdH-NL) and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), supported by Equal Measures 2030 as a technical partner. She Leads brings together child rights organizations, feminist/women’s rights organizations and groups led by GYW, with the aim to increase the sustained influence of GYW on decision making and the transformation of gender norms in formal and informal institutions. The programme focuses geographically on East Africa (Uganda, Ethiopia, Kenya), West Africa (Ghana, Mali, Sierra Leone, Liberia) and the Middle East (Lebanon, Jordan).

**Equal Measures 2030** is a coalition of national, regional and global leaders from feminist networks, civil society, international development and the private sector working together to connect data and evidence with advocacy and action for gender equality.

Visit our website: [www.equalmeasures2030.org](http://www.equalmeasures2030.org)

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