

She
LEADS

EQUAL
MEASURES
2030

Closing gaps, opening doors

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

Brief for young advocates



I. Introduction

Girls' and young women's (GYW) leadership is about empowering young women to take the lead, make decisions and contribute our unique perspectives within our communities. It recognizes that everyone, regardless of age or gender, has valuable ideas. When GYW lead, communities become fairer and more equal. GYW understand the challenges young people face, and we can ensure everyone's voice is heard.

To understand exactly how GYW are leading – and to address barriers that prevent us from doing so – we need good quality data and evidence. She Leads carried out a research study, **'Closing Gaps, Opening Doors: Promoting Inclusive Data Collection for Girls' and Young Women's Leadership and Participation'**, to improve understanding of data on GYW leadership. It identifies glaring gaps, particularly the absence of age- and gender-disaggregated data, and investigates what causes these gaps and how they can be addressed. With quality data, we can showcase the invaluable impact of GYW in our communities and persuade decision makers to support our initiatives, creating more opportunities to take part in decision making. In a world where young people often face discrimination and struggle to be heard, data can be a powerful amplifier, exposing inequities and making our voices impossible to ignore!

Keywords

Data: Information and facts collected to understand things better.

Disaggregated data: Information separated into groups, like age or gender, so we can see the details more clearly.

Data gaps: Areas where we don't have any or enough information, making it difficult to identify and address a problem.

Data-driven advocacy: Using information to understand an issue and who it affects, and then using this evidence to demand action and change.

Community-driven: When the people who live in a place lead and decide what happens.

Lived experiences: The things that happen to us, what we go through and how we feel about it.

Quantitative data: Information in number form.

Qualitative data: Descriptive information in written form.

Agency: The power and ability to take action and make choices for ourselves.

II. Key findings

When She Leads spoke to GYW and others in the GYW advocacy sector about their experiences engaging with data, they identified a range of challenges as well as opportunities. The research has uncovered important findings about why gaps exist in GYW leadership data, what could be achieved if we had more and better quality data, and the role of various people in improving the data.

What do GYW advocates think?

96 %
of survey respondents said **collecting data was important.**

Only 50.2 %
of survey respondents were **aware of the data that exist on GYW leadership, participation and decision making.**

73%
of survey respondents said **volunteering is the most popular form of leadership they practice in their communities.**

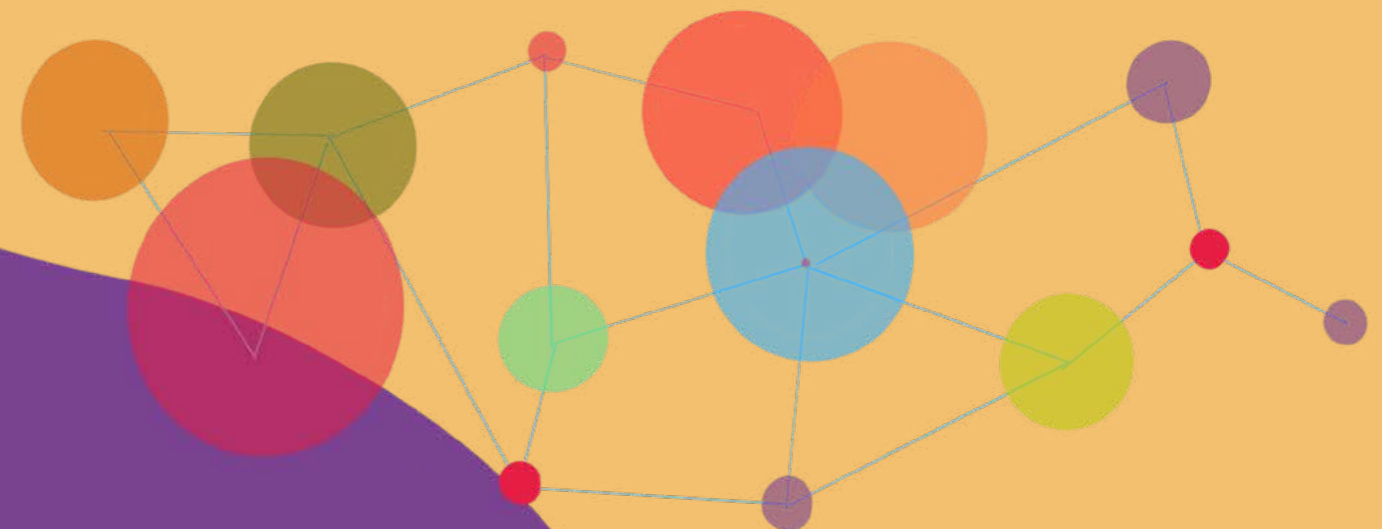
1. What does GYW leadership mean?

'GYW leadership' means different things among those working in the youth advocacy sector. People often don't fully understand how GYW lead because they focus on formal, political forms of leadership (e.g., voting or representation in local/national governments). But GYW leadership is more than that – it includes helping in the community, volunteering in local groups and making decisions about our own lives.

Because GYW leadership isn't understood clearly, it's challenging for data collectors (e.g., government ministries, international organizations, research institutions, national non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society) to know what to measure and where to get this information. Consequently, GYW leadership often goes undocumented.

2. Data gaps and random approaches

Currently, it's difficult to see how GYW are taking the lead because quality information is scarce. Data exist on things like our health and education, but not so much on our leadership and participation. GYW and those who support us often have to use incomplete data from different places, like social media, because there isn't a comprehensive system to collect all this information. Relying on bits and pieces of data makes it hard to grasp the many ways GYW lead and make decisions.



3. Lack of disaggregated and community-driven data

Data are rarely broken down by age, gender, urban/rural location or disability status, etc. This means we can't understand fully how certain problems affect GYW compared to the whole population, or the differences among GYW. Secondly, data are usually collected by large, international organizations, instead of being driven by the communities affected by particular issues. There can be a disconnect between the data collected and the lived experiences of GYW, which often results in GYW and GYW-led organizations having little interest and trust in research.

4. Barriers to data collection

The She Leads study reveals **three main barriers** to collecting data on GYW leadership:

- Resources and infrastructure: Collecting data and participating in research requires transport and internet connectivity, for example. Community and GYW-led organizations often lack these resources, while poor infrastructure (especially in rural areas) makes it hard for GYW to participate.
- Institutions and policies: Not enough government funding is going where it should, and too much emphasis is put on numbers rather than understanding GYW's experiences.
- Societal and cultural barriers: Beliefs and attitudes about gender mean that many people misunderstand – or oppose – GYW leadership.

5. The opportunities from improved data

Yet, amidst these challenges, a beacon of hope emerges. Better data has the potential to drive change for GYW leadership, supporting data-driven advocacy and community engagement. Data collection that focuses on GYW voices and aligns with our perceptions of leadership and participation can tackle power imbalances and improve our agency and trust in the data.

6. Leveraging the potential of GYW

The research revealed an inspiring picture of just how strong the GYW advocacy sector is. With deep understanding of our local contexts, GYW are initiating and participating in research, and we are supporting data collectors. Even though we might not have a lot of resources, GYW-led organizations are ready to plan, do research and collect data. Meanwhile, big organizations that collect valuable data are important in supporting and strengthening the capacity of local organizations and movements.

7. Data-driven advocacy and policymaking in action

Decision makers and policymakers are also key to creating change. They can push for more funding for data collection and better approaches, promote evidence-based policies to improve GYW's lives, and partner with GYW and community-led organizations on data collection efforts.

III. Listening to the voices of girls and young women

1. How are GYW using data?

The evidence shows that data in the hands of GYW and youth-led organizations drives change in powerful and diverse ways, including:

Designing community initiatives

GYW are using data to decide important issues to tackle and to raise community awareness.

Measuring impact

Data help GYW organizations measure their impact and effectiveness.

"We collect data around the impact we create on the ground and how the methods of advocacy are received by GYW. We use the data to analyse our strengths and weaknesses and as a result, get a way forward" - Young woman from Kenya

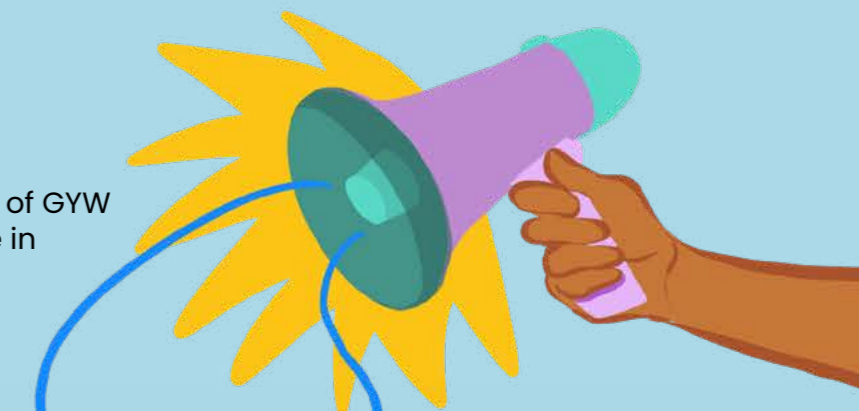
Advocating for change

Equipped with data, GYW-led organizations are gaining visibility and prompting decision makers to act.

2. What is the impact when GYW use data?

GYW collecting and using data can enhance our agency and challenge social attitudes:

"With strong data to advocate for GYW you will see a reduction in domestic violence, improved development in communities, fewer abuse cases, and enough or more women to take leadership positions. Previously GYW were not part of community structures, but because of our data, now most GYW are in key decision-making bodies. You will see more women at the community level, more stakeholders taking it seriously at chieftom meetings, men will change their behaviour." - GYW-led organization, Sierra Leone



"We collect data about GYW'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

"I collected data on the total number of persons with disabilities in two chiefdoms in my district. We presented the data to electoral management bodies and lobbied for the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in the electioneering process" - Young woman from Sierra Leone





3. What are the main challenges GYW face?

Navigating power dynamics

GYW's stories reveal the power dynamics we face in collecting and using data, and issues around trust in data.

Although international funders can provide important opportunities for local GYW organizations, they often end up being the ones who decide what data are collected and how. This means that research doesn't always fit the needs and realities of those collecting the data.

Many GYW shared that they do not trust their governments to collect accurate data that reflects their reality.

"We don't trust government information: we trust NGOs more because they care more about doing it properly. Participation is good and the She Leads project is empowering us to take part in decision making and we appreciate that..."
-youth advocate, Jordan

"time and budget limits placed on collecting data leads to inauthentic data. [The] data collection meant to take a week would be limited to a day, and the budget may not be enough. These shortcuts negatively affect data collection." - GYW-led organization, Uganda

To dismantle power dynamics and advance gender equality, governments need to (re)build trust. They must be more open about how they collect their data and partner with GYW on data collection efforts.

Amplifying GYW voices

The study shows GYW voices need to be amplified in the research process. It is important that GYW actively participate in data collection, ensuring data accurately reflect our experiences.

"GYW should be more engaged which can be done by giving the women the confidence or equal playing field to collect data, change the stereotype, let the women feel part of the system and be inclusive." - GYW-led organization, Sierra Leone

"We, the girls, can do the best research on GYW because everything begins with us. We have the best access because we are already in our communities."
- youth advocate, Uganda

By involving GYW in research design and implementation, the process becomes empowering, fostering leadership and active participation in our communities.

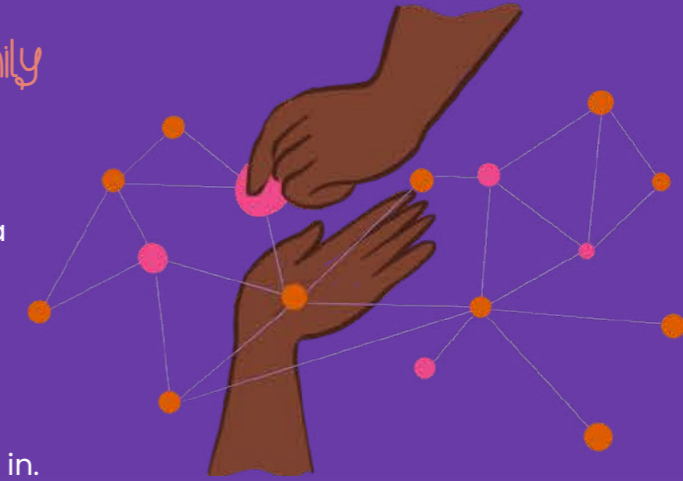


IV. What can I do?

Let's transform insights into action! Below are some steps you, or your organization, can take to improve the quality and accessibility of data on GYW leadership and participation:

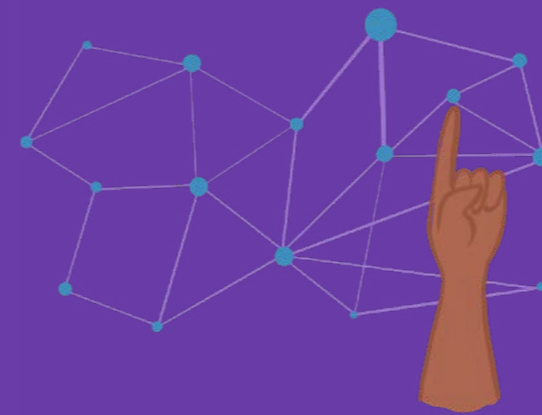
Share these findings with your friends, family and community.

If you are involved in an organization working on GYW issues, use these research findings to start a conversation on how your organization is using data and how data could improve your work.



Strengthen your data skills.

Take a course on data analysis, explore YouTube videos or podcasts on data for gender equality, or explore data sources on the issues you're interested in.



Get involved in data collection efforts.

Keep an eye out for organizations in your community or government-led initiatives that are collecting data on GYW issues and leadership. Have your say and share your experiences by participating in interviews, focus groups or surveys.

Initiate a data collection project.

If you can't find data on a certain issue, explore opportunities for research funding and collect data yourself. If it's your first time, partner with a local organization experienced in data collection and analysis for support.

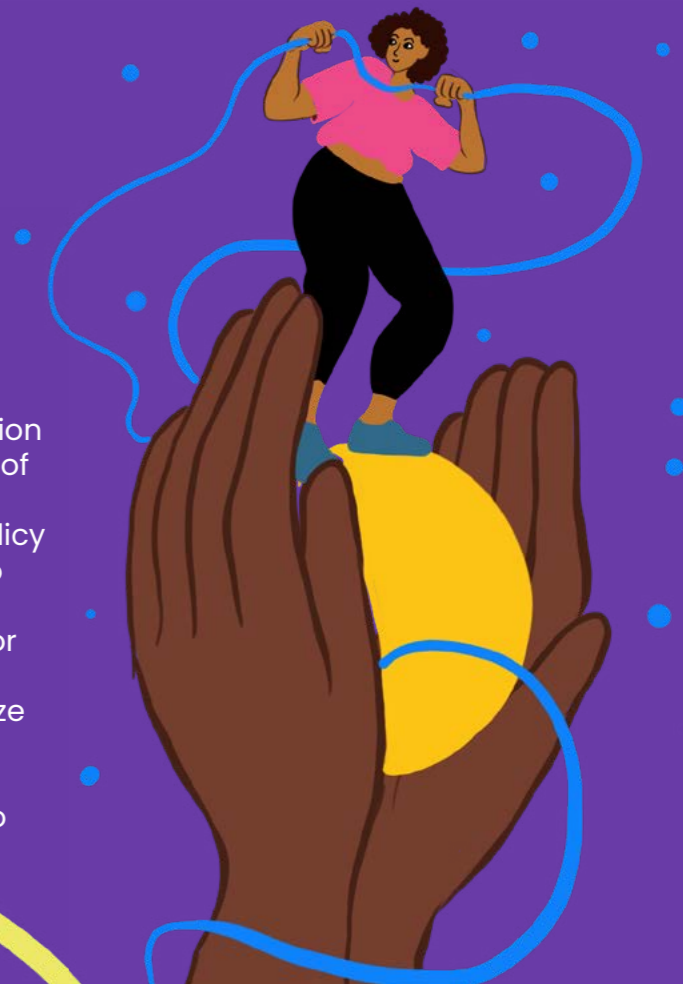
Raise your voice!

Engage with policy and decision makers at the community, national or regional level, using data to show the impact when GYW lead and participate. Demand action to improve data collection on GYW leadership using the recommendations below for different stakeholders.

Recommendations

All stakeholders

- Let GYW lead/co-lead research and data collection on issues that affect us, and recognize the value of our research and data.
- Be transformative in research, programme or policy design, moving from mere youth engagement to GYW leadership and co-ownership.
- Ensure GYW are recognized and compensated for our time and expertise.
- Don't tokenize young people or use us to legitimize processes if we aren't meaningfully involved.
- Support and resource GYW leadership and the spaces we occupy. Address our specific needs to enable true participation.



Decision makers and policymakers

- Provide financial and technical support to GYW-led and GYW-focused organizations.
- Implement gender data studies nationally and locally so policies are created on solid evidence.
- Advocate for dedicated data collection units within relevant ministries focusing on GYW-specific issues.

Data collectors and producers

- Recognize that GYW have a broad view of leadership. Focus on our community-level leadership, informal participation and personal decision-making.
- Involve GYW in all stages of the research process including design, data analysis, and validation.
- Ensure data are disaggregated by age and gender at least, but also explore location, religion, education and disability etc. to understand our diverse experiences.

GYW advocacy organizations

- Strengthen the ability of GYW-led and GYW-focused organizations to collect and interpret data. Encourage partnerships between international and local organizations so they can learn from each other.
- Create spaces to share research findings, ensuring outcomes are communicated clearly and accessibly considering diverse backgrounds of GYW.

V. 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

Writing by Liz Lum

Design and Illustrations by [Vidushi Yadav](#), [Medhavini Yadav](#)

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