

MARCH 2019

Bridging the Gap:

Mapping Gender
Data Availability
in Africa

**KEY FINDINGS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS**

data2x^o



Overview

Bridging the Gap: Mapping Gender Data Availability in Africa contributes to international efforts to understand, identify, and respond to the ongoing challenge of producing policy-relevant data about the lives of women and girls. This work builds upon Data2X's *Mapping Gender Data Gaps* report, published in 2014, which launched efforts to find and test innovative solutions to fill gender data gaps.

In the five years since the *Mapping Gender Data Gaps* report was published, the data landscape has expanded and gender data has received more attention. The indicator framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has increased demand for disaggregated data that can help decision makers and implementers get closer to the impact they are hoping to achieve. This is underpinned by the promise of the 2030 Agenda to “leave no one behind,” which has renewed a focus on groups that are systematically disadvantaged and has pushed the boundaries of global expectations for what data can and should be able to tell us about the lives of women and girls.

Despite the expanding scope and demand for better data, data availability has not kept pace evenly across regions. *Bridging the Gap* is a regional deep dive assessing availability of data about women and girls in 15 countries in sub-Saharan Africa. These 15 countries represent 60 percent of the population of sub-Saharan Africa and a range of income levels.

Through this project, we set out to answer the following questions:

- Which domains of women’s and girls’ lives (health, education, economic opportunities, political participation, human security, environment) do we understand well thanks to existing data, and which domains remain unclear because of a lack of or poor quality data?
- When data exist, where do they come from (sources) and where can they be found in international and national databases? What lessons can we glean from these patterns of availability?
- What can we learn from the 15 countries about the most effective ways to close systemic gender data gaps?

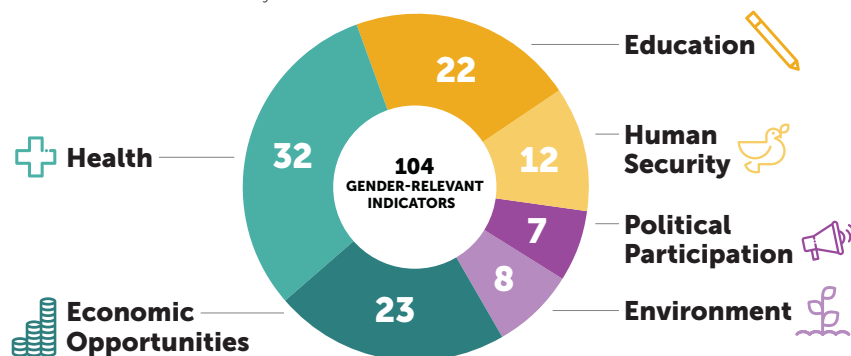
Fig. 1: The 15 sub-Saharan African countries in this study



Approach

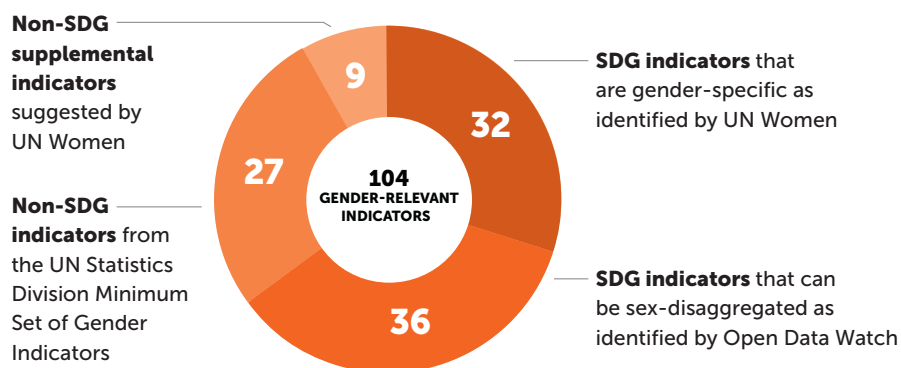
To answer these questions, we assembled a list of 104 gender-relevant indicators covering six domains: economic opportunities, health, education, human security, political participation and the environment.

Fig. 2: Gender-relevant indicators by domain



These indicators include 68 gender-relevant SDG indicators and 36 non-SDG indicators from other international sources. This combination of SDG and non-SDG indicators, if produced regularly and to a high standard, would provide a portion of the information we need to be able to monitor and deliver on current commitments for women and girls. Much more work needs to be done to design methodology for Tier III indicators and other measures.

Fig. 3: Sources of the gender-relevant indicators examined in this study



To understand where the existing data comes from we looked in both international and national databases. We assessed data in four ways:



AVAILABILITY

Availability examined whether the 104 indicators were recorded at all in any form over the period 2010 to 2018.



ADHERENCE TO STANDARDS

Adherence to standards noted whether indicators were being produced according to international standards.



DISAGGREGATION

Disaggregation assessed if the existing indicators were sex-disaggregated and whether they reported against additional disaggregations such as geographic location, age, income level, or disability status.



TIMELINESS

Timeliness checked how recently the indicators had been produced and if they had a history of appearing frequently.

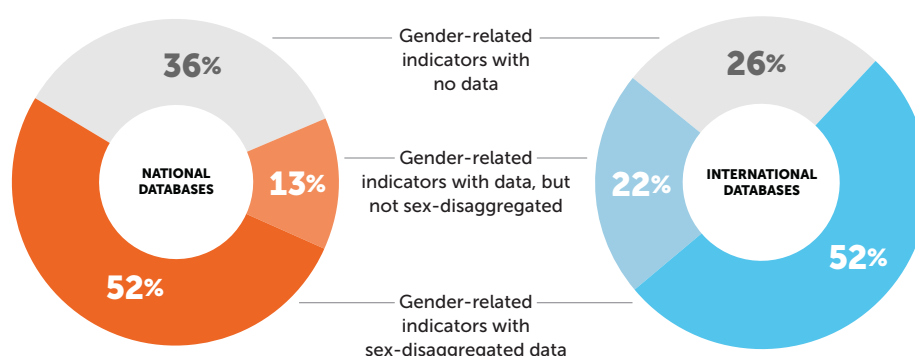
We dug deep into sources of the data by examining their metadata and recording their microdata sources - the specific surveys, censuses, and administrative data sources used for calculating the indicators. This allowed us to establish the trends in data production, learn from the areas where some countries are doing well and assess whether their success is replicable, and pinpoint strategic opportunities to improve gender data collection for these indicators.

Key Findings: Gender indicators in international and national databases



Data exist for 52 percent of the gender indicators in both international and national databases; however, 48 percent lack sex-disaggregation or are missing entirely.

Fig. 4: Gender-relevant indicators available at the national and international level



National databases have a higher proportion of gender indicators with no data than international databases and are more likely to report on indicators that do not exactly conform to international standards. International databases have more data that adheres to standards but report on a more restricted set of indicators. This suggests that while national databases have a distance to travel in terms of adhering to standards, international databases could also learn from in-country experience to report proxy measures for a wider set of indicators. At both levels, there is still very basic work to do on nearly half of the indicators, to produce them in a sex-disaggregated form, or indeed at all.



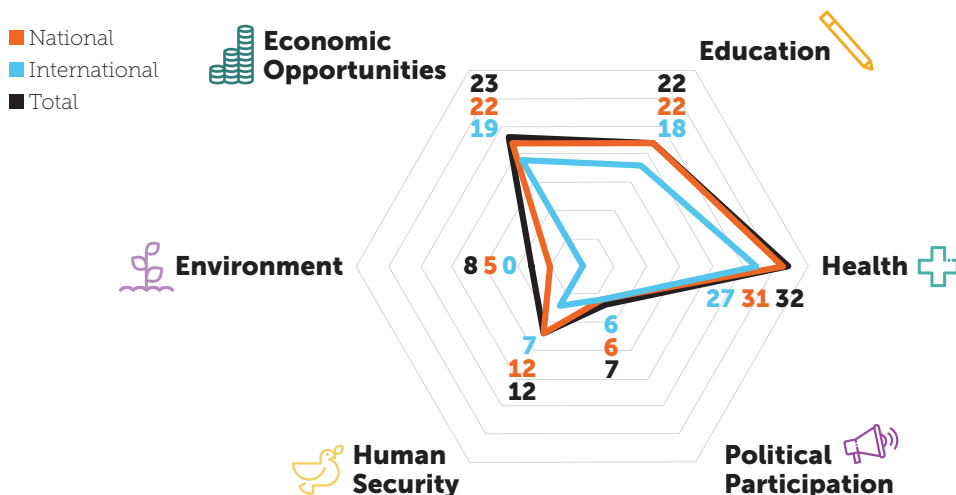
Only 44 percent of indicators are produced with complete disaggregation at the international level, and just 32 percent are produced with complete disaggregation at the national level.

Sex-disaggregation is the first basic level of disaggregation required to tell us about the lives of women and men, girls and boys. But recognizing that women and girls are not a homogenous group, additional disaggregations are required to document different outcomes for women and girls in rural and urban settings, young and old, higher and lower income, and across the spectrum of disability status and racial and ethnic groups. Working towards more complete disaggregation is an important challenge for data producers to address.



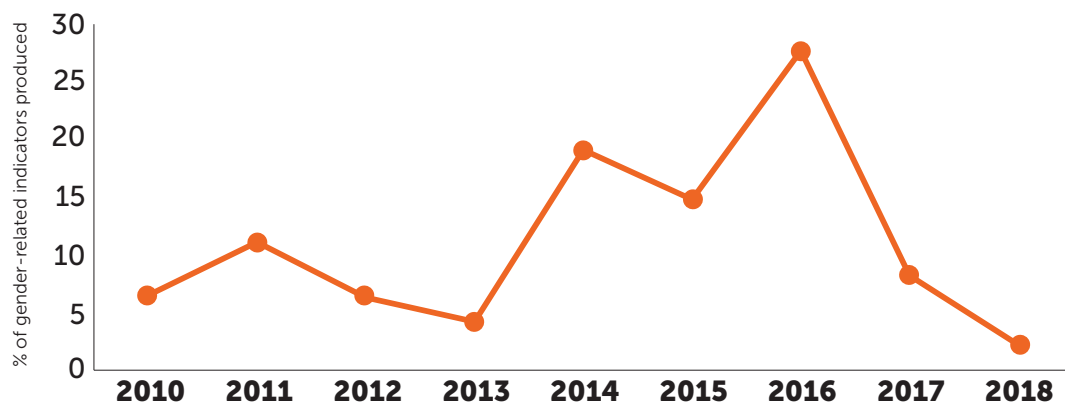
The health domain has the highest number of sex-disaggregated indicators (27) available at the international level. No indicator in the environmental domain has sex-disaggregated data at the international level. Data availability at the national level is higher across domains than at international level.

Fig. 5: Availability of sex-disaggregated data by domain



One-third of indicators with gender data in national databases have available observations within the last three years, with the largest share occurring in 2016, but two-thirds are four years old or older, with 17 percent last published in 2010 or 2011.

Fig. 6: Most recent year of observation in national databases (%), 2010-2018



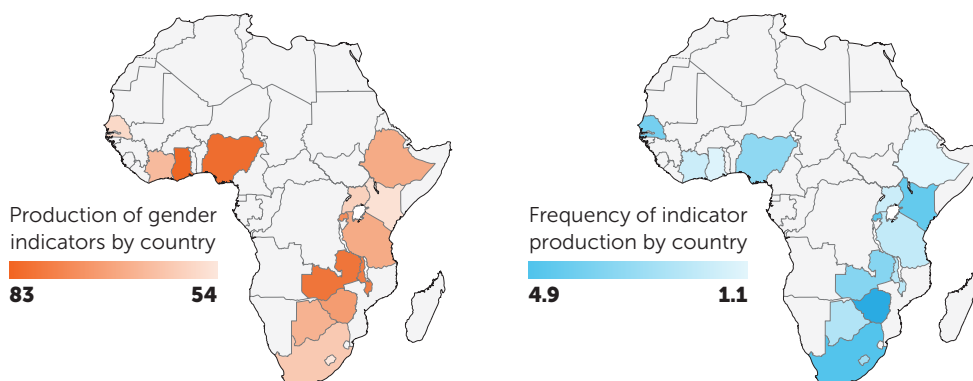
The lack of timely data is symptomatic of infrequent data collection and delays in processing data for publication. In most countries only one or two values are available for important gender indicators over the nine years covered by the study. Regular updates and timely release of data are key to planning, monitoring, and decision-making. More balanced data cycles would enable more efficient production of higher quality gender data.



AVAILABILITY

In national databases, Kenya and Lesotho produced the fewest gender indicators (54), while Ghana produced the highest number (83). However, frequency of gender indicator production is highest in South Africa, where there was an average of 4.9 observations per indicator, and lowest in Ethiopia, with only 1.1.

Fig. 7: Production and frequency of gender indicators by country



Variations in data availability and capacity to fill gender data gaps shows that countries make difficult choices in their data production decisions as a result of resource limitations. These results may reflect a strategic choice by some countries to produce data more frequently for a more limited number of indicators: South Africa, for example, has data for only 61 gender indicators but has published them more frequently. Others may choose wider but less frequent coverage. However, it also seems likely that low frequencies may result from an inability to sustain statistical programs – an area where countries and donors need to work together to improve for the future.

Key Findings: Microdata sources

A high proportion of gender-relevant SDG indicators are produced from internationally-sponsored surveys.

A balanced mix of microdata sources is key to ensuring high-quality and frequent gender indicators. However, we found that 14 of the 15 countries are heavily dependent on internationally-sponsored surveys such as MICS and DHS for a large share of their data, in particular, in health and education. For economic indicators, labor force surveys are the principal source of data. Each country in the study conducted at least one living standard study to collect information on household income or consumption and, along with the population census, to collect data on housing conditions and other assets. The remaining microdata sources were specialized surveys or administrative records.

Administrative data were underreported, undocumented, and were found to offer weaker data than what was produced by surveys.

Administrative records have the potential to provide more complete gender data than surveys and do so at higher frequencies. However, to become useful sources of reliable statistics, these records need to be well-documented and standardized to facilitate comparisons between countries and over time. Furthermore, standards for anonymization of data are needed to permit the open dissemination of administrative records for public use.

Recommendations

1. **Prioritize closing gender data gaps.** National statistical offices, international custodian agencies, donors, and technical experts who support statistical development should work closer together to strengthen the quality of the existing gender data and prioritize new production to close the gaps.
2. **Build towards more complete disaggregation.** Multiple disaggregations give us a clearer picture of the varied experiences and outcomes for women and girls. Tackling this challenge will necessitate innovation in the years to come that will have wide reaching benefits not only for gender data but for other fields as well. Countries should prioritize the disaggregations that are most appropriate in their national context. Improvements to household surveys that yield increased information for individual household members by sex would greatly increase their value.
3. **Aim for more frequent production of headline indicators and even spread of data collection across regular intervals.** Both this recommendation and recommendation two above would be enabled by increased attention to strengthening administrative data sources. Investment in data matching and linking techniques between sources of data would provide information of a much richer texture than any source alone can provide. Investigation into the possibilities for new data sources to fill gender data gaps should also be pursued and supported.
4. **Country capacity should be strengthened on availability and frequency.** Simply producing an indicator once is not sufficient to track progress over time. Support for countries is needed to build capacity to maintain regular data production cycles.
5. **Where existing microdata are sufficient to produce sex-disaggregated indicators, a systematic effort to compile and disseminate disaggregated indicators should be undertaken.**

Next Steps

The accompanying technical report is a summary of the knowledge generated by the *Bridging the Gap* study. A number of additional products for the data and policy communities will be produced, to serve as a basis for discussions on future plans for filling gender data gaps. These will include:

- Individual country assessment reports to be shared with the relevant national statistical office and other stakeholders;
- Summary pages for each of the 68 gender-relevant SDG indicators offering targeted and specific insights into what should be done to improve data collection and production for each gender-relevant SDG indicator;
- A methodology guide to enable countries not covered in this report to carry out their own assessment of gender data availability;
- Policymaker briefs to outline ways to support data production and encourage its use.

About Data2X

Data2X is a 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. Working in partnership with multilateral agencies, governments, civil society, academics, and the private sector, Data2X mobilizes action for and strengthens production and use of gender data.

About Open Data Watch

Open Data Watch is an international, non-profit organization of data experts working to bring change to organizations that produce and manage official statistical data. We support the efforts of national statistical offices (NSOs), particularly those in low- and middle-income countries, to improve their data systems and harness the advancements of the data revolution. Through our policy advice, data support, and monitoring work, we influence and help both NSOs and other organizations meet the goals of their national statistical plans and the SDGs.

#BridgetheGap

Find out more at: bit.ly/BridgetheGapReport.

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