Dating Gaps: An SDG Era Update

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
Acknowledgments

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Executive Summary

Good data are needed to make good decisions. Regularly-collected, high quality data on women and girls can inform smarter decisions for policies and programs, and track whether those decisions improve lives and gender equality more widely. Intersectional data that is simultaneously disaggregated by multiple dimensions is even more powerful for capturing differences based on income, age, race, ethnicity, location (urban/rural), indigenous status, migration status, disability, or other characteristics. Under the Sustainable Development Goals’ Agenda to Leave No One Behind, this type of nuanced information is crucial to ensure that the world delivers on its commitments to everyone.

However, despite the best efforts of those striving toward gender data equality, gaps in data remain, new ones have emerged, and there is still much to be done to make women’s and girls’ lives visible in data systems. This includes the dearth of data on women over reproductive age; our poor understanding of whether education is preparing girls with the digital literacy skills necessary for the future of work; our partial picture of women’s political engagement; and the nascent field studying the interplay of environmental issues and gender.

Data2X believes that we cannot solve a problem that we cannot name. Since our inception, we have worked to uncover gender data gaps and devise solutions to close them. Our starting point in 2014 was a mapping exercise of key gender data gaps across different domains (health, education, economic opportunities, political participation, and human security). This mapping exercise provided a roadmap for all actors working to address the challenge of missing and incomplete data on women and girls and outlined where to focus our time, resources, and investment.

Since then, our efforts to fill these gender data gaps have ranged from direct support of methodological research and data production, to creating networks among data producers, and investing in innovation. We have also generated independent knowledge that aims to shine a light on strategic areas requiring attention to advance the field of gender data. For example, 2018 saw the launch of our Bridging the Gap project in partnership with Open Data Watch, which provides an in-depth assessment of gender data sources and gaps in 15 African countries, with other regions to follow. Equally important to our technical efforts has been Data2X’s emphasis on communication to socialize what gender data is, why it’s important to policymaking, and ensure that it attracts greater attention on the global development agenda.

Given the significant changes in the gender data landscape since 2014, Data2X decided to update the mapping exercise. In this time, the global development agenda has shifted from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and has brought with it a renewed focus and commitment to tracking data across different areas of development. Simultaneously, technological innovation has created innumerable sources of big data that have the potential to improve our understanding of women’s and girls’ lives, even in the most remote and isolated places.

There are numerous reasons for persistent gender data gaps. These include low prioritization, low resources or capacity driving a low country coverage in gender data collection efforts; poorly developed or non-existent international standards for data used to construct indicators; and challenges brought by the complexity of monitoring systems needed to capture desired gender data and indicators. In fact, UN Women estimates that just 13% of countries worldwide have a dedicated budget for collecting and analyzing gender statistics and only 22% of the 54 gender-specific indicators in the Sustainable Development Goals target gender equality and women’s empowerment as outcomes.

Furthermore, the rapid pace of technological change presents new opportunities and challenges. Big data, artificial intelligence, and other technologies hold the potential to revolutionize how we collect, analyze, and use data on women and girls. However, these technologies also raise concerns about privacy, bias, and the potential for unintended consequences. It is crucial that we approach these developments thoughtfully, ensuring that they are used to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment, rather than perpetuating existing inequalities.

In conclusion, the quest for gender data equality is ongoing and requires sustained efforts from all sectors of society. By working together, we can ensure that the world delivers on its commitments to leaving no one behind and creating a future where women and girls thrive.

Data2X will continue its efforts to uncover gender data gaps and devise solutions to close them. We are committed to supporting the work of data producers, advocating for greater investment in gender data, and communicating the importance of this field to policymakers and the wider public. Together, we can ensure that the world delivers on its commitments to gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Data2X

[Institute Logo]
Development Goals are produced with regularity worldwide\(^1\).

Given this changing landscape and the continuing data gaps, this updated mapping project aims to answer several critical questions:

- Where have we made progress in closing gender data gaps since 2014?
- What new gender data gaps have emerged as new issues have risen to prominence?
- Which are the key agencies and organizations working to close gender data gaps, by setting standards, advocating for gender data, directly collecting data, or aggregating and analyzing the available data?
- Which are the key sources of gender data for each domain and where can we find the data that does exist?
- What are the most promising approaches to closing gender data gaps in each domain and what are the key barriers that need to be overcome to do so?

This updated mapping exercise focuses on six key domains: (1) health, (2) education, (3) economic opportunities, (4) public participation, (5) human security, and, for the first time, (6) environment.

Standing on the cusp of the Decade of Delivery for the SDGs, the global data system continues to make progress but struggles to answer the more nuanced questions it faces. Custodian agencies and expert groups are continuously working to move as many SDG indicators as possible to Tier 1 (with internationally agreed methodology and regular data collection)\(^2\) and to encourage sex-disaggregation. Global advocacy and efforts to mainstream gender across the SDG framework have also increased the demand for gender data. These efforts, however, reveal new gender data gaps that require improved data collection efforts, systems, and standards in order to be filled.\(^3\)

This year also marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a watershed moment for gender equality that recognizes the importance of accurate and inclusive data systems. The platform celebrates the gathering of a diverse array of women and girls to address the common issues that mediate and shape their lives. Data systems need to be similarly strategically designed to capture the common experiences of women and girls, while being nuanced enough to reflect their diversity as more than half of the global population.

**METHODOLOGY**

The methodology for this exercise included a review of relevant research, scholarship, and other online materials produced since 2014 to identify what progress has been made in the past five years to close gender data gaps. We also interviewed experts working across civil society, academia, research institutes, think tanks, UN agencies, and SDG custodian agencies to identify the most pressing gender data gaps and the key actors and initiatives working to resolve them. Some of the individuals that we interviewed participated in Data2X’s 2014 mapping exercise while others were identified for their expertise on a specific topic or through recommendations provided by other organizations and experts. The resulting list of gender data gaps is not exhaustive. Rather, it represents the views of those working and advocating in this field on the most pressing gender data gaps as of 2019, particularly in relation to the SDG monitoring framework.

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KEY PLAYERS

- **Standard setters and custodian agencies** such as the UN System remain key in setting standards and supporting data collection and reporting, with the UN Statistics Division and UN Women playing instrumental roles in relation to gender data efforts.

- **Academic institutions and think tanks** also play a role in supporting methodological testing and analysis of gender data for insight.

- **National statistics offices** are crucial partners for improving efforts to collect and disseminate nationally representative gender data.

- While **governments and the multilateral system** remain the majority funders of the data system, **non-traditional donors** such as foundations have also begun supporting gender data systems.

- **Civil society organizations** also connect countries to technical and financial resources and advocate for more and better gender data.

- **Private sector data producers** have also risen in importance in recent years as the use of big data to investigate gender-relevant research questions has gained prominence.

This report is intended as a resource for all actors working to address gender data gaps and towards more inclusive data systems. This includes custodian agencies, government actors, donors, researchers, and civil society actors.

KEY FINDINGS

Across the domains, we observed a number of key trends:

- The shift from the MDG to the SDG era has brought with it an increased demand for disaggregated and nuanced data. Basic sex-disaggregation remains an issue, while the need for multiple disaggregations to also account for differences based on income, age, race, ethnicity, location (urban/rural), indigenous status, migration status, and disability has not yet been met.

- Disaggregation remains a key challenge across sectors as most data are collected at household rather than individual level.

- Across domains, sex-disaggregation is not explicitly called for in the monitoring of many gender-relevant SDG indicators.

- Where data are being disaggregated by sex, in-depth gender analysis of that data are not always undertaken.

- The source and nature of gender data gaps across domains varies. In some areas, such as environment, appropriate measures are still being conceptualized. In others where the approach to collecting gender data is agreed and established, gaps can arise because of a lack of prioritization, resources, or capacity for gender data collection.

- Restricted sampling means that we know most about women of reproductive age (15-49) but little about children, younger adolescents, or older women.

- Reliance on repeated cross-sectional surveys means that longitudinal dynamics are rarely captured; for example, the long-term psychological effects of violence and harassment.

- The SDG framework, like the MDGs, compartmentalizes gender within specific goals and targets, often ignoring linkages across goals — for example, how environmental degradation impacts women’s economic opportunities. This has spillover effects for the way gender equality research and programming is conceptualized and funded.

- The uptake and use of gender data for designing policies and programs is challenged in the translation and communication of statistics to less technical audiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Investment must be made across all parts of the data collection system. Data systems are complex and there is no one data source which can provide insight into every facet of gendered experience. For instance, censuses
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and sample surveys provide crucial snapshots of population wellbeing and progress, while quality administrative data contributes essential sub-national and dynamic information on basic topics such as births and deaths, school enrollment, and immunization. Big data sources are also beginning to be used to provide granular information.

- Investment in gender data should target national statistics offices to demonstrate the value of collecting gender data and improve their capacity to communicate information to program and policy decision-makers in a timely manner. The ultimate value of gender data is not in its production, but rather in its use.

- To help fulfill the SDG commitment to “leave no one behind,” standard setting and data collection and aggregation agencies should require (not just recommend) that all gender-relevant SDG indicators be disaggregated by sex, and where relevant, simultaneously disaggregated by income, age, race, ethnicity, location, indigenous status, migration status, disability, and other relevant characteristics.

- Administrative data systems are an important source of gender data and investment outside of the education and health systems would be a strategic future target to yield gender data across domains.

- Greater investment should be geared to supporting well-functioning civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems, which are a key source of sex-disaggregated demographic data throughout the life-course.

- Big data generated from cell phones, laptops, remote sensors, and more can add nuance to our understanding of women’s and girls’ lives by providing information that is highly granular in both space and time, and difficult to capture or quantify with standard types of data collection. These sources should be more fully utilized.

- Existing international databases often have data that could be disaggregated by sex or analyzed to address gender data gaps. These sources should be mined before investing in new data collection efforts.

- Existing household or enterprise surveys should be revised where possible to include additional questions and to expand to a greater number of countries in support of eliminating gender data gaps.

- Increased focus on panel surveys and the production of longitudinal data would also be valuable across domains to trace gender dynamics over time. Surveys tend to be representative at the national level, requiring a strong system with a mix of survey, census, and administrative data to provide sub-national and individual level estimates.

- More methodological work is needed to identify robust and internationally standardized measures for capturing women’s and girls’ subjective experiences, aspirations, and perceptions.

This Executive Summary is part of “Mapping Gender Data Gaps: An SDG Era Update.” The full report can be accessed here: data2x.org/MappingGenderDataGaps.
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<td>ACLED</td>
<td>Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project</td>
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<td>COP</td>
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<td>CRVS</td>
<td>Civil Registration and Vital Statistics</td>
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<td>DALY</td>
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<td>FGM</td>
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<td>HIV</td>
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<td>IAEG</td>
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<td>IUCN</td>
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iKNOW  International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics
LGBTQIA  Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual/Allied
LSMS  Living Standards Measurement Survey
MDG  Millennium Development Goal(s)
MICS  Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys
NDI  National Democratic Institute
NGO  Non-government organizational
OECD  Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHCHR  Office of the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights
OPHI  Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative
RHS  Reproductive Health Surveys
SDG  Sustainable Development Goal(s)
SIDA  Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SIGI  Social Institutions and Gender Index (OECD)
SMS  Short Message Service
STEP  Systematic Tracking of Exchanges in Procurement
TUS  Time Use Surveys
UIS  UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UN  United Nations
UNCCD  United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification
UNDESA  United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP  United Nations Development Program
UNECE  United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNECOSOC  United Nations Economic and Social Council
UNEP  United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFCCC  United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNFPA  United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR  United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF  United Nations Children’s Fund
UNODC  United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
UNSD  United Nations Statistics Division  
USAID  United States Agency for International Development  
VAW  Violence Against Women  
WASH  Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene  
WEAI  Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index  
WEDO  Women’s Environment and Development Organization  
WHO  World Health Organization  
WIDE  World Inequality Database on Education  
WIEGO  Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing  
WPPRI  Women’s Political Participation Risk Index  
WPS  Women, Peace and Security Program (International Peace Institute)  
WWAP  World Water Assessment Programme (UNESCO)