

Measuring progress on women's participation and influence in decision-making in the SDGs: Recommendations to the Inter-agency and Expert Group and UN Member States

1. Summary of recommendations

- Whilst the overall number of global SDG indicators needs to be manageable for national statistical authorities, some targets will require multiple indicators to be true to the targets' ambition. This is true of Target 5.5 of the Open Working Group proposal for the SDGs – on women's participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making.
- The global indicator list should include a combination of one quantitative and one qualitative indicator for Target 5.5, which should include measuring changes in attitudes and social norms. One quantitative indicator alone is not sufficient to measure the different aspects of this target.
- A qualitative indicator is needed to compliment data from the quantitative indicator, which measures changes in women's participation and leadership through an understanding of perceptions and attitudes. Understanding women's experiences of decision-making through a self-reported indicator will capture the reality as experienced by women themselves and allow measurement of progress towards 'full and effective participation'.
- The quantitative indicator should include the number of women in local governance, as well as the number of women in national decision-making bodies, to ensure progress is measured 'at all levels'. To ensure we are measuring progress towards 'equal opportunities for leadership', it must also look at the share of seats women have at the highest level of decision-making, such as ministerial and cabinet positions, and be disaggregated including by socio-economic status.
- Further work is needed to establish the interrelationship between indicators and targets, including those which impact on women's participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making. However, this should not limit Target 5.5 to one indicator.

Our recommended global SDG indicators to measure Target 5.5:

- Proportion of seats held by women in local governments and national parliaments, disaggregated including by socio-economic status, and the proportion of those seats held at a leadership, ministerial or cabinet level.
- Female politicians' perceptions of the impact that they have on decision-making, by level of government.

2. Introduction

The Gender and Development Network (GADN) Women's Participation and Leadership Working Group strongly support the inclusion of a target on women's participation and leadership in decision-making in the Post-2015 development agenda – the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We are encouraged that the United Nations (UN) draft outcome documents for the SDGsⁱ include the Open Working Group (OWG) proposal of Target 5.5 on women's participation and leadership in decision-making.ⁱⁱ

Target 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.

It is however critical that the SDGs are accompanied by indicators that allow effective tracking of progress towards meeting the goals and targets that are adopted in September 2015. This paper sets out our recommendations to the Inter-agency and Expert Group on the Sustainable Development Goal Indicators (IAEG-SDGs) and UN Member States on global indicators for women's participation and influence in decision-making, including in leadership positions. It is intended to inform ongoing discussions on the development of the global indicator list, which is the focus of the IAEG-SDGs. The relationship between global, national and sub-national indicators is also important, but is not explored in this paper.

3. Context

In March the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) published a technical report on the process for the development of an indicator framework for the goals and targets of the Post-2015 development agenda. The UNSC described this draft as an 'initial assessment on the proposed provisional indicators to measure the targets proposed by the Open Working Group on SDGs.'ⁱⁱⁱ

The UNSC (at its 46th session on 3rd - 6th March 2015) endorsed the establishment of the IAEG-SDGs, and tasked it with developing a proposal for the global indicator framework for consideration and endorsement by the UNSC at its 47th session in March 2016.^{iv} The current draft timetable indicates that this proposal will be submitted by 30th November 2015.^v

In preparation for the first meeting of the IAEG-SDGs on 1st - 2nd June, the UN Statistics Division (UNSD) produced a second document: 'First proposed priority indicator list' which sets out priority indicators under each target.^{vi} This list was intended to summarise the current discussion on indicators for individual targets and was the focus for the first meeting of the IAEG-SDGs. Attempts were made to limit the number of indicators by identifying only one priority indicator per target. The UN will provide an updated list of possible indicators four weeks ahead of the IAEG-SDGs' second meeting, currently scheduled for 26th- 28th October 2015.

4. Our priority indicators on women's participation and leadership

Target 5.5 concerns women's *equal and meaningful* participation at *all levels* of decision-making. Indicators for this target must therefore measure not only if women are represented, but also the extent to which they are able to be actively involved in and influence decision-making processes at all levels through their participation.^{vii}

Combining proposals from UN Women,^{viii} Gender Links,^{ix} VSO,^x Womankind Worldwide^{xi} and Oxfam **we recommend one quantitative indicator** which recognises that decision-making should occur at all levels, including in local governance. This indicator should also recognise the share of seats which are held at a leadership level and should be disaggregated by socio-economic status to measure the extent to which women are representative of poor and marginalised women and girls. **We also recommend a complementary qualitative indicator** that allows us to measure women’s own perceptions of their ability to participate equally and effectively in decision-making.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative indicators is essential to achieve the ambition set out in Target 5.5 and address the structural barriers that prevent women’s full, equal and meaningful participation and influence at all levels of decision-making. Measuring progress qualitatively and quantitatively captures the complex and changing realities of women’s lives.^{xii}

5. Our assessment of the UN’s current proposals

At the time of writing this paper there have been two proposed lists of global indicators from the UN which include proposals to measure Target 5.5, as set out below.

UN proposed lists of global SDG indicators:

1. UN Statistical Commission’s initial assessment of proposed provisional indicators to measure Target 5.5 of the OWG on SDGs (3rd March 2015):

- **Indicator 5.5.1** Proportion of seats held by women in local governments
- **Indicator 5.5.2** Proportion of women who have a say in household decisions (for large purchases, their own health and visiting relatives)

2. The first proposed priority indicator list, compiled by the UN Statistics Division (29th May 2015), produced for the first meeting of the IAEG on 1st-2nd June 2015:

- Target 5.5: Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments

In relation to Target 5.5, both the UNSC’s preliminary list of indicators and the UNSD’s first proposed priority indicator list have major limitations. They both are limited to capturing the numerical representation of women, be that at local, national or household level. Neither provides a measure of the extent to which women have ‘full and effective participation’, and ‘equal opportunities for leadership’, or evidence of whether decision-making is occurring ‘at all levels’, key aspects of the target in question and the intention of the Open Working Group. **As it stands neither of these lists of indicators would allow us to adequately measure progress towards meeting the OWG agreed target.**

Crucially, a qualitative approach is also needed to measure perceptions, attitudes or an individual’s own recollection of their experiences. To effectively measure this target, we need to be able to capture women’s *influence* (exerted through meaningful or effective participation) over decision-making in political, economic and public life, including the extent to which women are taking up leadership positions. This requires measurement of changes in attitudes and social norms through, for example, understanding perceptions.

Measuring women’s ‘full and effective’ participation

(i) *Why measuring numbers is not enough*

It has been widely argued that the number of women in representative politics is not the best indicator of women’s actual political participation ‘because there is no necessary relationship between the two.’^{xiii} Increased numerical representation does not automatically translate into increased influence for women: having a seat at the table does not guarantee that a woman will have the opportunity to speak, or that she will be listened to. There are concerns that in some cases parties select electoral candidates whom they know will act as proxies for their husbands or fathers.^{xiv} This challenge was captured during an interview with the leader of a VSO partner women’s organisation in Nepal: “Women who are actually present at the table will all be known to the male leaders – they are placed there and tend to be women that the men think will do what they want. They are only there to fill the quota and give a veneer of participation.”^{xv}

(ii) *Understanding and measuring perceptions*

Understanding perceptions is particularly important for measuring changes in women’s participation and leadership. Measuring perceptions can be an important way of measuring interim progress against a target as changing perceptions can demonstrate step-change towards the desired outcome. In addition, self-reported indicators can help with the interpretation of quantitative data by providing important contextual understanding: in essence, they provide important data on women’s experiences and understanding of the impact they have on decision-making. Understanding how women’s voice translates into influence needs to begin from women’s own experiences, rather than a set of pre-determined outcomes.^{xvi}

We recommend a qualitative indicator is included in the global indicator list, which measures changes in women’s participation and leadership through an understanding of perceptions and attitudes. We recommend a self-reported indicator is developed which looks at female politicians’ perceptions of the impact they are having on decision-making. Although data sources do not currently exist, a similar model to the World Economic Forum’s Executive Opinion Survey could be developed which surveys female politicians worldwide on an annual basis.

Measuring women’s participation and leadership ‘at all levels’ of decision-making and ‘equal opportunities for leadership’

(i) *Local governance*

Women continue to be under-represented numerically at local levels and lack influence in the local structures and institutions that govern their everyday lives. It is at the local level that many of the decisions that affect women’s lives are made.^{xvii} This is also the level of decision-making where women are often most active and potentially have the greatest influence.

The exclusion of participation at the local government level and elsewhere in community and public life has been identified as a limitation of international indices such as the UN Development Programme’s Gender Inequality Index (GII).^{xviii} The importance of increasing

women's participation in local governance was recognised by the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) taskforce on education and gender equality.^{xx} It is however promising that in January 2013 a memorandum of understanding was signed between UN Women and the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) to collect data on female participation at the local level and also create a world observatory to track gender equality at the local level.^{xx}

The UNSC's proposed indicator is currently used by the African Gender and Development Index (AGDI), the Southern African Gender and Development Index (SGDI) and also collected by the African Peer Review Mechanism. Information on the numbers of women in local government in European countries is also compiled by the European Commission in its women in decision-making database.

However, this indicator only tells us how many women are entering local government. It does not give us data on what positions they hold, the influence they are having when in office, and the extent to which they are representative of poor and marginalised women. These are crucial elements needed to reflect the ambition of Target 5.5.

(ii) National governance

The UNSD's priority indicator list puts forward the number of women in national parliaments as the measure for achieving Target 5.5. The number of women in national level politics tends to be used as a proxy indicator for women's participation and influence in public life because it is a simple and convenient measure, and one for which data collection systems are now well instituted. Data on the number of women in national parliaments is compiled by the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

However, as we have seen following its inclusion under MDG3, this indicator is highly limited because it does not provide insight into women's ability to influence national level decision-making or the level of power entrusted to women in these positions. Nor does it measure progress at other levels of government, such as local or municipal levels.

By continuing to focus only on the overall number of women represented in national parliaments there is a danger that we will continue to see a narrow definition of women's participation and continue to measure what is convenient and 'easily verifiable' rather than what matters. A focus on the national level also diverts emphasis away from comprehensive data collection on women's participation at the local level.

We recommend the global indicator list should include one quantitative indicator which measures the number of women in local and national government (thereby combining the UNSC and UNSD proposals). We also recommend that the indicator is expanded to include the share of seats that women have at leadership, ministerial or cabinet level, and that it is disaggregated including by socio-economic status.

6. Interlinkages with other indicators and targets

Gender equality and women's rights issues, such as women's participation and leadership, are multi-dimensional and changes to one may impact on another. For example, violence against women in the household can increase as women move into public and political life.^{xxi}

Further work is needed to establish the interrelationship between different indicators and targets, including those which impact on women’s participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making. For example, Target 16.7 looks to ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels, and indicators developed here will be relevant to measuring progress on Target 5.5.

We welcome the IAEG-SDGs’ focus on identifying the interlinkages between goals and targets. However, this should not result in limiting all targets to one global indicator when there is a clear need for multiple indicators, as there is with Target 5.5.

The Gender & Development Network (GADN) brings together expert NGOs, consultants, academics and individuals committed to working on gender, development and women’s rights issues. Our vision is of a world where social justice and gender equality prevail and where all women and girls are able to realise their rights free from discrimination. Our goal is to ensure that international development policy and practice promotes gender equality and women’s and girls’ rights. Our role is to support our members by sharing information and expertise, to undertake and disseminate research, and to provide expert advice and comment on government policies and projects.

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Working groups

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GADN’s Women’s Participation and Leadership Working Group pools experience and expertise to contribute to GADN, government and other stakeholder initiatives, including targeted policy advocacy and advocacy in relation to women’s participation and leadership. This briefing is also endorsed by the GADN Post 2015 Working Group. Publications of the working groups do not necessarily reflect the views of all members.

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- ⁱ UN. *Zero Draft of The Outcome Document For The UN Summit To Adopt The Post-2015 Development Agenda*. 2015. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/7261Post-2015%20Summit%20-%202%20June%202015.pdf>; UN. *Final Draft of The Outcome Document For The UN Summit To Adopt The Post-2015 Development Agenda*. 2015. Available at: http://www.un.org/pga/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/07/080715_Post-2015-Final-Draft-of-the-Outcome-Document.pdf
- ⁱⁱ UN. *Open Working Group proposal for Sustainable Development Goals*. 2014. Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgsproposal>.
- ⁱⁱⁱ UN Statistical Commission. *Technical Report By The Bureau Of The United Nations Statistical Commission On The Process Of The Development Of An Indicator Framework For The Goals And Targets Of The Post-2015 Development Agenda (Working Draft)*. 2015. Available at: [http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/pdf/technical%20report%20of%20the%20unsc%20bureau%20\(final\).pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/broaderprogress/pdf/technical%20report%20of%20the%20unsc%20bureau%20(final).pdf)
- ^{iv} The IAEG-SDGs consists of 28 representatives of national statistical offices and include, as observers, representatives of regional commissions and regional and international agencies, including those responsible for global reporting on the MDGs, to provide important technical advice and support as needed.
- ^v IAEG-SDGs. *Tentative timeline, work plan and organization of work*. July 2015. Available at <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/IAEG-SDGs%20-%20timeline%20-%2020150707.pdf>
- ^{vi} Sustainable Development Goal Indicators Blog. *First Proposed Priority Indicator List*. 2015. Available at: <http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/2015/05/29/first-proposed-priority-indicator-list/>.
- ^{vii} See also: FIDA (Kenya), LIWOMAC (Liberia), WILDAF (Ghana), Womankind Worldwide (UK) *Women's Rights And Gender Equality In The Post-2015 Framework*. 2014. Available at: <http://www.womankind.org.uk/download/16545/>.
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- ^x VSO. *Women in Power: Beyond Access To Influence In A Post-2015 World*. 2013. Available at: http://www.vsointernational.org/sites/vso_uk/files/documents/Policy/Gender%20equality/vso_women_in_power_report_final_10september2013.pdf
- ^{xi} Supra note vii.
- ^{xii} See discussion in Moser, A. *Gender and Indicators: Overview report*. 2007. op cit. on qualitative and quantitative data. Available at: <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/sites/bridge.ids.ac.uk/files/reports/IndicatorsORfinal.pdf>.
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- ^{xxi} See, for example, ActionAid UK. *Destined to Fail? How Violence Against Women Is Undoing Development*. 2010. Available at: https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/doc_lib/destined_to_fail.pdf.