

GADN Recommendations to Measuring progress on women's participation and leadership in the Sustainable Development Goals

Abigail Hunt and Maria Vlahakis

A new publication by the UK Gender and Development Network (GADN) Women's Participation and Leadership Working Group proposes global indicators to effectively track progress made on implementing the SDGs between now and 2030.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the result of approximately three years of negotiations, consultations and drafting and will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) when they expire at the end of this year. Governments worldwide are gearing up for the adoption of the new SDGs at a UN [Summit](#) in New York from 25th to 27th September. The goals and targets have just been [agreed](#) but the global indicators which will be used to measure progress against them have yet to finalise and won't be adopted until March 2016.

Building on the MDGs

Under the MDGs three indicators measured progress on women's empowerment and gender equality, including one focusing on the [proportion of seats held by women in national parliament](#). This drew welcome attention to increasing the representation of women, but it was limited because there was no associated target to drive political will and resources. In addition, the narrow focus on numbers of women present in national legislatures also diverted attention away from much-needed efforts to ensure women's 'full and effective', or meaningful, participation. In short, 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.

Furthermore, it led to a focus on women's representation in formal, national-level political structures. Yet women continue to be under-represented numerically in sub-national and community governance structures and institutions and lack influence in the local structures and institutions that govern their everyday lives. This matters because many of the decisions that affect women's lives are made at a local level.

The SDGs have the potential to change this and achieve transformative changes for women and girls by addressing the root causes of gender inequality. Goal 5 of the agreed SDG document has as its stated goal to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls". Under this a target on women's participation and leadership is included, as follows:

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.

The inclusion of this target goes further than the MDGs by recognising that women's participation must be 'full and effective' and they must have 'equal opportunities for leadership' – in other words women must not only be round the table but must also be able to equally and

meaningfully lead and influence the decisions made. It also recognises that the decisions that affect women's lives are made 'at all levels', and across political, public and economic spheres – not just by national parliaments.

Now that the goal and target have been agreed, it is crucial that efforts for their implementation are equally ambitious. This includes ensuring that progress is made towards the achievement of all aspects of the target. Having effective indicators in place is key to this as what is measured is often where resources and political will are focused.

The UN body tasked with developing the global indicator list is currently consulting on its [latest proposals](#) and once again its indicator suggestions are limited to the numerical representation of women.

GADN Recommendations

To ensure transformative indicators are selected the [Gender and Development Network's Women's Participation and Leadership Working Group](#) has published a [briefing paper](#) which sets out recommendations for the SDG indicators for 'women's participation and leadership at all levels of decision-making', as follows:

- Proportion of seats held by women in local governments and national parliaments disaggregated 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.

Crucially, the paper makes a recommendation that a qualitative indicator is included measures changes in women's participation and leadership through an understanding of perceptions and attitudes. Measuring perceptions provides important data on women's experiences and understanding of the impact they have on decision-making.

The paper also sets out key principles to be taken into account if the indicators are to provide real insight into whether women globally are meaningfully involved in decision-making:

- Capture transformative change rather than just numbers.
- Be both qualitative and quantitative, including a self-reported indicator to capture the experiences of women leaders.
- Be applied at all levels of leadership.
- Be more ambitious than previously agreed indicators, particularly MDG indicators
- Be comparable across countries.

Finally, it is crucial that those responsible for selecting the final indicators do not resort to what is simple and convenient, or easy to measure. Reflecting need rather than the current availability of data must be a priority if the SDGs are to offer a real chance to go further than the MDGs did and truly measure whether women are influencing at the highest levels of decision-making.

Additional information

The paper was co-authored by Maria Vlahakis, VSO; Abigail Hunt, Womankind Worldwide; and Carol Ballantine, Trocaire, with input from members of the GADN [Women's Participation and Leadership Working Group](#).

It can be downloaded here: [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](#)

For more information about UK Gender and Development Network click [here](#).

For further information about Gender and SDG Indicators see the 'Key issues' guide developed by Eldis which can be found [here](#).