

21 ways the SDGs can have the best impact on girls

How can the sustainable development goals (SDGs) tackle the underlying gender inequality that holds girls back? Our had these suggestions

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Invest in research: The effectiveness of goals and policies aimed at reducing gender-based inequalities continues to be undermined by knowledge gaps. We need a better understanding of how gender inequalities are produced, reproduced or challenged during the transition to adulthood and between the generations. *Professor Jo Boyden, director, Young Lives, Oxford Department of International Development, Oxford, UK, @yloxford*

Put money where our mouths are: Our next challenge after the adoption of the SDGs will be to move towards implementation. In order to do so we will need new and ambitious financing commitments at the third international conference on financing for development. An ambitious agenda for achieving gender equality must be matched by ambitious resources. *Lucie Faucherre, junior policy analyst, Gender Equality and Women's Rights OECD, Paris, France, @luciefacherre*

Include youth voices: Today, young people under 30 make up a staggering 50% of our world's population. With 3.5 billion of them, it's the largest generation of youth the world has ever seen. Their needs, voices and perspectives - not least those of girls - must be central in high-level, global conversations and in the SDGs. *Katja Iversen, chief executive, Women Deliver, New York, US, @katja_iversen*

Work with men and boys: We need to address the patriarchal system and work with men and boys so that there is a clear shift in their attitude towards viewing women and girls as right holders rather than objects of gratification or commodities. *Saket Mani, UN global youth advocate, World We Want 2015, Pune, India, @SaketMANI*

Take a holistic approach: Some member-states advocated for a smaller number of goals to make the whole package more accessible. It is positive that all 17 goals remained in the final outcome. The SDGs should be a holistic set only considered together in order to maximise impact and avoid the isolated silo approach that would take the "sustainable" out of the SDGs and look more like the MDGs. *Nebila Abdulmelik, head of communications, Femnet (African Women's Development & Communication Network), Nairobi, Kenya, @aliben86*

Don't take the easy route: The MDGs have not gone far enough because they prioritised “easy” and “communicable” action, which resulted in leaving out the more difficult and structural problems, for example violence against women and girls. Girls’ and women’s rights are never easy. We would rather see a longer and complex framework that addresses the structural causes of gender discrimination and inequality than a shorter set of goals. *Kasia Staszewska, women’s rights policy adviser, ActionAid UK, London, UK, @KasiaStasz*

What gets measured, gets done: SDGs is not the ideal framework but it is a huge step from MDGs. What is needed to enhance the SDG goals and targets is a comprehensive indicators set that will be sex- and age-disaggregated. At the moment it is too easy for girls to slip through the cracks of monitoring. *Anush Aghabalyan, head of advocacy, World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, London, UK, @Anushik_Ag*

Adapt to the local context and embed accountability: The question is how these broad targets and indicators are then adapted to suit the country and regional context. The SDGs must have a strong focus on implementation, monitoring and resourcing. Accountability has to be embedded in the national and regional mechanisms. *Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, general secretary, World YWCA, Geneva, Switzerland, @worldywca*

Understand it's everyone's problem: One of the main issues has been that gender inequality has been seen as a woman's problem. Gender inequality is a societal and a human rights problem, with a multiplier effect on economies, communities and nations that is truly overwhelming. *Katja Iversen*

Work with religious and cultural leaders: We have to work with faith and cultural communities to change norms so that girls are valued the same way as boys and are given equal opportunities. *Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda*

Show that everyone benefits: All evidence shows that when societies invest in girls and women everybody wins. Investing in girls and women is not only the right thing to do, but the sound thing to do. We know it creates a ripple effect of sustainable change that benefits families, communities, and nations. When 10% more girls go to school, a country's GDP increases by an average of 3%. *Katja Iversen*

Recognise and redistribute unpaid care work: It is important to recognise, value, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work. The gendered division of labour must be dismantled as these are the structural causes and conditions that keep women and girls subjugated. *Nebila Abdulmelik*

Cultivate a meaningful education system: It's good to see the SDGs have a strong focus on education. We need to go beyond the ability to read and write so that girls are equipped to access decent employment or be entrepreneurs. This requires a good investment in the education sector, including the quality training of teachers, motivation and good working conditions, and having the tools and materials to use. *Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda*

Listen to girls: SDGs can deliver transformative change for girls only if they have been consulted and their priorities and needs have been taken into account. Girls should be

viewed as agents of change and not as beneficiaries - therefore their engagement in the implementation of the SDGs is crucial. For this we need to recognise the leadership potential of girls. We have witnessed firsthand the massive contributions that girls and young women as volunteers delivered for MDGs. *Anush Aghabalyan*

Be bold: It's no longer enough to do trickle-down pilot projects. What is required are bold commitments and interventions that enable us to go scale. *Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda*

Engage the private sector: The business community plays a key role in making sure investment in girls and women happens. It is very interesting to see how inequality is being discussed in Davos and among industries. The world is waking up. *Katja Iversen*

Nurture grassroots women's organisations: Research across 70 countries and throughout four decades (1975 to 2005) has shown a strong link between autonomous feminist movements and government action to end violence against women. However many women's rights organisations are struggling to survive in the current financing environment. *Kasia Staszewska*

Talk about failure: We need to encourage donors to take risks and to create an environment more open and tolerant about failure. Shifting discriminatory social norms and behaviours will take time. *Lucie Faucherre*

Believe in the possibility of rapid change: It is important to emphasise that it is possible to change social norms in less than a lifetime. We see that in multiple places, even in some of the issues that some deem sensitive, FGM (female genital mutilation) and young people's access to modern contraceptives. The real change come when the demand comes from the communities and young people themselves. *Katja Iversen*

Dig out the roots, rather than cut off a branch: I worry that the current focus on specific practices, such as early and forced marriage, rather than underlying structural factors might not produce the kind of outcomes we seek. It is important to understand the reasoning behind these practices, for example why in poor communities in many countries early marriage is considered protective of girls, and to explore what other options might exist within communities, families and young people (boys and girls). For example, making schools more accessible to girls can make a difference, helping to delay marriage. Sometimes the solutions are simple, such as separate latrines for girls and boys or organising things so that girls can be accompanied on their way to and from school. *Jo Boyden*

Teach sex education: One issue that it is crucial to address in the SDGs, and not least in the implementation, is the need for comprehensive sexuality education. Right now it is not included but we know how crucial it is for all, especially girls. Prevention is better and cheaper than cure, and it seems to me that we could to some extent prevent a lot of the issues we are fighting today if good, comprehensive sexuality education was in place in all schools. *Katja Iversen*

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