



Women and power

What can the numbers tell us about women's voice, leadership and decision-making?

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Key messages

- Most indicators of women's leadership and decision-making measure factors that we assume enable or result from women's empowerment, such as access to resources and legal rights.
- Indicators that measure women's influence over decisions *in practice* are rare. They mainly measure women's representation in senior positions and women's self-reported decision-making power.
- Indicators also tend to rely on national data. This can allow us to make comparisons internationally and analyse trends, however, subnational data is less common and can provide more insight into differences between groups of women.
- To better measure women's leadership and decision-making, indicators need to be comparable; able to measure diverse facets of voice and leadership and disaggregated where possible.
- A priority for development agencies is to expand the number of variables systematically collected, starting with women in senior national positions and in local government.
- A priority for researchers and programme managers is to develop clusters of indicators to measure substantive voice and leadership, and make greater use of mixed-methods approaches.

More information can be found at:
www.odi.org/women-and-power

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Introduction

This briefing provides an overview of existing global indicators for measuring women's voice and leadership. It outlines the methodological and conceptual issues that should be taken into account when using these indicators and critically examines the current state of available data in terms of the wider universe of proposed indicators. It concludes with a series of recommendations in relation to collecting better data and improving their use. The briefing is accompanied by an online database of indicators and data sources, to facilitate a better understanding and utilisation of existing data resources.

Conceptual framework and methodology

This briefing is part of the Women's Voice and Leadership in Decision-making Project. Using a conceptual framework drawn from the project (see Domingo et al., 2014; O'Neil and Domingo, 2015), the briefing examines indicators for the three aspects of interest – women's voice, decision-making power and leadership (see Box 1).

The database was constructed in two phases. In the first phase, we examined selected literature on measuring gender equality and women's voice, leadership and decision-making to map the conceptual debates within the field and to identify indicators and indicator sets proposed by leading organisations and academics¹ – referred to here as **proposed indicators**. These proposed indicators were then classified into three domains – **political, economic and social** – and then further classified as providing either **direct** or **indirect** evidence of women's leadership and decision-making.

These distinctions are outlined in greater detail in the following sections, but can be summarised as follows. **Direct** indicators in themselves provide strong evidence of women

performing leadership roles or undertaking decision-making.² **Indirect** indicators, by contrast, provide evidence for circumstances that are considered elements to **enable**, or likely **outcomes** of, women's voice and leadership, but that are distinct from women's voice and leadership itself. Indirect indicators are broken down into four categories:

1. **Attitudes and perceptions:** the presence of particular beliefs regarding the state of the world and women's place in it;
2. **Legal measures and constitutional rights:** the presence of particular laws or legal provisions;
3. **Participation:** women's presence and activity in public spaces and institutions – labour markets, civil society, politics, etc.;
4. **Access to resources:** women's access to or possession of a range of resources or capabilities, e.g. education, political knowledge, wealth, health care access, etc.

This breakdown was guided by a combination of the conceptual framework for the overall Women's Voice and Leadership in Decision-making Project, the areas that were focused on by indicators proposed by leading organisations and academics, and the organising frameworks used in the most recent literature.

In the second phase, these **proposed indicators** were cross-referenced with existing global databases to map what data are currently being collected, the extent of their coverage and where there are clear gaps. The indicators for which existing sourcing was found are referred to here as **sourced indicators**. The recommendations given in this document relate specifically to the gaps and challenges identified through this process.

Box 1: Voice, decision-making power and leadership

Voice refers both to the act of making known one's preferences, demands, views and interests (whether individually or collectively) and to the capabilities this requires (e.g. the capacity to make informed choice) (O'Neil et al., 2007).

Decision-making power is the ability to influence decisions that affect one's life – both private and public. It is a composite of access, capabilities and actions that shape whether women have influence over the polity or decisions about their private life. Formal access to positions of authority and to decision-making processes is therefore an important condition for women to have decision-making power in the public domain, but it is not sufficient in itself.

Leadership is defined as the individual and collective capabilities to mobilise 'people and resources (economic, political and other) in pursuit of particular ends' (Lynne de Ver, 2009). Leadership therefore involves the ability to influence the ideas and behaviour of others and is effective when it translates into outcomes, whatever the content of those might be. Leadership may or may not coincide with being in public positions of authority. Having influence with, over and through people and processes is therefore central to both leadership and decision-making power.

1 See references for a complete list of documents reviewed for this process.

2 These are referred to in the accompanying database as 'leadership/decision-making'.

Three major sources of data were used in the compiling and mapping of indicators and sources:

1. Generic global social, political and economic indicator sets compiled by international organisations;
2. Specific global women's empowerment indicator sets compiled by international organisations;
3. Indicators used by academic papers, grey literature and evaluation reports.

The references and Annex A present a complete list of sources and databases examined.

1. The conceptual debate

There is no single ideal set of indicators for all occasions. Rather, the purpose of any investigation is key to understanding which indicators may be most suitable and limitations on how they can be interpreted. These aspects are shaped by the issues explored below, which should be borne in mind when collecting, selecting or interpreting indicators for analysis.

1.1 How comparable are indicators across contexts and time?

Comparing conditions across different countries and contexts requires indicators that are consistent in terms of how the data are collected and interpreted. Proportion of women in the legislature may therefore be appropriate as a comparison, whereas presence of female genital mutilation or dowry practices – which are culturally bounded – may be less appropriate. Other indicators could be used to compare across states and contexts but are generally not used for this purpose owing to practical limitations. In some cases, there are no internationally agreed definitions so data are not truly comparable across contexts – for example extent of women's access to credit or land ownership, given that definitions and forms vary across cultures and stages of economic development.

In other cases, the data are considered less of a priority in existing national and international data collection efforts (e.g. data on women's presence in subnational and local government) so are collected irregularly, making it harder to use to track change and interpret trends. Some data may also require too great of an investment from international agencies to collect globally in a representative manner on a regular basis and so are uncollected. Otherwise, they are collected in a non-standardised manner by national agencies for their own purposes or in specific regions to analyse the impacts of particular programmes or for relatively small-scale studies (e.g. women's participation in health facility governance bodies or planning applications).

Comparing conditions in a single state or context over time does not necessarily require indicators that are consistent or valid in other contexts, although this may be preferred when examining changes associated

with a particular policy or intervention. As a result, a broader range of indicators may allow for a richer analysis of changes in these contexts or more imaginative understandings and approaches. Jupp et al. (2010), for example, draw on the experience of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency in implementing participatory evaluation of women's empowerment programmes in Bangladesh and suggest using achievement rates of self-defined targets for empowerment to measure programme effectiveness.

However, making comparisons over time requires consistency over the period of analysis in terms of how indicators are collected and how they can be interpreted. This can create challenges in comparing indicators over long periods of time, as social norms or political and economic structures may change. For example, in the short to medium term, contraceptive prevalence could be used as a measure of women's empowerment. In the long run, however, shifts in social norms and economic preferences may lead to men also desiring smaller families – making it ambiguous as to whether this is truly an indicator of women's empowerment. Equally, women's expectations and perceptions of their own empowerment may shift over time and so can also create challenges when relying on self-defined empowerment indicators or self-reported empowerment levels.

1.2 How do we interpret indicators and what else do we need to know?

Measuring women's voice and leadership faces similar conceptual difficulties as measuring women's empowerment more broadly. Empowerment is acknowledged to be both a process and an outcome (World Bank, 2005) and has been defined as 'the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them' (Kabeer, 2001). In light of this definition, measuring women's voice and leadership requires indicators that capture the presence and importance of women's actions and agency in the acquisition and deployment of leadership and voice (process), as well as the content of their use (outcome).

Conceptual challenges in measuring public leadership, voice and decision-making

Measuring leadership and voice directly is therefore extremely challenging. It is possible to hold a position of leadership without exercising power and equally possible to exercise power without being a leader or holding a leadership position. This applies equally to the absolute numbers of women in positions of leadership and the relative position of men and women in leadership: equality of male and female representation in a legislature that has no real influence tells us little about women's leadership or voice in practice. Similarly, in terms of voice, it is possible to be part of a demonstration or rally without necessarily being able to influence the message it conveys

or supporting the outcomes intended from it, particularly in contexts where patronage strongly influences political actions. Understanding the true content of these indicators is therefore difficult without viewing them in the broader context of formal and informal power relations.

A related issue is whether women's voice and leadership must necessarily be transgressive in order to be genuine – something that is rooted in the historical experience of societies and is not immediately apparent in indicators designed to be applicable across contexts. For example, quota mechanisms that guarantee female representation in the legislature or other public bodies often increase the number of women in leadership positions. However, by recording all female MPs equally, indicators of female representation in legislatures may therefore conceal dynamics with important implications for women's power – such as between women elected in seats that are completely open, based on gender-balanced candidate lists, or reserved for women. These are not necessarily issues that can be solved through the collection of a specific indicator or set of indicators, but should be borne in mind when interpreting data and prescribing policy approaches. Aligned with this as well is the question of whether the outcomes of women's leadership further empower women, or whether they reinforce the *status quo* and female vulnerability.

Assessing the extent of women's voice and leadership using numerical indicators of actions, presence or positions alone therefore does not tell us the extent to which they constitute genuine voice or leadership from the women in question. Understanding the meaning of these indicators requires further interrogation and triangulation with other sources of information.

Public and private decision-making – the challenges of measuring individual experience

Alongside more qualitative research, there is the potential to use measures that focus more at the level of individual experiences. These investigate the process of voice, leadership and decision-making by interrogating the actions, decisions, perceptions and attitudes of those engaged in these processes. Examples might include self-reported control over household investments or spending, or the decision-making process around participating in a public meeting. These provide a richer source of information than enumerated participation or leadership positions alone, but there are considerable challenges in using these data in a comparative way.

Decision-making power within the household and in the public sphere are not necessarily linked, meaning questions on decision-making need to be carefully tailored to domain and sphere. Conceptualisations of leadership and voice, and the link between household and public influence, can also vary widely across cultures and even between individuals, making comparison challenging. There is also a considerable challenge in terms of self-reported indicators, whereby women make judgements of their situation based

on frames of reference that are socially bounded, and adapt their expectations to their circumstances and those of others around them – making it hard to establish a true and objective baseline.

There are also challenges in how we define women's voice and leadership. Are women engaged in genuine decision-making only if they follow their preferences or is there also room for discussion and compromise, for example within the household? If the latter is the case, how do we easily distinguish between women who could follow their own preferences but choose to account for others' views as well and those who internalise a view of themselves as secondary to the wishes of others? There is also the question of delegated decision-making (i.e. women choosing to allow their husbands to take decisions in particular spheres or vice versa). These issues link to a broader question of how voice, leadership and decision-making can be most directly observed – through actions, decisions or attitudes. As noted above, the content of actions is hard to access, while definitions of decision-making are not unproblematic and the presence of attitudes or aspirations is not the same as their realisation. These forms of indicators therefore add to the richness of our understanding of these issues, but by no means solve the challenge of directly observing women's voice and leadership.

The potential and challenges of indirect indicators

One response to these challenges in the empowerment literature is to accept the difficulties of using direct indicators and attempt to augment them by using indirect indicators that are simpler to measure. These can be selected on the basis of strong theoretical or empirical reasons to believe they are associated with women's voice and leadership, as enabling factors that can facilitate it, as outcomes that would be expected as a consequence or as a combination of both.

Using indicators that measure factors that we assume enable or result from women's voice and leadership as indicators of voice and leadership itself is insufficient, for several reasons.

First, indicators that relate to the institutional environment (e.g. equal rights amendments, laws on inheritance, divorce, violence against women, etc.) do not guarantee they will be enforced in practice or women will take advantage of them. They may provide important legal protection and/or political leverage for potential female leaders or actors, but are qualitatively different from actual voice or leadership.

Second, indicators such as economic activity rates, contraceptive prevalence, marital age or female education levels are good measures of the resources women may have access to that can allow them to exercise voice or act as leaders. However, the extent to which these decisions are made by women for women (and may therefore be more relevant to them), or reflect male preferences, is unclear. Attitudes towards these different aspects varies widely

across cultures and within the same culture as social norms and economic circumstances shift, meaning they cannot be taken at face value as a sign of women's voice or leadership. It is also important to consider how these resources are used and the content of the actions: having more women in work or earning more does not mean they control the fruits of their labour; greater levels of female education do not necessarily translate into broader opportunities to use these knowledge and skills.

Third, empowerment often requires contestation, and its multifaceted nature means not all indicators will move in the same direction at the same time. Expansion of women's access to resources (whether in terms of credit, income or leadership positions) may trigger a struggle for control of these resources that results in a backlash, for example increased violence against women, the closing of avenues for further advancement or state repression, tightened laws or enforcement of customs. Indicators of these aspects can be interpreted as a slowing or reversal of women's voice and leadership, but may in fact be a manifestation of it as new areas are opened up for contestation.

It is important to bear in mind, therefore, that neither direct nor indirect measurement of women's voice and leadership is unproblematic and that indicators should not be viewed in isolation, but rather in the context of a range of other sources of information.

1.3 Multidimensional and multi-spatial indicators

Measuring women's voice and leadership within and across contexts requires the collection of multidimensional and multi-spatial indicators. Indicators need to be collected across the economic, political and social dimensions, but also at a range of levels of society.

Political leadership, for example, can be measured in terms of the presence of women in parliament, but a fuller picture of the opportunities and extent of female leadership can be gained by measuring their presence at other levels of government or in civil society organisations that can incubate leadership skills. Similarly, economic leadership may include figures at the national level presence of women CEOs, but may also involve presence of female business owners, landowners or professionals in a range of sector and industries.

Certain factors, such as presence and content of laws on marriage, inheritance, political rights, etc., may be measurable only at the level of nation or polity. However, aspects of these can be explored at subnational level, such as extent to which laws are enforced and women access them in practice.

Household-level indicators are also vital given that the household and family is a key site of women's disempowerment. This is particularly the case for social and economic aspects of voice and decision-making, such as time usage, expenditure, family planning, education or health decisions, etc. These can act as both indirect indicators of voice and leadership in the public domain

and direct indicators, if we understand the household itself as a domain of contestation where there may be persistent inequalities between men and women's access to resources and decision-making, and even between women in the same household.

Indicators must also be interpreted across multiple dimensions, not only in the sense that voice, leadership and decision-making can occur in economic, political and social dimensions but also because their presence in one dimension can affect women's power in other dimensions and in overall. Decision-making in the political sphere, for example, can allow women to reshape institutions and the overall distribution of resources – creating the potential for greater leadership and decision-making in the social and economic spheres. These feedback loops may also operate in reverse – with greater control over resources or freedom to act socially allowing for greater independence and political mobilisation. The impact of – and enabling factors for – women's voice, leadership and decision-making must therefore be understood broadly in the context of indicators across multiple dimensions and different spatial levels, rather than within a single, narrow sphere (Eyben, 2011; Kabeer, 1999; Luttrell et al., 2009).

1.4 Intersecting disadvantages and disaggregation

The intersectional nature of disadvantage is an important issue, and gender-based disadvantage sits alongside other marginalising factors (e.g. ethnic, religious, socioeconomic). Aggregate figures may mask how disadvantage is compounded for certain groups or whether there are groups of women that are relatively advantaged in exercising voice and leadership. Detecting these patterns can provide a basis for considering enabling factors and how best to target engagement and support.

The collection of data in a manner that allows representative disaggregation along societal cleavages and at lower levels of society is therefore crucial to understanding patterns of women's leadership and voice, as well as whose preference are being reflected. This will not be possible for all indicators (e.g. legal provisions are universal so cannot be disaggregated, although their implementation may be). In most cases, though, disaggregation is possible, but there are practical challenges in terms of the resources and time needed to build up large and detailed databases.

The basic fact that women are not all the same also raises important issues as to what is expected from women's voice and leadership. The presence of socially conservative female leaders in positions of power is unlikely to lead to an expansion in women's empowerment in social dimensions, while wealthier women in positions of power may have very different priorities for action than poor women. Even at the household or family level, conflict between women may arise from greater female empowerment, for example in cultures where the mother-in-law exercises power within the household and younger

women then challenge this. Changes in indicators – such as rising female employment rates or greater reported decision-making power at the household level – may therefore be associated with changes of in the distribution of power between women as well as absolute changes in women’s voice or leadership.

2. Overview of existing indicators

A review of international databases and recent literature on women’s empowerment, voice and leadership produced a list of 355 potential indicators. Table 1 gives a breakdown of the 226 indicators that are sourced, meaning they are readily available from public data sources and are regularly collected for a wide range of countries at the national level, with a minority of 57 also having easily accessible data that are representative of subnational regions. This does not include existing data sources that are not publically accessible (e.g. Gallup polls that have relevant indicators but are not freely accessible to researchers).

2.1 Direct indicators

It is striking that, of the 33 indicators that are **direct measures of leadership or decision-making**, almost half are in the social domain (15 of 33), with a relatively even division of the remainder into the political and economic domains. The indicators in the social domain are largely concerned with control over specific actions or decisions in the household – for example decisions on cooking for the household, decisions on personal health, etc. Some of these are also found in the economic domain – for example control of earnings – but the vast majority are in the social domain and these also form the bulk of the leadership and decision-making indicators that are available at the subnational level.

In contrast, half of the indicators in the economic domain, and almost all the indicators in the political domain are concerned with the proportion or number of women holding senior positions in the economic and political domain – that is, public leadership roles. A smaller proportion of these are available at the subnational level. This is partly because certain political indicators in particular are national by construction (e.g. there is only

Table 1: Sourced indicators by type and domain

	Indicator type	Economic	Political	Social	Total
Direct	Leadership and decision-making power	10	8	15	33
Indirect	Attitudes and perceptions	3	3	20	26
	Legal measures and constitutional rights	23	12	27	62
	Participation	12	11	1	24
	Access to resources	13	1	67	81
	Total	61	35	130	226

Table 2: Indicators types by sourced status

	Indicator type	Sourced	Unsourced	Total
Direct	Leadership and decision-making power	33	28	61
Indirect	Attitudes and perceptions	26	22	48
	Legal measures and constitutional rights	62	16	78
	Participation	24	24	48
	Access to resources	81	39	120
	Total	226	129	355

one chief justice so gender cannot be disaggregated by region), but for others it is the result of a lack of data at subnational level or challenges in harmonising indicators in such a way they are cross-nationally comparable.

The absence of a wide range of direct indicators, particularly at the subnational level, added to the conceptual challenges (as explored in the preceding section), demonstrates the challenge of using existing data to analyse women's voice and leadership across countries. Annex B gives a full breakdown of these indicators by domain and data availability.

2.2 Indirect indicators

The largest single group of indicators is of those relating to **access to resources** (81 indicators), followed by **legal measures and constitutional rights** (62 indicators). Both of these categories are composed of indicators for factors that we assume enable women's voice and leadership, and may also be outcomes of processes of voice or leadership. However, as noted in previous sections, in isolation they can provide us only with indirect evidence. Indicators of legal measures or constitutional rights, for example, can be considered strong indicators only alongside data on enforcement and usage. The lack of these data means it is unclear in many cases if these laws exist in practice as well as on paper. Similarly, access to resources – a wide-ranging category – is distinct from control over those resources or utilising them in order to exercise voice or leadership. An example that touches on both types of indicators is women's access to and control of land: to understand the true nature of property rights, data on formal property rights need to be viewed alongside data on women's landownership patterns, but also alongside data on women's land use patterns.

Indicators for **attitudes and perceptions** form a smaller group (26), with the vast majority of these being social indicators. These include indicators that look at the attitudes and perceptions of men and women to female leadership, equal rights and progress towards these, but also those that look at women's perceptions of their social position, levels of happiness and opportunities. These may act as important evidence of factors that may enable women's voice and leadership – in terms of both women's desire for change and the potential for male allies – but are indirect indicators as they do not contain information as to the ability of women to realise these desires in practice.

Indicators for **participation** form the smallest group by a small margin – 24 in total – with the bulk evenly split between the economic and political domains. The absence of collected data on social participation is striking – with few sources of data regarding women's mobility, access to public spaces or involvement in social institutions or organisations.

The extent to which **proposed indicators** (i.e. those proposed by international organisations and academics) have been classified as **sourced indicators** (i.e. those proposed indicators that are currently collected and available for a wide range of countries) varies considerably across indicator type.³ Table 2 gives a breakdown of this. The vast majority of proposed indicators for legal measures and constitutional provisions, for example, are currently collected (62 of 78), although data on their implementation are lacking. Similarly, two-thirds of proposed indicators are currently collected in terms of access to resources (81 of 120). In contrast, just over half of proposed indicators for attitudes and perceptions are currently collected (26 of 48) and there is a similar ratio for leadership and decision making, with 33 indicators sourced of the 61 proposed. Participation indicators are the least well collected at present, with just half of the 48 proposed indicators having a current source.

In terms of domains, social indicators make up just over half of all proposed indicators (186 of 353), while a higher proportion of proposed economic and social indicators have existing sources (66% and 70% respectively) in contrast with political indicators (46%).

2.3 The strengths and limitations of existing indicators

The existing data on women's voice and leadership have some clear strengths and weaknesses. There is now a strong evidence base on the legal and constitutional environment that women operate in across contexts, as well as data on the presence of women in positions of power in a range of institutions (national legislatures, firms, universities, judiciary, etc.). Data on the resources women have access to and their rates of participation are also considerable, with good coverage of education and health status, as well as a range of economic indicators (including wealth, property, credit access and labour force participation). These are important contributions to understanding the status of women in society and the resources they may be able to use to improve it.

There are clear and substantial gaps, however. Data on the presence of legal measures and constitutional provisions are not matched with data on enforcement rates or the extent to which women attempt to use these provisions in practice. It is therefore unclear whether these provisions have any impact on women's experience and the extent to which they constitute real opportunities for women to exercise voice and leadership.

The range of indicators on resources, both economic and social, also do not tell us the extent to which women are able to exercise control over either these resources or their broader life choices. Very few of the indicators measure control as opposed to ownership and there

3 Annex B contains a breakdown of proposed indicators by domain, type and sourced status.

are conceptual challenges in terms of how to interpret indicators of decision-making by women at the household level. Despite this, greater collection of these forms of data in terms of variables, coverage and matched data for the same women across time, alongside deeper qualitative research, would allow more concrete links to be made between improvements in women's access to resources and the extent to which they are in a position to utilise them.

The available political indicators also lack strong evidence on women's influence as well as presence. Indicators focus strongly on formal rights, presence of women in organised political bodies (e.g. national legislatures) and specific actions such as voting. However, there is still a gap in data availability regarding prominence and power of women within organisations such as non-governmental organisations and trade unions, as well as ministerial portfolios in the executive. This makes it hard to tell the extent to which women's participation in public life and institutions is translating into influence within society. There are also relatively few data on women's presence in subnational governance structures, making it harder to judge the extent to which female leadership is widespread and whether there are a range of routes into power. These more detailed forms of data would strengthen claims of female political voice and leadership, but will also suffer from the limitations noted above in terms of how much they have control and influence beyond the holding of official posts.

Across a range of domains and indicators types, the lack of data at the subnational level is both striking and problematic. Progress towards women's voice and leadership is likely to move at different rates for different groups in society, and collecting subnational data is critical to make visible intersecting disadvantage. Without expanded coverage, consolidation and linking of these data, we may be in a position where we can make broad statements about the progress of women's voice and leadership in a country as a whole but where this will conceal considerable and important variations between different groups.

The present state of data coverage for women's voice and leadership is therefore growing, but limited – meaning we must exercise caution in making strong claims regarding progress in different areas on the basis of indicators alone.

3. Next steps and conclusion

This section outlines several options for addressing the current weaknesses in collected indicators for women's voice and leadership. Practical difficulties – resource limitations and difficulties in generating definitions that are both useful and applicable across a range of national subnational contexts – constrain detailed data collection for many variables. These recommendations therefore concentrate modestly on three areas.

3.1 Cluster indicators to make the most of what we have

Better data that measures whether women have more voice and influence in practice is the ideal. However, in the absence of new data sources, researchers and programme designers can cluster indicators together to strengthen them. While we can conclude relatively little from many indicators in isolation, clustering enables us to double-check inferences and observe whether findings are consistent and have similar trends over time. This can be best illustrated through some brief examples.

For example, presence of quotas for the proportion of female members in the legislature is a relatively weak indicator, but can be strengthened if viewed in light of women in political leadership positions (e.g. ministerial posts, committee chairs), proportion of women elected outside of quota seats, relative success rates for female candidates, the relative level of female voter turnout and presence or absence of positive public perceptions of female leaders.

In the economic domain, presence of formal rights to inheritance and land ownership can be checked against proportion of land held by women, women's land usage patterns and a range of wealth indicators. Similarly, at a more micro level, evidence of rising female economic activity rates can be supported or refuted as evidence of women's leadership and voice by data on time use and survey data on changes in household spending and investment allocation decisions. An analogous approach is being taken by the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index. This is produced by weighting a variety of indicators around women's engagement in agriculture, including decision-making on production issues; ownership of resources; control over income; group membership and leadership; and division of paid and unpaid labour to produce an overall empowerment score (Malapit et al. 2014)⁴.

⁴ The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index is currently at the baseline stage as of 2014, with national data coverage for 13 countries. Its individual indicators are not included in the database here as they lack panel data at present, however they should be a priority for integration once the second round of the index has been produced.

While clustering indicators in this manner does not produce definitive evidence of women's voice and leadership, it does strengthen the case individual indicators make. In some cases, these can use data that are currently collected; in other cases, it can guide data collection priorities for particular projects or for broader expansion.

3.2 Priorities for data collection – linkages and low-hanging fruit

While it is not practical to collect on all the indicators that would be desirable in all contexts, some low-hanging fruit could act as a sensible first step to expanding international data collection, and particularly those indicators likely to add value to the idea of data clusters explored above. DFID and other development agencies with a focus on women and girls could play an important role in promoting them as a priority in discussions around how to improve data collection and dissemination occurring around the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as lobbying for them to be integrated into existing cross-national surveys.

Some basic examples include more detailed data on female legislators and members of the executive, such as positions held in parliament (e.g. posts in committees) and presence in different ministerial portfolios, particularly the division between social ministries that are often thought of as more feminine (e.g. health, children and education) versus more traditionally masculine (e.g. defence, law and order, economics). These would require a degree of definitional agreement, but the raw data are increasingly easy to access digitally. Similarly, rates of electoral success and turnover for female legislators could be extracted from electoral rolls.

There are also a range of data collected by national and subnational bodies, both state and non-state, either for administrative purposes (e.g. hospital admission records, membership rolls, etc.) or as part of specific surveys and censuses (e.g. national agricultural surveys, censuses for local business taxation). Accessing these existing data sources would involve challenges in terms of guaranteeing data privacy and ensuring some degree of comparability across organisations and contexts. However, they could provide a valuable source of insights into women's voice, leadership and decision-making, if properly linked, cross-checked and interrogated, without requiring entirely new data collection efforts.

Another aspect to consider is the leeway for piggy-backing micro-data variables of interest into existing

and frequently collected household surveys such as Demographic and Health Surveys or Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. These already include a range of variables related to health and education status, as well as household decision-making, but could be further expanded. The Gender & Development Network, for example, provides a useful set of proposals in terms of integrating these forms of indicators into the monitoring process for the Sustainable Development Goals, including more detailed data on women's presence, role and perceptions of impact in elected posts at different levels of government (GADN, 2015).

3.3 Mixed methods for accessing content of decision-making

The conceptual limitations noted above mean even the most detailed dataset and cluster of indicators will still face challenges in measuring women's voice and leadership. When designing monitoring and evaluation frameworks for programmes focusing on women's voice and leadership, there is a strong case for using a mixture of quantitative, qualitative and ethnographic measures that will allow more detailed understanding of these processes. Data can still be collected from a broad population, but incorporating qualitative and ethnographic elements will give depth in terms of understanding the content of what is found and uncovering the complexity of dynamics at work. This will in turn allow programmes to better judge their true impact and how they can better adapt to better foster women's voice and leadership.

For example, discovering whether self-reported statements about joint decision-making or sharing of household chores match reality (or whether the responses are conditioned on what is perceived as socially desirable) and understanding precisely what a wife or husband means when they talk of about these things are crucial to understanding how comparable measures truly are. Equally, understanding the extent to which nominal leadership translates into actual power and influence may vary from organisation to organisation or person to person. More in-depth, qualitative investigation is therefore crucial to uncovering and understanding the true nature of power relations.

Taking these strategies together with an intelligent and genuinely inquisitive approach to the data will allow us to understand much more clearly the state of women's voice and leadership across the world, the dynamics that are at work in specific contexts and the challenges that lie ahead.

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Annex A: Major databases analysed

Title	Publisher	Link
Afrobarometer	Afrobarometer	http://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/analyse-online
Demographic and Health Surveys	USAID/The DHS Program	http://www.dhsprogram.com/
Gender and Land Rights Database	FAO	http://www.fao.org/gender-landrights-database/en/
Gender Data Portal	OECD	http://www.oecd.org/gender/data/
Gender Equality Data and Statistics	World Bank	http://datatopics.worldbank.org/gender/thematic-data
Gender Inequality Index	UNDP	http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/gender-inequality-index-gii
Gender Statistics	UN	http://genderstats.org/EDGE
Gender Statistics Manual	UN	http://unstats.un.org/unsd/genderstatmanual/
Harmonised set of global indicators on gender equality	OECD and IAEG-GS	http://www.oecd.org/gender/data/harmonisedindicators.htm
Pew Research Center–Global Indicators Database	Pew Research Center	http://www.pewglobal.org/database/
Social Institutions and Gender Index	OECD	http://genderindex.org/
Women, Business and the Law	World Bank	http://wbl.worldbank.org/
World Values Survey	World Values Survey	http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVOnline.jsp

Annex B: Direct measures of leadership and decision-making by domain and data availability

Indicators	Domain	Data availability
Changes in time-use in selected activities, particularly greater sharing by household members of unpaid housework and child-care.	Economic	National
Decision on use of earnings (Decision maker)	Economic	Subnational
Percentage firms with female top manager	Economic	National
Percentage of firms owned by women, by size	Economic	National
Proportion of employed who are employers, by sex	Economic	National
Proportion of employed who are own-account workers, by sex	Economic	National
Self-reported final say in making daily purchases	Economic	Subnational
Self-reported final say in making large purchases	Economic	Subnational
Women's control over earnings	Economic	Subnational
Women's share of managerial positions	Economic	National
Chief Justice is currently female	Political	National
Contact with officials, politicians and other leaders, as well as for and reason of contact, by sex	Political	National
Number for female justices on the constitutional court	Political	National
Percentage of men and women who voted in last election and reasons why, if not	Political	National
Proportion of females among tertiary education teachers or professors	Political	National
Self-reported percentage of men and women who vote in national elections	Political	Subnational
Share of female judges	Political	National
Women's share of government ministerial positions	Political	National
Ability to make childbearing decisions: use contraception, access abortion	Social	Subnational
Contraceptive prevalence among women who are married or in a union, aged 15-49	Social	Subnational
Female headed households, % of total households	Social	Subnational
Ideal and actual number of children (actual and mean, by gender)	Social	National
Percentage of sexually active men/women not using modern contraception who don't want children for at least 2 years	Social	Subnational
Percentage of women with no say in own health care	Social	Subnational
Percentage of women with no say in visits to friends	Social	Subnational
Reason for discontinuing contraceptive use (including husband disapproval and knowledge/access issues)	Social	Subnational
Reason for not using contraception (by gender, including spousal disapproval and knowledge/access issues)	Social	National
Seeking assistance in cases of domestic violence	Social	Subnational
Self-reported final say in all decision categories (health care; large purchases; daily purchases; visit to family, relatives, friends; and what food to cook daily) (all women/married/non-married)	Social	Subnational
Self-reported final say in own health care (all women/married/non-married)	Social	Subnational
Self-reported final say in visits to family, relatives, friends (all women/married/non-married)	Social	Subnational
Self-reported final say in what to cook daily (all women/married/non-married)	Social	Subnational
Women's participation in decision making (Self/joint with partner etc.-breakdown by five areas of decision making.)	Social	National

Annex C: Domain types by sourced status

Indicator domain	Sourced	Unsourced	Total
Economic	61	32	93
Political	35	41	76
Social	130	56	186
Total	226	129	355



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