POLITICAL WILL FOR GENDER DATA IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender equality is not just a matter of individual attitudes and behaviors; it requires a fundamental shift in policies, laws, budgets, and planning to create a conducive environment for all genders to thrive. This transformational change can only be achieved when different stakeholders within and outside the government are willing to implement and sustain policies that recognize and respond to the experiences of all genders.

The willingness and commitment by governments to take action on issues, goals, and policies is what we refer to as "Political will." It is the driving force behind the initiation and execution of decisions. The Local Development Research Institute conducted a qualitative study in 20 Sub-Saharan African countries to map the political will for gender data. In our research, some of the tenets that we focused on to evaluate countries commitments to Gender data included:

1. **Conceptualizing Gender data:** We examined how the National Statistics Office (NSOs) and Ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs) define Gender data and where their definition comes from to understand what guides the collection of gender data.

2. **Existing frameworks and Institutional arrangements that support the collection of Gender data:** We examined the existence of established frameworks and policies that guide the collection, analysis, and utilization of gender data and existing institutional arrangements that support the implementation of these policies. For example presence of gender focal points, gender observatory units and gender statistical units.

3. **Resource allocation:** We assessed the allocation of resources, such as funding and personnel, dedicated to gender data initiatives. This involved examining the level of financial investment and human resources available to support the collection, analysis, and dissemination of gender data.

4. **Relevance of gender data to policy priorities:** We evaluated the extent to which gender data is considered in the design of programs and policies and how this influences the overall progress in achieving gender equality, including examining the degree of transparency and openness in making gender data accessible to policymakers, researchers, civil society, and the public. This involved assessing data dissemination practices, data sharing mechanisms, and efforts to ensure data availability for evidence-based decision-making.

5. **Stakeholder engagements:** We explored the involvement and engagement of various stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and donor institutions, in the process of generating and utilizing gender data. This encompassed assessing collaboration, coordination, and partnership efforts aimed at advancing gender equality, including communication between technical experts and policymakers.

The countries being analyzed have made significant strides in promoting Gender data. Recognizing the significance of gender data in informing policy and development efforts, most countries have integrated gender data into their national development plans and National Gender policies. Institutional arrangements such as the availability of gender focal points, a gender observatory unit, and a gender statistics unit within the NSO influence the availability and collection of Gender data. Countries with either one of the above showed greater commitment to gender data.

Funding for gender data in the countries studied is predominantly integrated within broader statistical budgets. Governments tend to incorporate gender considerations into existing budget lines, without having specific allocations solely dedicated to gender data-related activities. Similarly, donors tend to view funding for gender data as targeted support for short-term projects rather than as a core funding priority.

In examining the relevance of Gender data to policy priorities, our study showed that the data quality, timeliness, analytical capacity, availability, and accessibility influence the use of data in decision making. Although Gender data has been significantly used to inform policy formulation in sectors such as health, education, formal employment, and political participation, there is limited use of gender- data in sectors such as mining, the military, transport and infrastructure, and the informal economy.

In looking at stakeholder engagement, countries where there is an existing partnership between the government, development partners, and non-state actors, showed greater advancements in Gender data. In some countries, there was a challenge of stakeholders working in silos and lack of inclusivity. In a country like Mozambique, for example, women were seen as being left-out or underrepresented in data collection tools such as surveys. The limited use of digital collection methods, especially in rural areas, also posed a challenge to the quality of data collected.

Despite the significant strides, certain challenges persist, such as gaps in Gender data quality, availability, and accessibility, inadequate financing for gender data, limited human resources, and inadequate analytical capacity.

The primary goal of this study was to gather valuable insights that will benefit various stakeholders within the data ecosystem and enhance the collection and utilization of gender data and commitments to Gender data by governments. Specifically, we aim to engage key actors such as the National Statistics Office, government agencies, civil society organizations, and donor institutions. Our report seeks to identify opportunities to improve the enabling environment for the collection, use, and dissemination of gender data initiatives and foster collaborative efforts that are tailored to address the specific needs and challenges at hand.

OUR APPROACH

To map out the political will for countries to fund, collect, and use Gender data, we conducted a comprehensive cohort study from March-May 2023 in a subset of twenty African countries, namely **Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Morocco, Ghana, Benin, Kenya, South Africa, Rwanda, Zambia, Togo, Tunisia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Botswana, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, and Senegal.** The study involved a qualitative research component conducted by Country Researchers in each country. The primary aim of this research was to gather evidence on the political will for gender data and provide expert assessments by conducting 4-5 interviews with key stakeholders in each country, including representatives from the National Statistical Offices (NSOs), government ministries, and donor agencies.

The questionnaire tool provided focused on testing the following assumptions to establish a qualitative baseline for political will and domestic resource mobilization around gender data:

1. Is there a need for improved connections between gender data focal points at National Statistics Offices (NSOs) and political actors responsible for setting programmatic and funding priorities?

2. Are there challenges related to domestic resource mobilization for gender data, including a lack of understanding on how gender data budgets are formulated, allocated, and expended? Is there a clear set of advocates monitoring and demanding accountability for gender data budgets over time?

3. Are there communication barriers between technical experts and policymakers when it comes to interpreting gender data? Do policymakers lack the necessary technical capacity to effectively interpret and utilize gender data?

4. Is the relevance of gender data to policy priorities compromised due to issues such as outdated data, lack of comparability, inaccessibility, or other related problems

# MAPPING THE POLITICAL WILL FOR GENDER DATA

The willingness and commitment by governments to take action on issues, goals, and policies is what we refer to as "Political will." It is the driving force behind the initiation and execution of decisions. In our research in evaluating the political will of countries towards Gender data we assessed several levers such as: how countries conceptualize Gender data, Existing frameworks and Institutional arrangements that support the collection of Gender data, resources available, use of Gender data in decision making and stakeholder engagement. Countries under study showed greater commitment towards gender equality, however, even though governments prioritize gender equality efforts, in some countries, the question of how Gender data complements these efforts remains unanswered.

Conceptualizing Gender data.

In understanding Gender data in Sub-Saharan African countries, it is essential to consider the sociocultural context, political priorities, and legal and policy frameworks that shape gender relations.

Our study showed that the working definition of Gender data by NSOs is influenced by development and donor partners and, within MDAs, by government priorities.

In theory, there exists a comprehensive understanding of Gender data, which is data that is disaggregated by sex and extends beyond to encompass various other indicators, such as age, persons with disabilities, and time use. This broader concept of Gender data aims to capture the differences between men and women across all domains and shed light on existing inequalities, ultimately serving as a basis for developing interventions to promote gender equality.
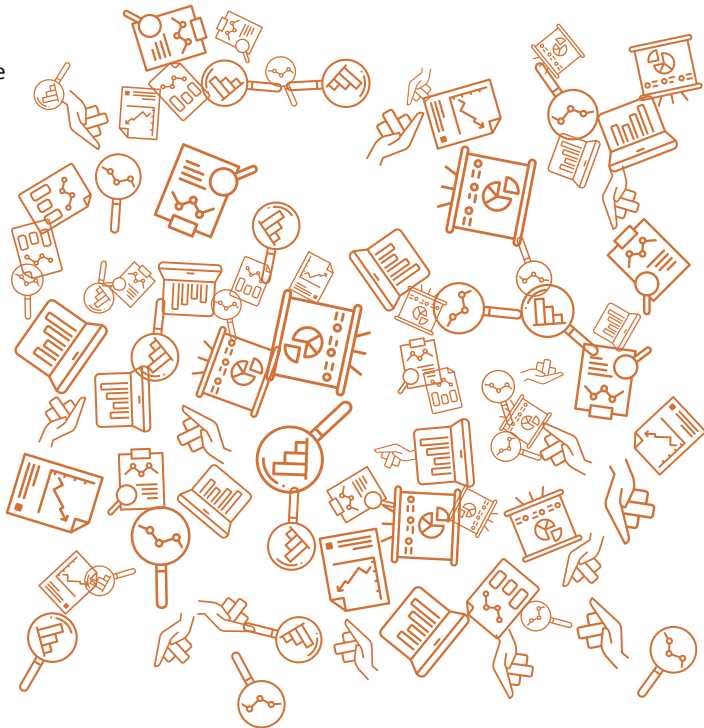
Research Coordinator, Namibia.

However, in practice, our study showed that the term "gender data" is often used interchangeably with "data disaggregated by sex/ sex disaggregated data." Consequently, while the theoretical understanding of Gender data is more encompassing, in practice, there is a tendency to equate it with data that is solely disaggregated by sex, which may have exclusionary implications for other factors that cause gender disparities such as cultural norms, societal expectations, economic inequalities, and institutional biases. It may also have implications for intersex persons and gender minority groups such as the LGBTQ community. This disparity between theory and practice has implications for policy formulation. By using a narrower definition of Gender data, policymakers may not have access to a more comprehensive picture of gender disparities and inequalities across various dimensions. This limited perspective could result in less effective policy interventions aimed at achieving gender equality, as important nuances and interconnections within gender-related issues might be overlooked.To ensure that policy formulation is informed by a broader understanding of Gender data, it is crucial to bridge the gap between theory and practice, encouraging the utilization of more comprehensive data that captures the multidimensional nature of gender disparities and goes beyond sex disaggregation.
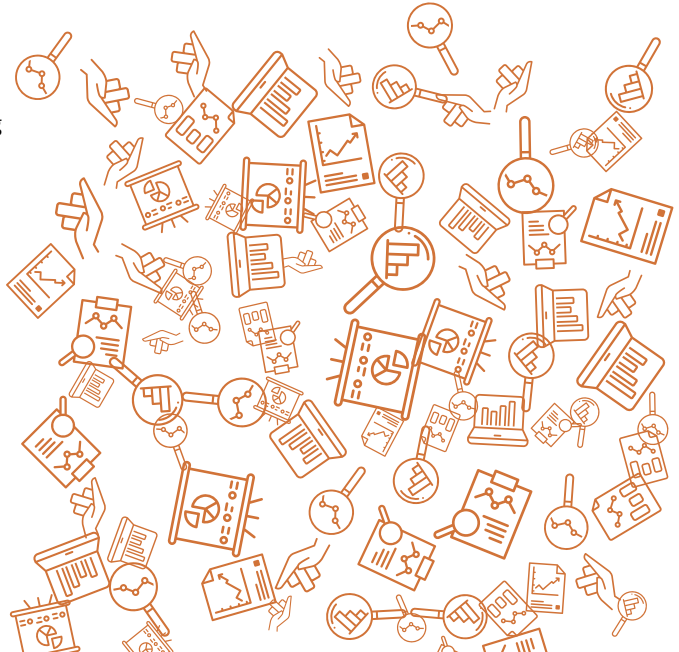
Existing frameworks and Institutional arrangements for collection of Gender data.

We examined the existence of established frameworks and policies that guide the definition,collection, analysis, and utilization of gender data and institutional arrangements that support the implementation of these policies.

Recognizing the significance of gender data in informing policy and development efforts, most countries have integrated Gender data into their national development plans and National Gender Policy. This integration reflects an understanding of the value of gender-disaggregated information in guiding and assessing progress towards gender equality within their respective national contexts. Ratification of international instruments such as CEDAW, Beijing, the Maputo Protocol, and the Sustainable development goals was also seen to influence the collection of Gender data as countries are expected to report on progress in gender indicators.
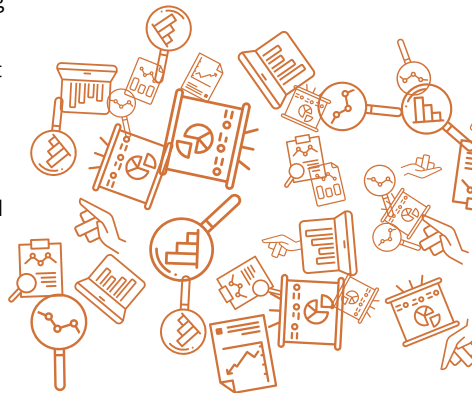
Countries with an existing national gender policy that explicitly mentions gender data include: Nigeria, Zambia, Namibia, Tunisia, Togo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, Botswana, Uganda, Burkina Faso, Benin,Mozambique, Kenya, Angola,and Ghana. Others have strengthened their commitments by having statistical acts that underscore the importance of the collection and utilization of gender data for decision making like Zambia's Gender Equity and Equality Act No. 22 of 2015 and National Statistics Act No. 13 of 2018 of the Laws of Zambia, and the Sierra Leone Gender Equality and Empowerment Act of 2022. From the assessment, National Frameworks that clearly describe the collection, dissemination and use of Gender data are limited.

In looking at institutional arrangements that support the collection of Gender data,the availability of gender focal points, a gender observatory unit, a monitoring and evaluation division, and a gender statistics unit within the NSO influences the availability and collection of Gender data. Countries with either one of the above showed greater commitment to gender data. Uganda, for example, has a gender and disability statistical unit that is responsible for gender data and an Equal Opportunities Commission that is mandated to review budgets submitted by all MDAs to the Ministry of Finance, Planning, and Economic Development (MoFPED) to examine if they have allocated resources for gender and equity aspects. Rwanda has a Gender and Monitoring Office separate from the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion. These institutional arrangements have been seen to provide great accountability for Gender data.

Resource Allocation

We assessed the allocation of resources, such as funding and personnel, dedicated to gender data initiatives. This involved examining the level of financial investment and human resources available to support the collection, analysis, and dissemination of gender data.
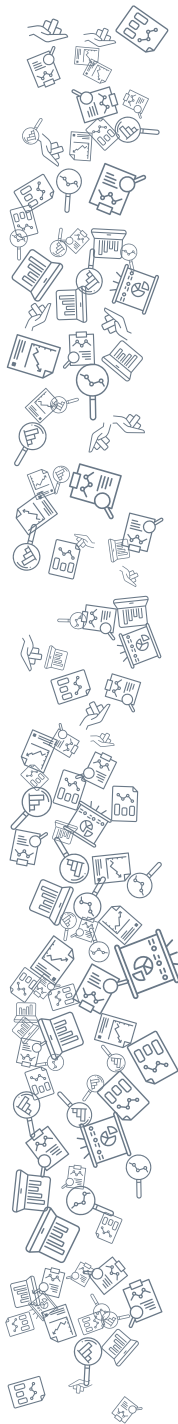
1. Gender Data Financing

> **"It is a challenge of Cost. It takes more time and resources to capture gender data, it is easier to count numbers than to count gender."**
> Interview respondent, Nigeria.

Gender data financing is essential for evidence-based decision-making, policy development, and programming that effectively address gender inequalities. It empowers individuals, informs targeted interventions, and promotes accountability for achieving gender equality goals. Adequate funding is crucial to sustain efforts in collecting, analyzing, and utilizing gender data, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and equitable societies.

Funding for gender data in the countries studied is predominantly integrated within broader statistical budgets. Governments tend to incorporate gender considerations into existing budget lines without having specific allocations solely dedicated to gender data-related activities. Similarly, donors tend to view funding for gender data as targeted support for short-term projects rather than as a core funding priority. The financing is often project-based and tied to specific initiatives, rather than being part of long-term, sustainable funding mechanisms. This situation underscores the availability of reliable and comprehensive Gender data.

While most countries follow this mainstreaming approach, there are a few exceptions that have taken specific measures to allocate separate budget lines for gender data financing. One notable example is Liberia, which has implemented a pilot project with a distinct budget line dedicated to gender data financing. Similarly, Tunisia has recognized gender data as a separate budget line in their 2019 finance law, although the implementation is still pending. Additionally, in 2022, Togo introduced gender budgeting for specific ministries, such as Public Works, Primary and Secondary Education, Health, Women, Agriculture, and Youth.
Our research further explored the funding sources, utilization, and funding gaps.

a) Funding Sources

In the countries under study, funding sources for gender data initiatives encompass both non-state actors and governments. Development partners play a significant role in financing gender data initiatives in countries like Malawi, Namibia, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Zambia, Senegal, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone.

Key development partners include Irish Aid, UNICEF, UNFPA, DANIDA, UN Women, the World Bank, Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office, OXFAM, Plan International, the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Swedish cooperation, Australian cooperation, SDGs Kenya Forum, UNECA, and AFDB. These partners have provided financial support and targeted technical assistance at various stages of the gender data process, including data production, analysis, and dissemination. On the other hand, countries such as Benin, Uganda, Botswana, Rwanda, Liberia, Tunisia, Togo, and Burkina Faso primarily rely on their respective governments for funding gender data initiatives.

b) Utilization of Funding

The allocated funding for gender data initiatives in the studied countries serves two primary purposes. Firstly, it is utilized to implement gender-based interventions aimed at addressing issues such as Gender-Based Violence, promoting education, healthcare, employment, and responding to humanitarian crises. Secondly, the funding supports technical assistance activities, including capacity-building for staff, the development of gender-sensitive surveys, and the monitoring and evaluation of gender indicators.

c) Funding gaps

All countries under study mentioned limited funding for gender data as a challenge, with the exception of Rwanda, Ghana, and Burkina-Faso. Mainstreaming gender within other budget lines does not guarantee sustainability in collecting and analyzing gender data. Countries tend to focus on donors and government priority areas. Over reliance on donor funding to generate gender data makes it difficult to produce regular and timely gender data. Lack of awareness of gender-sensitive budgeting within MDAs leaves Gender data initiatives out of some projects.

2. Human Personnel

Inadequate personnel pose a significant challenge to gender data activities, particularly within Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). There is a shortage of skilled personnel with expertise in gender data, hindering the effective implementation of gender-related initiatives. Moreover, the issue of personnel continuity arises as gender focal points are often transferred across different ministries and there are no mechanisms on knowledge management resulting in disruptions and a lack of consistency in data collection and analysis. Additionally, National Statistics Offices (NSOs) frequently face understaffing issues, particularly in terms of gender statistics experts. These staffing shortages limit the capacity of NSOs to effectively carry out gender data-related tasks and activities. Addressing these personnel-related challenges is crucial to strengthening gender data systems and ensuring the availability of skilled professionals to support comprehensive and accurate gender data collection, analysis, and utilization.

3. Relevance of gender data to policy priority

We evaluated the extent to which gender data is considered in the design of programs and policies and how this influences the overall progress in achieving gender equality, including examining the degree of transparency and openness in making gender data accessible to policymakers, researchers, civil society, and the public. This involved assessing data dissemination practices, data sharing mechanisms, and efforts to ensure data availability for evidence-based decision-making. The big question being, "is the Gender data available actionable?"

Gender data in the countries under study is used to identify key gender disparities, assess progress towards gender equality goals, and identify areas requiring targeted interventions. It guides the formulation and implementation of gender-responsive policies, programs, and strategies. However there are few challenges relating to quality, relevance and availability of data.

The data infrastructure in the countries under study varies in terms of quality, capacity, and accessibility. The study showed the over reliance of periodic data collection sources such as censuses as the only source of Gender data may limit the timely use of data for decision making as data is only collected after a certain period. The manual collection of data may also limit the quality and dissemination of data for evidence informed programming.

How data is made available may also impede use of data for decision making as it is not presented in summarized format and translated into "digestible policy recommendations." For example in a country like Ivory Coast, data that requires an in-depth analysis to meet specific needs warrants a payment from the user which may limit accessibility.

The availability and quality of data specific to gender, such as data on gender-based violence, time-use, and informal employment, are often limited. Data that is available includes data on reproductive health with a specific interest in maternal health, nutrition, adolescent health, HIV, education, employment, and political participation.

The study also showed that political incentives sometimes hinder the regular use of evidence for decision making which may lead to seeking and using evidence to support existing views or political positions while ignoring data and evidence that counters these positions. Having feedback mechanisms and empowering citizens to demand accountability and transparency is seen as a potential solution to this challenge.

Decision makers require context-specific evidence for informed, immediate decisions. Intermediation and knowledge brokering aid in tailoring evidence to policymakers' needs. Recognizing communication's significance between the NSOs and MDAs and engaging with policymakers and other stakeholders within the data ecosystem ensures evidence utilization in policy choices.

## Stakeholder Engagement and Gender Data champions

The level of stakeholder engagement varies. Countries where there is an existing partnership between the government, development partners, and non-state actors, showed greater advancements in gender data. In some countries, such as Uganda, there are well-established networks of gender data stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, and development partners. These stakeholders collaborate on gender data collection, analysis, and dissemination and have developed joint strategies to advance gender equality through data. For example, in Uganda, the CSO supplements data related to people with disabilities and supports citizen-generated data. In other countries, such as Burkina Faso, there are a limited number of stakeholders engaged in gender data work, which can affect the quality and availability of gender data.

There is an issue of inclusivity when it comes to stakeholder engagement in some countries, like Mozambique, where women might be left out or underrepresented during data collection methods such as surveys. Sierra Leone has a strong collaboration between Statistics Sierra Leone and other relevant stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs, which further supports the disaggregation of data.

Gender data champions in the public sector include the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Gender and Social Welfare, gender steering committees, gender focal points within MDAS, and the national statistics office. Within the private sector, the development partners and non-state actors advocating for gender data that seem to cut across include UN Women, UNECA, UNFPA, the Development Initiative, the World Bank, Swiss cooperation, the European Union, and the SDG Directory.

MINDING THE GAPS
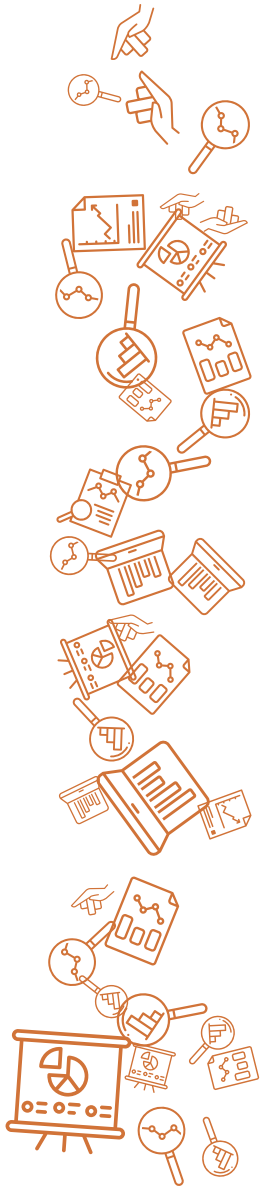
1. **Insufficient Gender Data:** Despite progress, there remains a significant gap in comprehensive and up-to-date gender data. The reliance on periodic data sources as the primary source for gender data restricts the regular production of gender-disaggregated data, limiting the ability to track progress and address gender inequalities effectively. Gender data available is published in pdf format and often does not include machine readable forms, which makes it difficult to re-use.

2. **Fragmented Data Management Systems:** Fragmented data management systems pose a challenge for accessing and integrating gender data. Different organizations and institutions maintain separate databases, creating a lack of coordination and hindering the establishment of a centralized data repository. This fragmentation limits stakeholders' ability to obtain a holistic view of gender-related issues and impedes comprehensive analysis and evidence-based decision-making. Additionally, the lack of a feedback mechanism further hampers the improvement of data quality and relevance.

3. **Inadequate Dissemination Channels:** Limited dissemination channels create barriers to accessing gender data. While National Statistics Offices (NSOs) and civil society organizations publish reports and data on their websites, the reach of these platforms may be limited, especially in remote and marginalized communities with limited internet access. To address this gap, it is essential to explore and expand alternative means of data dissemination, such as community engagement, radio broadcasts, and offline channels.

4. **Limited Capacity and Awareness:** Stakeholders within non-gender-focused Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) often face limitations in terms of capacity and awareness related to gender data. Insufficient training programs and resources on data analysis and interpretation hinder their ability to effectively analyze and utilize gender data for policymaking and program development. Additionally, a lack of awareness among community leaders and the public about the importance of gender data further impedes efforts to advocate for increased data availability and accessibility.

5. **Limited Analysis in Collected Data:** There is a tendency to use sex-disaggregated data and gender data interchangeably, limiting the depth of analysis. It is crucial to expand the analysis beyond simple sex-disaggregation and ensure that gender data encompasses more granular information and covers more sectors such as mining, public civil service, and the ministries responsible for lands. This will provide a comprehensive understanding of the gender disparities and challenges within specific contexts.

6. **Political Instability/ Humanitarian Crisis:** Political instability and humanitarian crises, such as the recent Covid-19 pandemic, pose additional challenges to data collection efforts. These circumstances disrupt data collection processes and make it challenging to gather accurate and timely gender data. The challenge of shrinking civic spaces creates little room for advocacy on gender issues. The instability and crisis situations require tailored approaches and resources to ensure data collection can resume and provide insights into the gendered impacts of such events.

7. **Gender data financing:** The challenges in financing gender data stem from donor fatigue caused by an excessive dependence on donor organizations for funding gender-related data initiatives. Insufficient domestic resourcing is often a consequence of the difficulties encountered in developing gender-responsive budgets, resulting in the allocation of statistical funding without a clear breakdown. Consequently, competing priorities emerge, leading to the unintentional neglect of gender data.
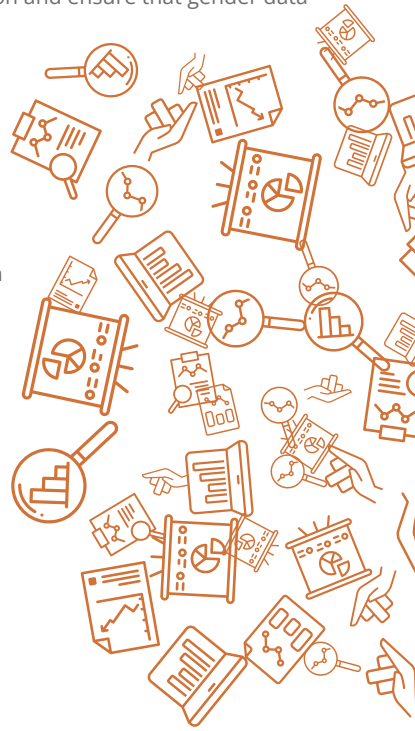
THE WAY FORWARD

1. **Strengthen Data Governance:** Data governance encompasses a range of elements, including guidelines, procedures, legal mandates, and strategies that oversee the entire process of collecting, disseminating, and utilizing data. Across the countries studied, a common approach involves integrating Gender data guidelines into National Gender frameworks and Statistical acts.

   To bolster these initiatives and bridge existing gaps, it's imperative to evolve beyond guidelines focussing on data collection only . The focus should extend to encompass guidelines addressing the comprehensive dissemination of gender data throughout institutions and ensuring public accessibility. A complementary measure involves implementing accountability and reporting frameworks. These frameworks play a pivotal role in ensuring consistent production of gender data across all sectors, transcending beyond just Education and Health sectors. In addition, coming up with verification and quality assurance mechanisms in order to incorporate data such as Citizen-generated data which offers a promising approach to address gaps in gender data.

   An effective strategy to enhance accountability involves fostering collaboration among Gender data champions. Rather than isolated individuals within specific Ministries, Departments, or National Statistics offices, these champions should collaborate within committees. This collective effort significantly enhances accountability and coordination, contributing to the overarching goal of promoting gender equality through comprehensive and well-regulated gender data governance.

2. **Strengthen Data Infrastructure:** The existing data infrastructure in the country under study varies in terms of quality, accessibility and interoperability. By enhancing the foundational elements like systems, technologies, processes, and resources, the entire data ecosystem can be elevated. Such enhancements will have a direct positive impact on gender-related data systems.
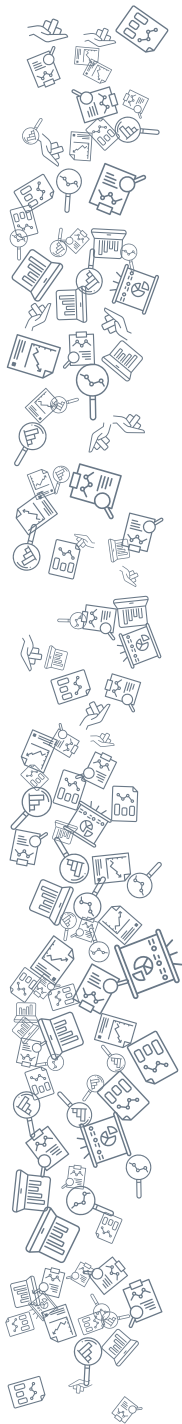
The study highlights the necessity of transitioning from manual gender data collection methods to digital approaches. This shift not only ensures data quality but also facilitates the dissemination of data in accessible formats. A vital step in this direction involves developing standardized methodologies for gathering gender data, while also harmonizing data collection efforts across different sectors.

In addition, improving coordination and collaboration beyond sectoral boundaries contributes to a holistic understanding of gender-related insights.

Human Resource Development: This entails the allocation of resources to expand both the quantity and expertise of human resources. It encompasses the establishment of a proficient workforce specializing in the collection, analysis, and utilization of gender data. This effort involves the recruitment and comprehensive training of personnel who possess a deep understanding of gender statistics, and subsequently, strategically placing them within pertinent institutions.

3. **Gender Data Financing:** The study reveals a notable commitment from governments to address gender equality disparities. However, for effective tracking of their progress, governments must simultaneously invest in gender data collection. This investment should encompass budgetary allocations specifically dedicated to gender data initiatives.

To achieve this, it's imperative to allocate funds for key Gender data surveys such as time-use surveys or Gender-Based Violence surveys. Additionally, investing in data analysis and dissemination activities is crucial to extract meaningful insights and ensure wider accessibility of the gathered data.

Allocating statistical funding without distinct budget lines can result in conflicting priorities. This situation often leads to the neglect or insufficient funding of Gender data initiatives, creating an undue dependence on external donor funding. To establish a sustainable and comprehensive approach, governments need to prioritize and allocate dedicated resources to gender data collection and analysis efforts.

The Way forward
For Partners and Donors

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1. **Provide Core financial support to improve the capacity for collection, use, and dissemination of Gender data more broadly beyond donor/partner interest.** Funding should be structured to be more long-term as opposed to being linked to projects and short-term initiatives and focus more on strengthening the data infrastructure within the support countries. In addition investing in the local institutions such as University departments and government schools for civil servants as training grounds for Gender data.

2. **Support Collection of data for decision making:** There is a need to support country efforts to collect gender data for decision making and move beyond data for reporting or tracking global or project indicators. The use of data for decision making involves using data to inform policy making decisions in all sectors and levels of government, with the aim of improving social and economic development, empowering citizens, improving service delivery, promoting transparency and accountability, and supporting innovation and entrepreneurship. There is a need to build a common vision for stakeholders within the data-ecosystem so as to coordinate resources to scale progress.

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