

Beyond Slogans - Good Practice to Count Us All In

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Summary

By 2050, about 2 billion people are expected to be over 60, representing 22% of the world's population.¹ Chronic poverty and income security in old age is widespread, and over 80% of persons with disabilities live in poverty.² However, women and girls with disabilities and older persons are routinely left out of evidence-based policy development due to limitations of data sets and pervasive negative social constructs, stereotypes, and discrimination.³ Our analysis provides: an in-depth examination of the current situation; promising practices involving data collection; and concrete recommendations for member states to begin addressing the invisibility of intersecting identities such as age, gender, and sex, and promote capacity building and accountability.

Key messages

- “By 2020.. increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely, and reliable data disaggregated by... gender, age,.. disability.. and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.” - **SDG target 17.18**
- “Right now, the most vulnerable groups are often under-represented in – or completely missing from – data, which means we don’t have a good picture of who they are, where they are, and what they need.” – Kathy Calvin, United Nations Fund

Who Is Being Left Behind?

Vast gaps in data collection result in policies and implementation of the SDG's that exclude significant segments of underrepresented groups, resulting in the invisibility of disadvantaged populations.⁴ Older persons and women and girls with disabilities are routinely left out of evidence-based policy development because of limitations of data sets and pervasive stereotypes, attitudes, and discrimination.⁵

“Being counted
means being seen.”

[HelpAge International]

- One out of every five women has a disability.
- Women comprise up to three-quarters of persons with disabilities in low and middle-income countries⁶
- 60 per cent of countries do not provide data on pensions for older women, resulting in the lack of data for evidence-based policy on older women.⁷
- 80 per cent of people with disabilities live in poverty.⁸ In the quest to end poverty while ‘leaving no one behind’ poverty data must include disaggregation for disabled persons.
- 60 per cent of people who reach 60 have or will acquire a disability.⁹
- Poverty rates among older people are missing from data in at least 93 countries, indicating the invisibility of millions of older people.¹⁰

The image below is from the World Bank Gender Data Portal. The age range of each indicator demonstrates the large population omission of those not 15 – 49 years old. The full life-cycle is excluded from this data set.

Women who do not own a house (% of women age 15-49)
Women who do not own a house (% of women age 15-49): Q1 (lowest)
Women who do not own a house (% of women age 15-49): Q2
Women who do not own a house (% of women age 15-49): Q3
Women who do not own a house (% of women age 15-49): Q4
Women who do not own a house (% of women age 15-49): Q5 (highest)
Women who do not own land (% of women age 15-49)
Women who do not own land (% of women age 15-49): Q1 (lowest)
Women who do not own land (% of women age 15-49): Q2
Women who do not own land (% of women age 15-49): Q3
Women who do not own land (% of women age 15-49): Q4
Women who do not own land (% of women age 15-49): Q5 (highest)
Women who own a house alone (% of women age 15-49)
Women who own a house alone (% of women age 15-49): Q1 (lowest)
Women who own a house alone (% of women age 15-49): Q2
Women who own a house alone (% of women age 15-49): Q3
Women who own a house alone (% of women age 15-49): Q4
Fig 1. World Bank, Gender Data Portal

Inclusive development requires inclusive data. Countries should encourage improvements in data collection so marginalized populations are recognized.

Countries that wish to successfully implement the sustainable development goals **must take data disaggregation seriously in order to “leave no one behind”** and represent their entire constituencies

The Bottom Line

Statistics are an essential piece of policy creation and implementation. Statistics lead to the creation of budgets and the allocation of resources. It is therefore crucial that statistics are accurate and address all populations, especially vulnerable populations. Data disaggregation is the only way member states can ensure they follow through on plans to ‘leave no one behind,’ as countries will most assuredly neglect including underrepresented populations without effective data disaggregation. Providing general and non-inclusive statistics results in the invisibility of vulnerable populations such as older persons and persons with disabilities.¹¹ Data collection and dissemination needs to be disaggregated by age, gender, and disability in order to properly ensure that policies address their concerns.

HLPF Side Event

At the very first side event of the HLPF, the Stakeholder Group on Ageing, the Stakeholder Group of Persons with Disabilities, and representatives of United Nations agencies, United Nations member states, NGOs and civil society groups had a unique collaboration to address the gaps of the 2030 agenda. This session shared information, existing best practices, data initiatives, and concrete proposals to influence the upcoming HLPF, the UN, and SDG national implementation processes.

The discussion highlighted the **importance of data disaggregation and ensuring the visibility of older persons, all genders, and persons with disabilities.**

Promising Practices in Data Collection

Sharing good practice and innovation on data collection is essential to ensuring accurate data that promotes the rights of older persons, persons with disabilities, and women of all ages. See some examples of data collection efforts for the SDGs:

- Washington Group on Disability Statistics
 - Recommended by the United Nations and Council of European Statisticians in upcoming 2020 censuses
 - Short set of six questions on disability status for purposes of disaggregation for the SDGs
 - Addresses the need for cross-national comparable measures on disability
 - Strives for international collaboration and participation from all countries

- Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data:
 - Endorsed during UNSC 48 in March 2017
 - Checklist for better data collection
 - Six main strategy areas for governments and policy leaders:
 - 1) coordination and leadership
 - 2) innovation and modernization of national statistical systems
 - 3) strengthening programs
 - 4) dissemination of data on sustainable development
 - 5) building partnerships
 - 6) mobilizing resources
- UNDESA, UNPD, & DSPD with support from the Statistics Division & ECA
 - Pilot survey developed through strong participatory approach
 - Conducted in Malawi, Uganda, and Kenya
 - Developed a standard methodology to collect age- and gender-sensitive data as evidence for policy implementation
- UN ESCAP
 - Collaboration with member states and civil society regarding the SDGs led to positive outcomes
 - Persons with disabilities, older persons, and indigenous groups were focus of the study
- “City Group” on Ageing
 - Under discussion by statistical division
 - Championed in many countries such as the UK
- African Commission on Human Rights
 - Draft protocol for the rights of persons with disabilities.
 - Ratification process to become legal binding document
 - Supports the equal rights of persons to be free from harmful practices and access to justice
 - Ensures disaggregate statistics and data on disability, gender, age, and other relevant variables
 - Disseminates statistics and data to all persons

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Food for Thought

A big problem with data collection is the lack of it. For specific groups, there is little to no information available. However, the critical problem produced by gaps in data results from representations that do not illustrate where data is missing. A solution to this problem is to include visual representations in your data sets to show where gaps are. By including a “...” or a “N/A” in a chart, these visual depictions clearly illustrate where data is missing, serving as an impetus for further data collection.¹² By allowing member states to figure out which populations are unaccounted for, visible gaps in data also bring visibility to the populations that are often left behind.

Recommendations

For all countries to be empowered agents of development, the following are concrete recommendations:

Disaggregated Data - Monitor all SDG goals and targets with fully disaggregated data by age, sex, and disability to increase visibility of older persons, women, and persons with disability.

Communicate, Coordinate, and Collaborate – Work with UN agencies, NGOs, and other civil society groups to improve practice and share knowledge.

Utilize Existing Tools –Member states must not wait for the perfect tools, but take immediate action to disaggregate data to include persons experiencing discriminations as they age which may be related to disability and/or gender. Both the Washington Group set of questions and the UNICEF/Washington Group module on Child Functioning can easily and cost effectively assist national data collection efforts.

Expand Data Sets - Average global life expectancy is 71.5 years of age. Yet, a lot of data ranges stop at age 49. Thus, existing data sets omit huge portions of the population, namely older persons. By expanding datasets to include the full lifecycle, all population segments will be reflected in policy development.

Intersectionality- Ensure social policies and data collection are conducted by recognizing intersecting identities to ensure full participation of all underrepresented groups, so that inequalities due to overlapping group memberships are not perpetuated.

Find Out More

Check out these resources to learn more about practical implementation of data disaggregation:

- **Washington Group on Disability Statistics:** <http://www.washingtongroup-disability.com>
- **Concrete Examples of Data Disaggregation Work and Strategies, UN and UNICEF:** <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/egm-data-dissaggregation/PPT17-Zaidi.pdf>
- **Cape Town Global Action Plan for Sustainable Development Data:** <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/hlg/Cape-Town-Global-Action-Plan>
- **UN Data Forum Blog, IDA:** <https://undataforum.org/WorldDataForum/persons-with-disabilities-must-and-can-be-counted-in/>
- **Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response:** <http://www.sphereproject.org/handbook/>
- **Minimum Standards for Age and Disability Inclusion in Humanitarian Action:** <http://www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/age-and-disabilityinclusive-humanitarian-response-minimum-standards-launched/>

¹“World Population Projected To Reach 9.7 Billion By 2050.” UN DESA Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (2015, July 29). Retrieved July 10, 2017.

²*World Report on Disability* (Rep.). (2011). Retrieved July 10, 2017.

³Persons with Disabilities. Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities Consortium (2008). *High-Level Political Forum 2016 Ensuring that no one is left behind*. Retrieved July 10, 2017.

⁴Putting the Most Vulnerable at the Forefront of the SDGs [Web log post]. (2017, June 12). Retrieved July 10, 2017

⁵See Number 3.

⁶See Number 2.

⁷Equal Rights for Persons with Disabilities Key to Achieve New Development Agenda. (2016, June 14). Retrieved July 10, 2017.

⁸Ibid.

⁹*World Report on Ageing and Health* (Rep.). (2015). Retrieved July 10, 2017

¹⁰Gladstone, R. (2015, September 9). Older People Are Invisible in Key Data, Study Warns. *New York Times*

¹¹See Number 4

¹²See Number 7