

As powerful agents of change, women and girls are the drivers of sustainable development. Healthy, educated, and empowered women and girls will foster the change needed to create empowered communities and, consequently, a more sustainable and peaceful future for all, as envisioned by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Evidence shows that when we invest in women and girls, we create a ripple effect that yields multiple benefits, not only for them, but also for their families, communities, and countries. In a time of rising conflict and humanitarian crisis, healthy, empowered women and girls are the key to more peaceful communities and resilient societies. However, we must ensure that the needs and contributions of women and girls are not overlooked. Greater collaboration and integration across sectors will be critical to help build individual agency, transform social relations and overcome structural barriers that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and inequality. Success will require the adoption of a more holistic, systems-based approach to health that leverages multi-stakeholder engagement for impact across the traditional development siloes. Greater engagement with individuals and communities will also be critical to address barriers to access and improve both supply and demand of services. Efforts must also look to address the unique challenges faced by today's historic number of adolescents to safeguard their rights and promote their full participation in their societies and economies. The health and empowerment of this "SDG Generation" will be an essential determinant of our success in achieving the promises envisioned across the SDGs. At a time of complex development challenges and shifting politics that threaten the health and rights of women and girls particularly, we must work together to ensure a more inclusive approach that promotes the health, well-being and empowerment of all for a more peaceful, inclusive, prosperous and peaceful future.

### **WHAT DO WE NEED FOR PROGRESS?**

- Laws, policies and social norms that enable women's social, economic and political participation, as well as economic empowerment and gender parity
- Greater commitment to a rights-based, whole-of-system approach to the health and well-being of women and girls that addresses underpinning discrimination and inequity as the driving forces that perpetuate violence against women and impede progress across sectors
- Strengthened capabilities of health programmes to engage communities and provide more responsive services that address the specific needs of women and girls
- Investments in social, behavioural and community engagement research, policies and programming to strengthen individual and community capacities; scaled programming of evidence-based social, behavioural and community engagement interventions
- Greater engagement of men and boys to address traditional social norms and paradigms that do not promote the full empowerment of women and girls
- Inclusive systems that promote active engagement of women, girls and communities in the design and development of quality-improvement activities and governance of services
- Expansion of civil registration and vital statistics (CRVS) systems to include age and sex disaggregated data, particularly those in hard-to-reach and fragile settings, to better inform programming decisions
- Development and strengthening of indicators to measure and assess empowerment in order to more effectively track progress
- Strengthened collaboration with enhancing sectors, including education, nutrition, and legal sectors to capture child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), female genital mutilation (FGM), gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women (VAW), and others
- Promotion of and greater investments in innovations to catalyse meaningful change for women and girls, through new ideas, products and practices as a force for social change

### **TOP LINE MESSAGES**

**The participation and empowerment of women and girls at all levels and across sectors will help ensure that they can truly transform their communities for a more prosperous, inclusive and sustainable future for all.** When women and girls are empowered, they are healthy and their communities thrive. A supportive social, economic, political and legal environment is necessary to enable women and girls to achieve their full potential and obtain their rights to health and well-being in all settings.

## TOP LINE MESSAGES (cont'd)

**When we invest in research, policies and programming that strengthen the capacity of women and girls, we improve the health, well-being and prosperity of their communities.** When women and girls have access to health throughout their lives, they deliver a healthier and wealthier world. When they have the chance to learn, they will deliver more equitable, healthy and prosperous societies. Investments in social, behavioral and community engagement research, policies and programming are needed to strengthen the capacity of women and girls, ensuring their full participation and equitable access to quality services.

**Gender-responsive policies and interventions must take into account cross-sectoral issues that have an impact on the full health and wellbeing of women, girls and their communities.** Empowerment cuts across an integrated agenda for women, children and adolescents. Success will require greater collaboration across sectors to address socio-cultural constructs that build barriers to full empowerment, including those based on ethnicity, class, geographic location, sexual orientation or gender identity. Targeted efforts must also be placed on harmful norms and practices like child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

## KEY STATISTICS

- Women could increase their income globally by up to 76 per cent if the employment participation gap and the wage gap between women and men were closed.<sup>1</sup>
- According to a study using data from 219 countries (1970-2009), for every additional year of education for women of reproductive age, child mortality decreases by 9.5 per cent.<sup>2</sup>
- While the number of countries with a female head of state increased from 8 in 2005 to 17 in January 2017, women's representation in politics overall is stagnating.<sup>3</sup>
- 30 million girls are at risk of female genital mutilation in the next decade.<sup>4</sup>
- Globally, the proportion of young women married in childhood has declined from one in three to one in four, but progress remains slow.<sup>5</sup>

## MEASURING PROGRESS: KEY INDICATORS FROM THE EWEC GLOBAL STRATEGY

- Maternal mortality ratio (SDG 3.1.1)
- Sexual violence against women by intimate partners (SDG 5.2.1)
- Informed decisions by women on sexual and reproductive health (SDG 5.6.1)
- Early marriage (before 15 and before 18 years) (SDG 5.3.1)
- Female genital mutilation (SDG 5.3.2)
- Legal frameworks for equality and non-discrimination on basis of sex (SDG 5.1.1)
- Proportion of young people (in schools) at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex (SDG 4.1.1)
- Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex (SDG 4.2.2)
- Proportion of 15-24 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) (SDG 8.6.1)
- Proportion of women in Parliament (GS additional contextual indicators, by target)
- Proportion of young women and men aged 18-29 who experienced sexual violence by age 18 (16.2.3)
- Proportion of countries that have ratified human rights treaties related to women's, children's and adolescents' health (additional to SDGs)

<sup>1</sup> Actionaid, 2015, "Close the Gap! The cost of inequality in women's work," p. 9. ([http://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/womens\\_rights\\_on-line\\_version\\_2.1.pdf](http://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/womens_rights_on-line_version_2.1.pdf))

<sup>2</sup> E. Gakidou, et al., 2010, "Increased Educational Attainment and its Effect on Child Mortality in 175 Countries between 1970 and 2009: A Systematic Analysis," *The Lancet*, 376(9745), p. 969.

<sup>3</sup> Women in politics: 2017. Geneva: InterParliamentary Union and UN Women; 2017 (<https://beta.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2017-03/women-in-politics-2017>)

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Children's Fund, *Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: A statistical overview and exploration of the dynamics of change*, UNICEF, New York, 2013

<sup>5</sup> *Health in 2015: from MDGs to SDGs*. Geneva: WHO; 2015.

