



Young Women as Mobilizers, Activists, and Advocators

Sabrina Grover and Bailey Greenspon (Fora: Network for Change)

Acknowledgements

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Why Young Women and Girls Should Participate in Decision-Making

At this critical time when discussions will inform future policy and decisions impacting them, young women and girls are taking their place as global development advocates. It is critical that young women and girls be at the forefront of shaping the movements that will dictate policy and action over the coming years. Access to resources and decision-making spaces affords young women and girls the power to mobilize, build new power relationships, and determine their own futures.

Young women and girls become empowered to take their place in spaces where they are traditionally under-represented including policy-making and decision-making – when they are equipped with skills and effective advocacy tools that recognize, promote, and encourage intersectionality. Global advocacy and leadership of young women and girls can be a catalyst to fostering systemic change and dismantling traditional and patriarchal power structures.

When young women and girls are seen as drivers of change rather than passive ‘beneficiaries’, more sustainable and effective investment in economic development, gender equality, education and health care become possible.

Investments into economic development, gender equality, education, and health, will be most sustainable when young women and girls are seen as the drivers of change rather than simply as ‘beneficiaries’ of donors and programmatic efforts. Embracing the notion of ‘nothing for us, without us’ is foundational in reimagining a global community that considers key issues facing young women and girls and increases not only the sustainability but the effectiveness of interventions. Moreover, encouraging young women to become activists and advocates results in policy change that ensures thriving over surviving, and builds productive, sustainable futures for themselves and their communities.

Investing in the leadership and advocacy of young women and girls interrupts cycles of intergenerational poverty, and increases human capital, today and in the future.

How can traditional decision-making bodies become more inclusive of girls and young women?

To achieve gender equality in our lifetimes, it is incumbent on decision-makers to transfer power to the next generation of girls and women around the world. While urgent, to avoid being seen as symbolic or tokenistic, the transition must be well considered and implemented. [Fora: Network for Change](#) has developed a guide for decision-making bodies and institutions striving to achieve girls' and women's **full and effective participation** in decision-making in public life.

Five Recommendations for Including Young Women in Decision-Making:

- Avoid the Trap of Tokenism
- Invest in Mentorship and Coaching
- Acknowledge Imposter Syndrome
- Amplify Young Women's Voices
- Measure Progress

From boardrooms to policy committees and everything in between, [Fora: Network for Change works with young women globally who advocate for meaningful inclusion in spaces of power](#). Keep reading to learn how to implement or advocate for these five recommendations.

Young women and girls have been increasingly focused on the following:

- Access to and availability of education
- Health and adolescent nutrition
- Sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR)
- Climate justice
- Gender-based violence
- Economic and political participation and decision-making

The Beijing Platform for Action: Setting the Stage for Global Gender Equality

As young women and girls work towards building advocacy movements both domestically and globally, there is an existing network of organizations and frameworks that help support and advance this advocacy. The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) adopted in 1995, is a cornerstone in this framework. 26 years later, the BPfA remains a foundational

blueprint for gender equality action, pressing for the equal rights of women and girls in all areas of life. Since its inception, governments, civil society, and activists have worked to define concrete commitments and areas of action based on promises outlined in the Platform, areas of action that grow and evolve to meet continuing and present challenges and barriers faced by women and girls.

Civil Society: Champions and Supporters

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are critical in creating and supporting enabling environments for young women and girls to engage in advocacy work. Local and domestic CSOs are well poised as entry points for gaining access to and navigating decision-making spaces, as well as considering the local context of global efforts and calls to action. CSOs are well-positioned to support and fund local advocacy efforts, as well as influence national and sub-national policy making, direct investment to relevant programs such as adolescent nutrition, access to menstrual hygiene products, and equal access to education.

Global networks and CSOs act as champions to advance the critical agenda of gender equality in multilateral forums such as the Commission on the Status of Women or the World Health Assembly, raising awareness of specific issues faced by young women and girls. Civil Society can engage in short-term critical and urgent advocacy to influence donors and national governments, as well as long-term advocacy to ensure relevant issues such as health, education, economic development, and climate are given priority in forums for setting global agendas.

What are the important components of effective advocacy?

Engaging in any advocacy activity should begin with consideration of three questions:

- 1. What is the change in policy/investment/activity/the agenda that I want to influence?**
- 2. What does success look like at the end of my advocacy?**

And the most important question...

- 3. Why am I in the best position to champion this issue?**

This third question positions young women and girls at the centre of the reason for change and spotlights the direct impact of interventions and investments on those affected most. ‘Imposter syndrome’ – questioning your ability, skills and right to hold space as advocates, activists and changemakers, is a significant factor that often prevents young women and girls from participating in advocacy forums. Defining advocacy with

this question creates opportunity not only to build a compelling narrative, but also an empowering community of supporters who draw on their experiences, knowledge and skills to act as advocates.

Most advocacy activities are based around effecting change, directing investment (short-term wins) or influencing policy and attention paid to an issue (long-term wins). Advocacy can take the form of developing a public engagement campaign including structured communications, hosting an event, building a network of supporters and influencers, or engaging with stakeholders and actors through formal meetings. But first – a clear issue and a clear ask are critical to building an effective advocacy plan.

Identifying the Issues:

What main issue area does your ask fall under? (i.e.: Education? Climate? Health and Nutrition? Humanitarian and Human Rights?)

- What is the prevalence of the issue and how important is it to your community? Your city? Your country?
- What is the direct impact of the change you are seeking?
- Who else in your community is a champion or working on this issue? Who else globally supports work on this issue?
- What are you trying to change or influence? Does it require urgent investment in a problem or a long-term approach to building solutions?

Knowing the existing areas of focus for local or national policy makers, and aligning your issues with them, can also be effective for leveraging policy change or increased investment.

Case Study: Ensuring All Voices Are Heard

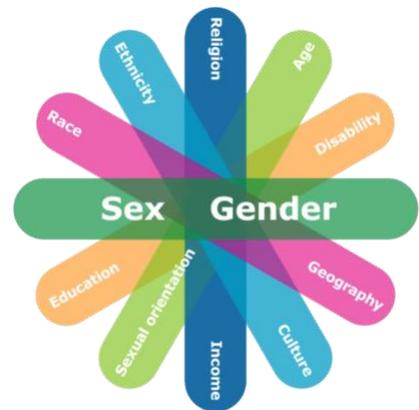
In 2018, young leaders from the G(irls)20 community, spanning eight countries in five continents, set out to gather input from young women in their communities about the ways they want to be included in decision-making spaces. They recognized that they needed to highlight local voices for global advocacy to be effective. Each G(irls)20 leader organized and facilitated a community consultation of young women in their social networks and schools. More than 100 young women in 8 countries were consulted over 2 months, all using the same research questions, yielding a snapshot of the gaps preventing young women from occupying leadership positions. Stories, data, and recommendations stemming from these consultations were documented in the [Rising Women Global Report](#).

How does the advocacy plan actually effect change?

Knowing and identifying what you want to change allows you to assess how effective your advocacy has been. Change can come in many forms – greater awareness and understanding of an issue on the part of key decision makers and stakeholders; allocating funding and investment to an issue or problem; including specific commitments in local or global policy documents; or building a successful network of supporters, champions and advocates. Setting SMART (Specific, Measurable, Actionable, Reasonable, Timely) and incremental goals helps to manage and create achievable advocacy change.

Gender Equality for All

Women and girls may find that, in addition to their gender, their intersecting identities are inextricably linked to society's ideas of leadership. Intersectionality is a feminist lens for examining power, and the ways in which gender, race, class, sexual orientation, ability or disability, religion, and other characteristics overlap and “intersect” with each other. As an advocate, consider the ways that your identities affect your lived experience with policies and programs, and change you want to achieve. Have you considered the perspectives of women and girls with different intersecting identities and lived experiences?



Creating compelling advocacy products

It is important to consider the narrative and tone you wish to adopt in advocating for change. For example: Is the issue you're bringing forward urgent? Are immediate investment and attention required to solve a crisis? Do you want to highlight an issue that has not received sufficient attention but where impacts of change could be high? Does your issue involve entrenched community connections and emotional attachments to historical strategies? Developing a compelling narrative that considers individual and collective human responses to the ask is fundamental to effective and successful advocacy.

Compelling advocacy products are key in executing an advocacy plan and strategy – they help to tell the advocacy story to the appropriate audience, elevate your issue, frame the problem and the pathway to change.

- Identify your Narrative
- Produce op-eds & blogs in local or global media
- Create a social media toolkit with key cut and paste messaging for your networks and advocacy champions
- Provide template letters to policy and decision makers for use by your network and advocacy champions
- Create infographics based on data (disaggregated by gender and other intersecting factors and identities) to support your ask
- Publish a policy brief to present to stakeholders and decision makers (summary, issue or problem, data and evidence, action sought)

The Power of your Public Narrative

Tell a compelling story that will make policy makers, stakeholders and potential allies listen. Your well-crafted public narrative is a powerful tool for shaping public opinion and influencing policy. Before developing a communications strategy, craft your story. Check out the workshop "[Power of your Public Narrative](#)" offered through *Fora: Network for Change* to get started.

COVID-19 and the changing world of digital advocacy

We are in the middle of a mobile phone and digital revolution that has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic – accessing digital spaces for advocacy has never been easier. The digital landscape is quickly shifting, and opportunities are opening to reach new and previously underserved audiences, to build effective and far-reaching advocacy narratives, to equip young women and girls with the right information at the right time, and to support them as advocates in their own communities. This expanded environment creates increased opportunities for young women and girls to participate in multilateral platforms and forums that may have been previously inaccessible because of barriers such as cost and 'professional status' and allows for greater amplification of young women's and girls' voices, ideas, and calls to action.

Digital platforms & what can digital do for you?

- **Social Media:** Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, TikTok, etc. deliver campaigns, content, series and more to the spaces where youth spend an increasing amount of their time.
- **Mobi Sites:** Sites designed especially for low bandwidth environments using open-source technology.
- **SMS & USSD (Unstructured Supplementary Service Data):** Deliver content and services via low fi channels that do not require data and are universally accessible with any phone.

How can you employ digital technologies for your advocacy?

- Easily engage and build a network of supporters that care about your issue and are willing to share your message (regional, national, or global)
- Access multilateral or national forums and amplify your voice and message as part of the conversation
- Target policy and decision makers through social media and identify issues and action areas

Raising Funds

- **Access funders that serve grassroots organizations and activists,** including: Urgent Action Fund, FRIDA, Women Deliver, and Equality Fund.
- **Crowdfunding Campaigns:** Learn how to build an effective crowdfunding campaign to raise funds through your networks.
- **Find a Trustee:** If you have a strong personal relationship with a registered charity, approach the leadership to take on your movement as a Trustee. Trustees can receive charitable funding on behalf of your movement.
- **Social Entrepreneurship Project:** Funding for young people with an idea for a social entrepreneurship venture is increasingly available. Explore accessing these funds with an entrepreneurial proposal connected to your advocacy work.
- **Identify a community corporate sponsor:** Is there a local woman-owned business, or a businessowner who is a father with daughters who believes in your mission? Build a relationship with local business owners and raise small donations as you build your movement.

Transformative, long-lasting social, economic, and developmental change is possible when young women and girls are active participants in the change!