

# WHAT DID WE HEAR?

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Summary Report on the  
Women Deliver 2019 Conference  
Listening Tour

From the Women's Marches across the globe harnessing a powerful energy, to the #MeToo movement holding the powerful accountable, to youth movements driving legislative and cultural change - the world is currently witnessing a dichotomy of incredible movements for gender equality, along with backlash from some of those who wield power.

Women Deliver, a leading global advocate for gender equality and the health, rights, and wellbeing of girls and women, embarked on an extensive, global Listening Tour from September 2017 to January 2018 to better understand the world today for girls and women.

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## LISTENING TOUR RESULTS

### Women Deliver's listening tour had three key goals:

- **CONNECT** with individuals and organizations from a wide range of sectors and geographies, and hear perspectives from all over the world;
- **BETTER UNDERSTAND** the global landscape - trends, opportunities, and challenges - facing girls and women today; and
- **HELP INFORM** our overall policy and advocacy work and the shape of the Women Deliver 2019 Conference (WD2019), the world's largest conference on gender equality and the health, rights, and wellbeing of girls and women to take place in Vancouver, Canada 3-6 June 2019.

The Listening Tour yielded insights from global, regional, country, and community civil society leaders; policymakers; private sector representatives; women and women's groups; as well as young people from around the world.

This undertaking was a first for Women Deliver, and we listened to the women, men, and girls leading change in rural villages, capital cities, and everywhere in between. The Listening Tour was an invaluable and humbling learning experience, and revealed new insights into how people and organizations are working every day to better the lives of girls and women, and provided insights from people not working regularly in this field.

The Listening Tour consisted of both in-person, in-depth group and individual interviews across a variety of sectors, as well as an online survey to reach as many individuals as possible.

**The high level of interest and engagement was tremendously exciting and included participation from:**

- **1,357 INDIVIDUALS** who filled out an online survey;
- **75 ORGANIZATIONS** from a wide range of sectors and issue areas that were consulted via in-person interviews (17 government institutions, 28 NGOs, 11 UN Agencies, 5 corporations, 6 foundations, 2 public-private partnerships, 6 other organizations);
- **150+ INDIVIDUALS** who contributed via one-on-one and group interviews;
- **YOUNG PEOPLE** including Women Deliver's Youth Engagement Working Group, representing dozens of youth-serving and youth-led organizations globally.
- Stakeholders based in more than **20 COUNTRIES** including: Afghanistan, Australia, Belgium, Burkina Faso, Canada, Côte D'Ivoire, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Kenya, India, Lithuania, Malawi, Mexico, Nigeria, Netherlands, Norway, Senegal, Sweden, Switzerland, U.K., and the U.S.A.

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# IDENTIFYING GLOBAL TRENDS, NEEDS & OPPORTUNITIES



Women and girls are starting to take up space with their voice and perspectives, not be forced to shrink and be less than what they are capable of.

## -LISTENING TOUR RESPONDENTS

In the Listening Tour, Women Deliver asked about global trends for girls and women, opportunities for change, and what is needed to drive progress. Some of the many trends identified through the Listening Tour include:

- **PERVASIVE INEQUALITIES STALLING PROGRESS.**

Persistent inequality along the lines of gender, geography, and lack of access to data and technology are stalling progress. Damaging gender norms perpetuate harmful practices like child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), and other forms of violence against girls and women.

- **SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS UNDER THREAT.**

The global political climate is precarious, and there is a growing and troubling chilling effect on girls' and women's rights. While some recent gains have been made, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including the right to safe abortion, are under threat in many places.

- **CHALLENGES FOR SAFE SPACE FOR GENDER EQUALITY.**

In some parts of the world, funding for girls' and women's health and rights is dwindling, and political space for CSOs – not least women's groups – is declining, just as women who speak up publically are trolled, and in the worst cases, killed. These shifts often result in weaker and/or fewer programs for girls and women, or the silencing of women's groups. This constitutes a major setback for gender equality without a counterbalance.

- **GROUNDSWELL OF ACTIVISM.**

Despite the negative trends, the world is also witnessing the rise of powerful movements for women’s rights, youth rights, and gender equality. Women- and youth-led action, like the global Women’s Marches, #MeToo, Ni Una Menos, and #BringBackOurGirls, combined with a growing sense of urgency, is contributing to a rise in confidence among those who are working for girls’ and women’s rights. However, while these movements are holding the powerful to account in some parts of the world, the fear of consequences and retaliation for speaking out continues to silence too many individuals and the full-scale witness to these movements is not universal in all places.

- **MEN AND BOYS ARE KEY TO ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY.**

As women-led movements gain momentum, there is a continued and growing acknowledgement that men and boys are crucial to advancing gender equality, shifting gender norms, and fighting extremism. Gender equality is not a “women’s issue,” it is a societal issue and everyone must be involved to reach a more equal world.

- **WORKING ACROSS SECTORS TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS.**

Powerful examples prove the model of working across traditional issues and sectors to work in a more integrated fashion. There is a narrative shift towards recognizing the significance of working with new and unusual partners in order to drive progress for girls and women—and development writ large. Collaboration must include governments, the private sector, civil society, and young people all joining together.

## What does the world need to do to create an enabling environment for girls and women?



We need to stop focusing on the easy wins, and go to the last mile to reach the most vulnerable. We need equity.

### -LISTENING TOUR RESPONDENTS

Looking at the current state of the world for girls and women, Listening Tour participants identified a wealth of needs and strategies required to drive progress for gender equality:

- **BREAK DOWN SOCIAL AND GENDER NORMS IN EXISTING POWER STRUCTURES - FROM GOVERNMENTS TO FAMILIES TO RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS - WHICH HOLD GIRLS AND WOMEN BACK.**

Listening Tour participants identified shifting social and gender norms as a key solution to entrenched power inequalities, and especially called out the need to work with community “gatekeepers and guardians.” For example, advocates should work with men and community leaders to shift negative gender norms and highlight the importance of issues like family planning and contraception to family wellbeing. Advocates should also work with faith groups to reframe religious narratives that harm and hold girls and women back from realizing their human rights, as well as male political decision-makers to prioritize girls’ and women’s health, education, role in decision-making, and women’s professional development.

- **DRIVE INVESTMENTS THAT BENEFIT GIRLS AND WOMEN.**

Listening Tour participants stressed the need for more and better funding for programs and policies that impact girls and women. They echoed the notion that when the world invests in girls and women, there is a ripple effect that benefits entire societies. They also noted that there is a need to look at the whole girl and the whole woman, including, but not limited to, her sexual and reproductive health and rights. The world should therefore explore stronger investments in a variety of areas that impact girls and women, such as programs to ensure workplace readiness; affordable, safe, and quality education and childcare; and access to financial services like bank accounts, credit, and insurance.

- **INCREASE THE NUMBERS OF WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS AT ALL LEVELS, IN ALL SECTORS.**

If women are not at the table when decisions about their lives are being debated and made, their needs will never be properly addressed - and that holds the whole society back. Listening Tour respondents stressed the importance of women in decision-making positions, especially those that have influence on policies and budgets - from local governments, to national office and the parliament, from community NGOs to UN bodies and the private sector. Specific to political leadership, more funding is required for grassroots organizations who develop and train female politicians, increase the quantity and diversity of role-models, and build more support for female candidates within their parties.

- **ENGENDER BOLD POLITICAL LEADERSHIP.**

Participants pointed out the urgency of building greater political support among decision makers who understand the many reasons for gender equality—the moral and social costs of holding women back; the socio-economic costs of violence against girls and women; how health is the foundation to strong business and economies; and how mainstreaming gender equality across the work of government and private sector processes are vital to driving gender equality. Advocates must also hold elected officials accountable to those who elected them, ensuring they invest in women and young people in the budgets they set. For a sustainable way forward, we need greater country ownership for funding gender equality - including sexual and reproductive health and rights - rather than relying on unpredictable donor funding.

- **BETTER IMPLEMENT THE LAWS AND RIGHTS “ON THE BOOKS” THAT SUPPORT GENDER EQUALITY.**

Respondents noted that in many cases the right policies and laws are already in place, but the challenge is a lack of implementation. Therefore, girls, women, and young people need to be educated about the laws that affect them, and emboldened to act to protect themselves. Through education and advocacy training, girls, women, and young people can learn about the existing laws in order to defend and claim their rights to them. Boys and men should also be educated about what is and is not legal, right, or acceptable in order to change their behavior and social paradigms.

- **GATHER BETTER DATA TO ADDRESS GAPS FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN.**

Listening Tour participants noted that better age- and sex-disaggregated data are essential for informing policies and planning, and called out specific needs. These needs included data on the measurement of gender norms, research on the importance of grassroots change, data on the effects of women in decision-making positions –either through a natural evolution or via transitional quota systems - and data on adolescents particularly around early/forced marriages, unintended pregnancy, the rates of sexually transmitted infections, HIV, access to youth-friendly sexual and reproductive health services and education, and the incidence of violence against them.

- **TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE CURRENT CLIMATE OF ACTIVISM, INCLUDING MASS MOBILIZATIONS TO END VIOLENCE AND OPPRESSION.**

With sexism and misogyny in the glare of the spotlight, there is an opportunity to reshape existing power structures. Participants urged gender equality advocates to

harness the daily ways in which people are banding together and organizing. Some participants expressed the need to unify the many unique women's movements across cultures and geographies towards a common purpose.

- **BE MORE INCLUSIVE, PAYING CLOSE ATTENTION TO MARGINALIZED GROUPS.**

To improve the lives of every girl and woman, respondents noted the need to include the most vulnerable and hardest to reach populations. For example, advocates must address the unique needs of girls and women in fragile settings and protracted crises, girls and women living with disabilities, members of the LGBTQ+ community, girls and women from indigenous communities, girls and women living in rural settings, sex workers, girls and women who are trafficked and working without the enjoyment or rights or decent work, girls and women from persecuted groups, and girls and women who live in extreme poverty. By making space for girls and women who are the most disenfranchised, policies and programs will better address the needs of everyone.

- **TAP INTO THE INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE POWER OF YOUTH.**

Young people around the world have freed themselves from some of the traditional expectations of gender norms and are speaking truth to power. Listening Tour participants noted that advocates must promote young female leadership, defend female activists, and support girls' agency.

- **WORK WITH THE PRIVATE SECTOR ON THEIR ROLE IN PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY AND SCALING UP BEST PRACTICES.**

Strategies include changing hiring practices to reduce conscious and unconscious bias, promoting buying from female owned businesses along the supply chain, strengthening efforts to have more women on boards and in the C-suite, adjusting workplace policies to create more gender-equality parental leave, developing guidelines and regulations to foster equal pay for equal work, and changing marketing practices to challenge gender norms rather than perpetuate antiquated ones.

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# SUGGESTIONS FOR WOMEN DELIVER 2019 CONFERENCE

In addition to asking about the general state of the world for girls and women, we also specifically solicited suggestions for the Women Deliver 2019 Conference. This will be the world's largest conference on gender equality and the health, rights, and wellbeing of girls and women, and respondents took the opportunity to share what they wanted highlighted on this global platform.

## Suggested themes and framing for the conference



WD2019 should be a showcase of those who speak truth to power.

### -LISTENING TOUR RESPONDENTS

Listening Tour respondents rallied around several themes and frames for WD2019.

- Power—in various forms—and how it needs to change.
- Equity and justice—what do these ideas look like in practice?
- Agency, investment, and changing gender norms—including working with unusual decision makers and opinion leaders at the grassroots level.
- Movement building, organizing, and individual action—how to link the global to the local and vice versa.
- Gender equality through different lenses—how issues such as peace and security, climate change, and immigration impact girls and women; and conversely how these issues can be impacted by greater gender equality.
- Best practices, learning, collaboration.

- Advancing from women's empowerment to achieving gender equality.
- Backlash: The unintended consequences facing women's movements around the world.

## What tone to set

Participants also expressed their hopes around what tone the conference will set.

- **HOPEFUL**
- **STRONG SENSE OF URGENCY**
- **SOLUTIONS ORIENTED**
- **POLITICAL**
- **THOUGHTFUL**
- **HONEST**
- **INCLUSIVE AND INTERSECTIONAL**
- **LOUD AND PROUD**
- **BOLD - CHALLENGE VARIOUS FORMS OF PATRIARCHY AND PRIVILEGE**

## Suggested topics



Men's voices and perspectives are important and are needed to shift and advocate for women. We need stories and examples of men working on behalf of women.

**-LISTENING TOUR RESPONDENTS**

During the Listening Tour we heard more than 1,000 specific suggestions for topics ranging from high-level global policy topics to issues impacting the lived experiences of girls and women around the world. Suggested topics fell mostly into the following categories:

- **POWER AND EMPOWERMENT IN VARIOUS FORMS:**  
e.g. promoting the agency of girls and women; challenging patriarchy and privilege; women's economic/financial power or lack thereof; changing power structures; the role of boys and men in the pursuit of gender equality.
- **REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH:**  
e.g. improving access to modern contraception and emergency contraception products, services, and information; access to safe abortion and quality post-abortion care; changing cultural norms around reproductive and sexual health and rights; male involvement in helping girls and women realize their sexual and reproductive rights; adolescent health; legal reform; improving menstrual health and hygiene in schools and communities; the provision of all of the aforementioned reproductive health services and information everywhere—especially in humanitarian and protracted crises.
- **VIOLENCE:**  
e.g. preventing gender-based violence in all its forms; ensuring laws and legal mechanisms are in place to seek justice and redressal; changing traditional/gender/social norms and practices that infringe on the health, rights, and wellbeing of girls and women—especially in humanitarian and protracted crises.
- **LEADERSHIP:**  
e.g. increasing women's roles as decision makers in all levels of society; increasing political involvement as members of the electorate and as elected officials; achieving gender parity in the workplace (both in the number and quality of positions afforded to women, but also equal pay for equal work); increasing women's leadership in all sectors.
- **EQUALITY:**  
e.g. reducing cultural and gender norms as barriers to equality; changing laws to improve equality; filling gaps in the collection of sex- and age-disaggregated data to reveal inequalities and improve accountability; creating and access to an enabling environment for women's economic and financial progress.

- **EDUCATION:**

e.g. safety of girls to attend school; education in conflict settings; investing in professional training; improving the number of girls and women in STEM; and workplace readiness for girls and women.

- **TECHNOLOGY:**

e.g. as a tool to prevent gender-based violence and efforts to mitigate violence perpetuated against girls and women as a result of technology; as a tool in social movements; as a way to give voice to girls and women in closed societies; utilizing big data; efforts to address online harassment; addressing the digital divide; improving digital financial services/innovations to reach remote/excluded populations.

## Suggested speakers



We need to leverage the increasing power of young voices to push for change; young people aren't scared to speak truth to power.

### -LISTENING TOUR RESPONDENTS

We heard more than 1,000 suggestions for speakers who would inspire concrete action for girls and women. These included, but were in no way limited to:

- Political Leaders (e.g. Michelle Obama, Angela Merkel, Justin Trudeau, Leonardo Garnier)
- Leaders from the private sector (e.g. Chip Berg, Heli Kurjanen)
- Advocates from a variety of sectors (e.g. Malala Yousafzai, Gloria Steinem, Bana Al-Abed, Masih Alinejad)
- Global health champions (e.g. Sabrina Rubli, Melinda Gates, Paul Farmer)
- Leaders from academia (e.g. Marni Sommer, Judith Butler, Chris Bobel, Deborah Diniz, Peter Piot)

- Celebrities and writers from around the world (e.g. Oprah Winfrey, Farhan Akhtar, Megan Markel, Youssou N'Dour, Emma Watson)
- Cultural and religious leaders (e.g. female and male Imams, progressive male clergy)
- Young Leaders (e.g. Dr. Tlaleng Mofokeng, young entrepreneurs)
- People driving change at the community level
- Male feminists (e.g. HeforShe representatives, men behind the menstrual equity movement)
- Voices from too-often marginalized groups
- Voices speaking truth to power (e.g. grassroots activists, youth activists)
- Diverse, empowering, and inspiring voices

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## THANKS AND NEXT STEPS

Women Deliver is grateful to all who shared their views. We will be using the analysis of the findings, and the rich suggestions and ideas to inform and assist in the program development for WD2019, as well as our general portfolio of work.

We will continue to work with experts and advocates from across the globe to develop the program and identify speakers to create a robust and dynamic conference.

For more information on the Women Deliver 2019 Conference, please visit **[WD2019.org](https://www.women-deliver.org/2019)**.