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‘Gender equality, the empowerment of all women and girls and their human rights across the Sustainable Development Goals: Assessing progress towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda’

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## **Citizen Data for Gender-Responsive SDG Accountability: From Representation to Evidence, Voice and Action**

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\* The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent those of UN Women, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organizations.

## 1. Introduction and context setting

### **CSW71 is a moment to assess progress – and shape what comes next**

The priority theme of the 71st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW71) in March 2027 will be “accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The Secretary-General’s report and the accompanying Expert Group Meeting (EGM) present a critical opportunity to assess not only what progress on gender equality has been achieved but also how and by whom evidence, implementation, monitoring and accountability have been shaped. It is also an opportunity to identify the decisions and actions needed in the remaining years of the 2030 Agenda and to draw lessons for a more inclusive, participatory and accountable post-2030 monitoring framework.

### **Citizen data responds to a crisis of representation, trust and evidence**

The multilateral system faces a profound crisis of representation and legitimacy. Civic space is shrinking in many regions, with restrictive laws and funding cuts constraining civil society’s ability to hold institutions accountable. At the same time, traditional survey infrastructure is under threat: The closure of the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) programme in early 2025 eliminated a critical source of gender data for dozens of countries. More than half of national statistics offices (NSOs) reported reduced funding since January 2025.<sup>1</sup> In this context, citizen data – data originating from initiatives in which citizens are meaningfully engaged in the design, collection and use stages of the data value chain<sup>2</sup> – provides a pathway for communities, under-represented groups and the organizations that represent them to help shape what is measured, contribute evidence on their own lived realities, interpret what that evidence means and use it to influence decisions for and about them. At a time when civic space itself is under pressure, protecting these pathways for participation and evidence generation becomes even more important. Citizen data can help sustain gender data production and use, deepen inclusivity, strengthen the representational legitimacy of evidence systems and reinforce accountability for implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### **The global normative and statistical foundations are already in place**

The framing of this observer paper draws on the Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data, endorsed by the 56<sup>th</sup> UN Statistical Commission in March 2025, which recognizes citizen data as critical for empowering communities, centring the voices and priorities of marginalized groups, addressing intersectional marginalization and holding institutions accountable. It also builds on the Participation for Transformation (P4T) Framework,<sup>3</sup> developed jointly by UN Women and

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<sup>1</sup> Azcona, G., A. Bhatt, G. Fortuny Fillo et al. 2025. *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2025*. New York: UN Women and United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs (DESA).

<sup>2</sup> Collaborative on Citizen Data. 2024. “[The Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data](#).”

<sup>3</sup> UN Women and PARIS21. 2025. “[Participation for Transformation of Gender Data: Developing a Framework for Transformative Production, Use and Reuse of Gender Data](#).”

PARIS21, which reimagines gender data governance by fostering collaboration across the entire gender data ecosystem. Further, this paper draws on UN Women's impactful work through the Women Count programme, the Working Group on Gender and Citizen Data<sup>4</sup> and emerging country experiences that show how gender and citizen data can complement official statistics, support policy use and broaden participation in gender data ecosystems.

### **The argument: Citizen data strengthens evidence, representation and accountability**

This observer paper argues that citizen data is not merely a technical supplement to official statistics but a democratic and representational practice that strengthens the legitimacy of evidence systems, makes intersecting inequalities visible and provides new pathways for accountability.

### **From global recognition to national and local practice**

The paper traces the contribution of citizen data at two levels. At the global level, it shows how citizen data has evolved from practices advanced by civil society, communities and other non-state actors into a recognized area of work within the global statistical community. This evolution builds on wider efforts to strengthen participatory, citizen-centred and rights-based approaches to data and is reflected more recently in the establishment of the Collaborative on Citizen Data,<sup>5</sup> the development and endorsement of the Copenhagen Framework<sup>6</sup> and the United Nations Statistical Commission's (UNSC) decision<sup>7</sup> welcoming implementation of the Copenhagen Framework and calling for practical guidance, knowledge-sharing, piloting and capacity-building on citizen data.

At the national and local levels, the paper discusses how citizen data has made visible gendered realities that are often under-measured while creating practical entry points for collaboration among civil society organizations, communities, NSOs and policymakers.

### **The lesson for 2030 and beyond**

The paper uses citizen data as an entry point to assess both the achievements and limits of SDG monitoring for gender equality over the past decade. The SDG framework has helped create stronger demand for gender data, expand the availability of indicators, strengthen attention to disaggregation and build a wider movement for more inclusive and participatory monitoring and review. An important lesson is also that gender data should not be treated as a niche or supplementary area of statistics. It is essential for understanding how development outcomes, opportunities and inequalities are structured by gender, including where women, girls and gender-diverse people are disproportionately disadvantaged or rendered invisible in existing evidence systems.

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<sup>4</sup> UN Women and Open Data Watch. "[Working Group on Gender and Citizen Data](#)."

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). n.d. "[Collaborative on Citizen Data](#)."

<sup>6</sup> Collaborative on Citizen Data. 2024. "[The Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data](#)."

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). 2026. "[Report on the Fifty-seventh Session of the Statistical Commission](#)." E/2026/24-E/CN.3/2026/35.

At the same time, persistent gaps show that data availability alone is not enough. Evidence systems must also capture lived realities, support intersectional analysis, enable participation and connect evidence to policy and accountability. The paper therefore considers citizen data not only as a contribution to current SDG monitoring but also as a practical lesson for accelerating progress before 2030 and as a priority for any post-2030 monitoring framework that seeks to be more inclusive, responsive and legitimate.

## **2. From data gaps to systems gaps: Reframing the problem**

### **Gender data gaps are not only technical deficits; they are also systems gaps**

Persistent gender data gaps often manifest as technical deficits: missing indicators, outdated surveys, weak administrative data, insufficient disaggregation or limited statistical capacity. These constraints are real. The SDG framework has helped generate stronger demand, investment and methodological attention to gender data. Data availability for SDG 5 indicators improved from 47 per cent in 2022 to 57.4 per cent in 2025.<sup>8</sup> Yet more than four in 10 data points needed to track SDG 5 remain unavailable; four SDG 5 indicators still lack sufficient data; and comparable data on sexual violence under SDG indicator 5.2.2 remain unavailable.

This pattern points to a deeper problem in gender data systems. Many of the remaining gaps are not explained by methodological constraints alone. They also reflect institutional and political choices about which issues are prioritized, financed, measured and sustained over time. Making these systemic constraints explicit matters because what is recognized as a systems problem can then be addressed through mandates, financing, coordination and institutional reform rather than treated only as a technical gap to be filled. Where mandates, technical and financial resources, partnerships and accountability arrangements are weak or have not been institutionalized, core dimensions of women's and girls' lives – including violence, unpaid care, informal and precarious work, exclusion from services, mobility constraints and lack of agency and decision-making power – remain only partially visible in SDG monitoring. Some of these dimensions are increasingly measurable, while others continue to require methodological development and more sustained engagement with the people whose experiences existing instruments struggle to capture.

### **Citizen data complements official statistics by expanding what gender data systems can see**

Citizen data is already relevant to this monitoring challenge: Evidence suggests that it is contributing to, or could contribute to, around 33 per cent of SDG indicators overall<sup>9</sup> and 29 per cent of SDG 5 indicators.<sup>10</sup> Its value lies in complementing official statistics by bringing forward evidence that conventional instruments, sampling frames, reporting channels and official

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<sup>8</sup> UN Women. 2025. [Women Count Annual Report 2024](#). New York: UN Women.

<sup>9</sup> UN Women. Forthcoming. "Integrating Citizen Data on Gender into National SDG Monitoring Frameworks." New York: UN Women.

<sup>10</sup> Fraisl, D., J. Campbell, L. See et al. 2020. "[Mapping Citizen Science Contributions to the UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)." *Sustainability Science* 15: 1735–1751.

classifications may not fully capture. It can surface issues absent from standard questionnaires; reach groups outside existing frames or people who may be unwilling or unable to disclose their experiences through official channels but are more willing to engage with trusted community organizations; triangulate under-reported experiences such as violence and harassment; and generate localized, timely or qualitative evidence on unpaid care, informal work, mobility constraints, exclusion and agency. This aligns with the Copenhagen Framework's recognition of citizen data as a response to invisibility in official statistics, weak trust in institutions and the disconnect between local issues and national policymaking, with the potential to strengthen the relevance and legitimacy of the evidence on which public decisions are based.

Citizen data also strengthens intersectional measurement. Disaggregation alone may not capture how multiple forms of disadvantage interact. Citizen data can help by bringing affected communities into decisions about what is measured and how evidence is interpreted, while adding qualitative and lived experience that conventional sources may miss. Section 3 explores these issues further.

### **Citizen data can shift the measurement frame, not only fill data gaps**

Citizen data can reveal where gender data systems need to adapt, including what they measure, whom they reach, how they engage communities, how they assess quality and how they connect evidence to policy and accountability. It can expose gaps in mandates, financing and coordination; show where instruments fail to capture lived realities; identify barriers to accessibility and use; and reveal when evidence is ignored, misinterpreted or misused.

Case study evidence also shows that citizen data can question whether existing instruments ask the right questions, reach the right populations and produce evidence on which citizens and policymakers can act. In some cases, its value lies precisely in providing an independent source of evidence that can show where implementation is falling short or where lived realities differ from what existing data or reporting mechanisms capture.

### **Trusted use of citizen data depends on complementarity, collaboration and safeguards**

Citizen data and official statistics are complementary sources of public evidence. Official statistics bring an institutional mandate, comparability and established quality frameworks. Citizen data brings proximity to lived realities, contextual knowledge, participatory approaches and access to experiences and populations that may remain less visible in official systems. Their relationship should not create a hierarchy in which citizen data is considered valuable only when formally incorporated into, or validated by, official statistics.

This complementarity requires stronger and more systematic collaboration between NSOs, civil society and gender equality actors. One recent review found that 11 per cent of NSOs collaborated regularly with civil society organizations and another 26 per cent reported doing so on an ad hoc basis – suggesting both considerable room for stronger institutionalized collaboration and an

existing base on which to build. This matters for gender data because civil society, feminist networks, community organizations and rights-based actors have proximity, trust and contextual knowledge of realities that remain less visible in official systems.<sup>11</sup>

### **Co-production with official systems**

Sustained NSO–civil society collaboration can make under-measured populations statistically visible while strengthening trust in official data systems. Mexico illustrates this clearly. The realities of LGBTIQ+ people were only partially visible in official statistics, with existing evidence relying largely on non-probabilistic surveys<sup>12</sup> and limited modules that could not adequately inform public policy. To address this gap, the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), working with the National Council to Prevent Discrimination (CONAPRED), civil society organizations, academic institutions, public agencies and members of the LGBTIQ+ community, developed the National Survey on Sexual and Gender Diversity (ENDISEG) and a complementary web survey.<sup>13</sup> Quality and ethics were built into the process through exploratory interviews, repeated working sessions with civil society, questionnaire testing, pilot exercises, interviewer training, confidential data collection methods for sensitive questions and data validation procedures. The result was nationally representative evidence on the size and characteristics of the LGBTIQ+ population and on experiences of discrimination and mental health, which informed policy debates and legislative reforms, including measures related to so-called ‘conversion therapies’ and anti-discrimination protections, while also repositioning INEGI as a more collaborative and trusted actor in the data ecosystem. The experience illustrates how official statistics can responsibly measure sexual and gender diversity when co-designed with affected communities, combining methodological rigour with trust-building and ethical safeguards.

Citizen data also raises real questions about quality and representativeness, particularly where methods differ from those used in official statistics. The appropriate standard is fitness for purpose: transparent methods, appropriate quality criteria, ethical safeguards and clarity about what the evidence can and cannot support. Integration into official statistics is therefore not the only marker of value. Citizen data already informs advocacy, human rights reporting, community monitoring, SDG interpretation and policy dialogue, including when it remains independent of official statistics.

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<sup>11</sup> UN Women. Forthcoming. “Integrating Citizen Data on Gender into National SDG Monitoring Frameworks.” New York: UN Women.

<sup>12</sup> UN Women. Forthcoming. “Collaborative on Citizen Data: Case Study Compilation.” New York: UN Women.

<sup>13</sup> INEGI. N.d. “[Información Demográfica y Social: Encuesta Nacional sobre Diversidad Sexual y de Género \(ENDISEG\) 2021.](#)”

## **The lesson is that evidence systems must become more inclusive, participatory and accountable**

For CSW71 and post-2030 discussions, the implication is clear. Closing gender data gaps calls for more than adding survey modules or producing more indicators. It also requires stronger user-producer dialogue, closer collaboration among NSOs, women's machineries and civil society, more inclusive instrument design, better use of administrative and non-traditional data sources, sustained financing for gender data and clear pathways for evidence to inform policy and accountability.

A future monitoring framework cannot carry existing data gaps forward as technical unfinished business. It must address the institutional, methodological and participatory conditions that determine whose realities become visible in evidence systems and whose remain overlooked. This means building systems capable of capturing the important experiences of women, girls and gender-diverse people that conventional approaches have left undermeasured. Citizen data contributes to this shift by helping reveal how existing systems fall short and by creating additional pathways for representation, participation and accountability.

### **3. Making intersecting inequalities visible through citizen data**

#### **Seeing who is left behind requires evidence that demonstrates how inequalities intersect**

The central pledge of the 2030 Agenda is to leave no one behind and to endeavour to reach the furthest behind first. Who counts as furthest behind is itself contested and context-specific, which is precisely why participatory evidence, rather than a fixed external definition, is needed to identify them. That pledge cannot be assessed through aggregate measures alone. It requires evidence that can show not only whether women and girls are being left behind, but also which women and girls, in what circumstances and through which overlapping forms of disadvantage.

The SDGs were deliberately framed around what is important and meaningful to measure rather than only what was already measurable, and target 17.18 committed to a significant increase in the availability of high-quality, disaggregated data.<sup>14</sup> More than a decade on, that commitment remains only partly met for gender equality. As of 2025, only 57.4 per cent of the data required to monitor SDG 5 was available.<sup>15</sup> Where data exist, they are usually disaggregated along a single dimension. Cross-disaggregation, which intersectionality requires, is even scarcer. Data systems rarely capture how gender intersects with age, disability, ethnicity, migration status, institutional or legal status,

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<sup>14</sup> United Nations General Assembly. 2015. "[Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#)." A/RES/70/1.

<sup>15</sup> Azcona, G., A. Bhatt, G. Fortuny Fillo et al. 2025. [Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2025](#). New York: UN Women and United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs (DESA).

location, income, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, sex characteristics and other determinants.<sup>16</sup>

### **This is where the systems gap becomes an equality gap**

Populations that conventional instruments miss, including those outside sampling frames – such as unhoused people, residents of unregistered or informal settlements, seasonal or undocumented migrant workers and residents living in hard-to-reach area – are often the very groups the 2030 Agenda pledged to reach first. Where SDG monitoring cannot see compounded disadvantage, implementation cannot be directed toward it and progress for the most marginalized can be neither planned nor verified.

### **Citizen data helps make these intersecting realities visible**

Citizen data narrows that gap by engaging communities in the design, collection, interpretation and use of evidence. Its contribution is not only that more people are counted but that people who are often under-represented in official systems can help define what should be counted and how it should be understood. Community-shaped and participatory approaches can reach populations that sampling frames omit, bring in qualitative evidence that captures experience rather than counts alone and surface issues that standard instruments may under-capture such as unpaid and undervalued care work, violence that goes unreported, informal and precarious work outside any survey or register, exclusion from services, mobility constraints, fear, lack of agency and limited control over decisions, resources or bodily autonomy.

### **This matters because intersecting inequalities do not simply add up; they compound**

A woman may face disadvantage as a woman, as a member of an ethnic or linguistic minority, as a person with a disability, as a migrant, as a person with a diverse sexual orientation or gender identity or as a resident of a remote or informal settlement. These axes of inequality can interact and mutually reinforce one another. Conventional statistics, when disaggregated one variable at a time, may obscure that interaction. Participatory and community-shaped data can help surface it, giving policymakers a stronger basis for integrated responses across health, justice, social protection, education, employment, care, digital inclusion and other policy areas.<sup>17</sup> This is also a more efficient use of scarce resources as a single intersectional data-collection effort can inform responses for multiple affected groups rather than requiring effort for each group.

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<sup>16</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). 2025. “[Mind the SDG Data Gaps: Insights from the OECD SDGs Hub](#).” Policy Insights, September; Beegle, K., U. Serajuddin, B. Stacy et al. 2023. “[Missing SDG Gender Indicators](#).” Policy Research Working Paper 10544. Washington, DC: World Bank.

<sup>17</sup> UN Women and United Nations Partnership on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. 2022. “[Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit: An Intersectional Approach to Leave No One Behind](#).”

### **Citizen data can create safer pathways for evidence on sensitive and under-reported issues**

Some of the experiences most central to gender inequality are also the most difficult to measure. Violence against women and girls, sexual harassment, technology-facilitated abuse and other forms of gender-based violence are heavily under-reported<sup>18</sup> because of stigma, fear of retaliation, weak trust in institutions and the lack of safe reporting channels. Citizen data does not remove these risks but, when designed with survivor-centred protocols, informed consent, privacy-by-design, secure data governance and do-no-harm principles, community-rooted and community-led approaches can lower barriers to disclosure while protecting participants from harm. These safeguards are not technical refinements; they are the conditions under which such data can be collected and used responsibly.

### **Citizen data also recognizes young people as producers of evidence, not only subjects of data**

Young women, girls and gender-diverse youth are increasingly documenting their own realities and priorities, from care and climate to digital harms, and bringing that evidence into spaces where the 2030 Agenda is reviewed, including the High-level Political Forum, the CSW and the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) Youth Forum.<sup>19</sup> This is especially important because age itself is an axis of exclusion from data systems. Adolescents and young people are often absent from sampling frames, consent regimes and consultation processes, leaving their experiences of school-related violence, online abuse, precarious work, barriers to services and limited participation in decision-making under-measured. This generation has also grown up amid unprecedented data collection by technology companies while facing technology-facilitated gender-based violence and AI-enabled harms that official statistical systems have been slow to measure.

At the same time, youth-generated data should be understood through an intersectional lens. A young Indigenous woman with a disability, a displaced adolescent girl or a young person facing stigma because of sexual orientation or gender identity experiences disadvantage in ways that cannot be understood through any single category. Citizen data can help ensure that young people, including those among the furthest behind, are visible not only in monitoring but also in the design of responses. The same exclusion operates at the other end of the age range. Survey instruments such as the DHS apply upper age cut-offs that leave older women's needs, health risks and economic circumstances largely unmeasured. The underlying problem – age-based sampling and consent design – is the same in both cases, so citizen data can help close both gaps at once.

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<sup>18</sup> United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). 2025. [“Making All Spaces Safe: Global Programme to Address Technology-Facilitated Gender-based Violence.”](#)

<sup>19</sup> UN Women. 2025. [“Youth Leading Local Change: From Climate Justice to Gender Equality.”](#) Feature, 4 August.

## 4. Citizen data as representation, participation and accountability

### **Visibility becomes representation when communities help shape the evidence**

Citizen data therefore does more than count the uncounted. It changes who is recognized as a legitimate producer of evidence for the SDGs. By allowing under-represented groups to shape what is measured, how categories are defined, how findings are interpreted and how evidence is used, citizen data turns visibility into representation. Communities must not only appear in SDG data; they must also help determine what the data means and how it informs action. This is the bridge to accountability: Once communities help define the evidence, they gain a stronger basis for participating in decisions, challenging implementation gaps and holding institutions to account.

### **Visibility becomes accountability when communities can use evidence to shape decisions**

Section 3 showed how citizen data makes intersecting inequalities visible. This section focuses on what follows from that visibility. When under-represented groups help define the evidence, they are not only counted in SDG monitoring; they also gain a stronger basis to participate in decisions about priorities, resources and implementation. Citizen data therefore addresses a representational gap in SDG monitoring by broadening the set of actors who help produce, interpret and use the evidence on which progress assessments depend.

### **Citizen data is a participation agenda, not only a data collection method**

Citizen data is led by civil society, feminist networks, citizen science initiatives and communities and engages citizens and civil society directly in both advancing the SDGs and monitoring them. Participation can take different forms, from consultation to active involvement in design and collection and to deeper forms of empowerment in which communities help set the terms of what is measured and how evidence is used. As participation deepens, gender statistics become more relevant, legitimate and actionable.<sup>20</sup> The underlying principle, “nothing about us without us”,<sup>21</sup> echoes the 2030 Agenda’s own consultative origins and gives practical content to target 16.7 on responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making.

### **Participation strengthens accountability in practical ways**

Participation strengthens accountability not only in principle but through concrete pathways. First, it improves the relevance and credibility of the evidence: When communities help define priorities, shape indicators and validate findings, the resulting data are more grounded in lived realities. Second, it builds the constituency that can press for a response. People who have helped produce evidence about their own lives have both the knowledge and the standing to demand action from government agencies, service providers and other duty-bearers. Third, it creates a documented basis against which commitments can be reviewed over time, converting broad pledges into

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<sup>20</sup> UN Women and PARIS21. 2025. [“Participation for Transformation of Gender Data: Developing a Framework for Transformative Production, Use and Reuse of Gender Data.”](#)

<sup>21</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). n.d. [“Collaborative on Citizen Data.”](#)

evidence that can be tracked and followed up. In this sense, participation turns data from a product for communities into a resource they hold, and that ownership enable them to hold institutions to account and demand their human rights.

### **Citizen data also helps sustain civic space**

Citizen data initiatives are as much a political agenda as a technical one, particularly at a time when civic space is contracting in many parts of the world. Restrictive laws, funding cuts and harassment of independent voices are narrowing the room in which civil society can organize, speak and hold authorities to account.<sup>22</sup> In this context, citizen data should be understood not only as a way to fill evidence gaps but also as an instrument for sustaining and widening civic space and participation. It gives communities and their organizations a legitimate, evidence-based channel through which to participate in public life, to enter debates about priorities and resources and to bring lived realities into public decision-making. Legitimacy here does not depend on validation by a national statistical office; it rests on ethical production, methodological transparency and community ownership of the process (see section 5).

Where formal avenues for participation are constrained, the act of generating and using credible evidence about one's own conditions can itself be a form of civic agency. By broadening who participates in producing public evidence, and in defining what counts as evidence in the first place, citizen data can also strengthen trust in evidence systems by anchoring them more firmly in the realities they seek to represent. Representation, participation and accountability are therefore connected: Who is counted shapes who can participate, and who participates shapes who can hold institutions to account.

### **Civil society and feminist organizations are central to this accountability function**

Civil society and feminist organizations are not occasional contributors to citizen data on gender; they are among its principal producers and users. Feminist networks, women's rights organizations, grass-roots and community groups, human rights actors and citizen science initiatives use citizen data and their practice-based knowledge<sup>23</sup> to hold institutions to their commitments under the SDGs and related normative frameworks, including the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).<sup>24</sup> Through community monitoring, advocacy and independent reporting, these organizations test official narratives against lived realities. Civil society also performs a translation function in the gender data value chain, converting technically

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<sup>22</sup> Sesan, G. 2025. "[Shrinking Civic Space, Digital Funding, and Legitimacy in a Post-truth Era](#)." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 17 July.

<sup>23</sup> UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women. 2025. "[Co-creating an Agenda: Practice-based Learning and Knowledge for Women's and Feminist Movements to End Violence against Women and Girls](#)." SVRI Forum 2024 Workshop Report. New York: UN Women.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations. 1995. "[Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#)." New York: United Nations; United Nations General Assembly. 1979. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#). 1249 U.N.T.S. 13.

framed official statistics into evidence policymakers can act on and making the case for why gender matters to development outcomes they are already accountable for.

Civil society shadow and spotlight reports have become an important part of the SDG follow-up and review architecture. Under one feminist programme alone, partners produced 38 such reports to governments' Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) between 2016 and 2020, applying an intersectional lens to assess progress.<sup>25</sup> These forms of evidence can inform advocacy, policy dialogue and, in some contexts, rights-based claims.

### **Citizen data has accountability value when it is connected to decision-making spaces and there are feedback loops**

The accountability value of citizen data is strongest when community evidence is connected to the mechanisms through which states report on and answer for their commitments. These include VNRs and the High-level Political Forum, human rights treaty body reporting, national accountability processes and follow-up to the CSW. Citizen data can act as a bridge between evidence generated close to people's lives and these national and global accountability processes, so that what communities know informs how progress is assessed and how implementation gaps are addressed.

These contributions are not automatic. Citizen data acquires accountability value when it is ethically produced, quality-assured, appropriately interpreted and linked to spaces where it can inform decisions or prompt a response. Participation without trusted use and recognition risks tokenism; use without participation risks extraction. Trusted use implies that the evidence can be vouched for by statistical offices, is reliable for duty-bearers to use to make decisions and is believed by communities to represent them. This depends on ethical production, transparent methods and a clear link to the decision it is meant to inform. The central lesson for CSW71 and the post-2030 agenda is therefore that inclusive monitoring of progress must create pathways not only for communities to be counted but for their evidence to shape decisions and accountability.

## **5. Enabling conditions and institutional pathways for trusted use**

### **Trusted use of citizen data requires more than good data; it requires an enabling environment**

Sections 3 and 4 showed that citizen data can make intersecting inequalities visible and create stronger pathways for participation and accountability. For that potential to translate into strengthened SDG monitoring and implementation, citizen data must also be trusted, usable and connected to institutions that can act on it. Citizen data is itself a strategy for building the more inclusive and responsive data ecosystems the 2030 Agenda envisaged when it called for

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<sup>25</sup> Women2030. 2021. "[Gender Equality on the Ground: Feminist Findings and Recommendations for Achieving Agenda 2030](#)." Global Shadow Report. Utrecht: WECF International.

strengthened statistical capacity and a broader evidence base for the SDGs.<sup>26</sup> The Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data sets out the elements of such an enabling environment: political commitment, legal recognition, coordination mechanisms, sustained capacity and institutional openness to data produced outside the official system.<sup>27</sup>

For gender data, these conditions are especially important because many of the realities most likely to be captured through citizen data – violence, exclusion, unpaid care, discrimination, unsafe mobility and the experiences of marginalized groups – are also those that require trust, protection and sustained collaboration to measure responsibly. The gender data systems that best support SDG monitoring are therefore not necessarily those with the largest budgets but those with the strongest relationships: regular, structured dialogue between users and producers of data and effective coordination among NSOs, the wider statistical system, national women’s machineries and civil society. Where that dialogue exists, citizen data has clearer channels into monitoring, policy and accountability; where it does not, even strong evidence may remain outside decision-making.

### **Enabling citizen data is also a civic space issue**

Establishing these conditions is a political undertaking not just a technical one. Legal recognition of citizen data, the opening of official processes to civil society and the protection of the space in which communities can collect, interpret and use evidence are all matters of political will. They are especially important in settings where civic space is shrinking and where data from civil society organizations, particularly women’s rights organizations, are increasingly facing denial, distortion and backlash, including through the spread of misinformation.<sup>28</sup> An enabling environment for citizen data is therefore also an enabling environment for civil society participation. It depends on the same conditions highlighted in the United Nations Guidance Note on Civic Space<sup>29</sup> and the United Nations Agenda for Protection:<sup>30</sup> the protection of those who generate evidence, the participation of communities and civil society in decision-making and monitoring processes and the promotion of a diverse and independent civic space capable of contributing to knowledge production and accountability.

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<sup>26</sup> United Nations General Assembly. 2015. “[Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).” A/RES/70/1.

<sup>27</sup> Collaborative on Citizen Data. 2025. “[The Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data](#).”

<sup>28</sup> Erikson, A. and S. Majumdar. 2025. *Beyond Backlash: Advancing Women’s Movements on Ending Violence against Women – Insights from Grantee Partners of the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women*. New York: UN Women.

<sup>29</sup> United Nations. 2020. “[United Nations Guidance Note: Protection and Promotion of Civic Space](#).” September. New York: United Nations.

<sup>30</sup> United Nations. 2024. “[United Nations Agenda for Protection: Strengthening the Ability of the United Nations System to Protect People Through their Human Rights](#).” February. Geneva: United Nations.

## The task is to move from pilots to institutional pathways

A recurring weakness is that citizen data remains confined to isolated pilots or one-off initiatives, with limited influence on SDG monitoring or policy at scale. Moving toward systemic use requires NSOs to act not only as producers of official statistics but also as data stewards within broader data ecosystems. Yet few incentives currently exist for NSOs to engage systematically with civil society actors. Within the statistical community, data stewardship is still often viewed through the lens of technical innovation and the use of private-sector data, rather than as a mandate to be more open to citizens, communities and their insights. Reframing stewardship in this way would create a clearer pathway for institutionalizing citizen data through governance, standards, coordination arrangements and quality criteria that allow citizen data and other non-traditional data sources to inform SDG reporting, policy dialogue and accountability while safeguarding privacy, confidentiality and ethical use.<sup>31</sup>

Moving beyond pilots also requires recognizing civil society expertise as part of the national data ecosystem. This means investing in community-led data initiatives, creating incentives for collaboration between official and citizen data actors and building practical mechanisms for co-design, co-validation, documentation and appropriate use. The objective is not to absorb all citizen data into official statistics but to create credible pathways through which different forms of evidence can inform public decisions.

Institutional change happens when partnerships create the standards, capacities and coordination mechanisms needed to move citizen data from isolated practice to recognized evidence. Uganda illustrates this shift clearly. A strong partnership between UN Women and the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), working with civil society organizations and other actors in the national statistical system, helped move citizen data from a marginal concept to a more institutionalized and policy-relevant source of evidence.<sup>32</sup> In response to growing demand for more timely, high-quality and disaggregated gender data, this partnership supported the integration of citizen-generated data, now increasingly framed as citizen contribution to data, into Uganda's broader gender statistics architecture through legal and policy frameworks, coordination mechanisms, capacity-building and the development of dedicated guidelines and a toolkit. It also encouraged civil society organizations, including those working on gender equality and violence against women, to integrate citizen-generated data into their programming, while strengthening the ability of statistical actors to assess, use and connect such data to national priorities and decision-making.

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<sup>31</sup> UN Women. 2026. "[Practical Guidance: Gender-Responsive Citizen Data Quality Principles](#)." Working paper. New York: UN Women.

<sup>32</sup> UN Women. 2024. "[How Uganda is Investing in Citizen-Generated Data to Improve the Lives of Women and Girls](#)." 6 April.

## **Complementarity must be operationalized, not only affirmed**

Citizen data and official statistics are complementary sources of public evidence. For assessing SDG progress, neither contribution is sufficient alone: Credibility before policymakers and comparability across contexts benefit from official standards, while relevance to those furthest behind depends on community proximity and participation.

Trusted use is what allows these sources to reinforce rather than undermine one another. Quality, in this setting, is a function of relationships as much as methods. Trust, shared ownership, clearly allocated roles, transparent documentation, co-design and co-validation help make citizen data both credible and usable. Co-validation is particularly important because it allows community knowledge and statistical standards to strengthen one another, producing evidence that can inform SDG monitoring without losing its grounding in lived experience.

Community-led data initiatives show that institutional change also depends on recognizing self-identification and self-definition as principles of valid evidence. Initiatives such as the Indigenous Peoples' Navigator is a framework and set of tools for and by Indigenous Peoples that demonstrates how communities can generate and use their own data to document issues such as land rights, cultural identity and access to services while ensuring that Indigenous knowledge systems and priorities are reflected in governance processes.<sup>33</sup> Central to this approach is the principle that individuals and communities determine how they identify and how their characteristics are validated and represented in data. This is particularly important for Indigenous Peoples as externally assigned classifications often fail to capture their identities, realities and rights, whereas self-identification helps produce more accurate, culturally relevant and rights-based evidence for decision-making.

## **Ethics and protection are preconditions for use**

Ethical protection is a precondition rather than an afterthought. Informed consent, participant safety and sound data governance determine whether data on sensitive issues – including violence under target 5.2, discrimination, civic space restrictions and the circumstances of groups in vulnerable or criminalized situations – can be collected at all and whether they can later be shared, interpreted or reused without exposing participants to reprisals, intimidation, surveillance or other forms of harm. Openness and reuse, which give citizen data much of their value across the SDG evidence ecosystem, are possible only where these protections hold.

These safeguards carry particular weight for groups whose evidence is necessary but would potentially expose them to heightened risks if they were identified. Women human rights defenders, environmental, land, democratic and civil rights activists and other advocates often

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<sup>33</sup> Soler Torramilans, J., S.S. Jørgensen and Carol Rask. 2025. [\*Citizen Data Collection Methods: Experiences from the Indigenous Navigator\*](#). Copenhagen: Danish Institute for Human Rights.

generate front-line evidence on violations, reprisals and shrinking civic space, precisely the realities formal systems may struggle to capture. Yet they may also be targeted for that work, and data identifying them or those they support can create direct risks. Capturing their realities is necessary for an honest assessment of progress under the SDGs and related human rights frameworks; doing so responsibly requires strict confidentiality, secure data governance, informed consent and a do-no-harm standard that takes precedence over any interest in disclosure or integration. Where these protections cannot be guaranteed, the right course may be not to collect, publish or integrate the data.

The same applies where same-sex relations, diverse gender identities or advocacy related to them remain criminalized or heavily stigmatized. In such contexts, the absence of data on LGBTIQ+ populations is not a neutral gap but often a reflection of legal and political constraints. Citizen data, when independently governed and ethically designed, may offer one of the few pathways to generate evidence while protecting participants. Decisions on whether and how to collect such data must remain context-specific and grounded in do-no-harm principles.

### **Integration into official statistics should be a pathway, not a default**

Integration into official statistics is not always the right goal. The Copenhagen Framework provides principles for trusted use, but the appropriate pathway will depend on context. Where rule of law, institutional trust, civil society independence and safeguards are strong, citizen data may inform or complement official statistics more directly. Where those conditions are weak, folding citizen data into official systems may expose participants to surveillance, co-opt independent voices or invite retaliation.<sup>34</sup>

Citizen data also retain value as part of a wider evidence ecosystem, informing advocacy, human rights reporting, community monitoring, SDG interpretation, policy dialogue and accountability without becoming official statistics. Knowing when to integrate, when to link, when to use alongside and when to keep citizen data independent is therefore an enabling condition in its own right. For CSW71 and the post-2030 monitoring architecture, the key lesson is that trusted use requires institutional pathways that are both enabling and protective: They should make citizen data more usable for decision-making while preserving the participation, independence and safety of the communities that produce it.

## **6. A shift in citizen data use from filling evidence gaps to creating institutional change**

Citizen data is slowly moving from a largely advocacy-driven practice to a recognized area of work within the global statistical community. In practice, citizen data significantly predates its formal recognition. It has long been produced by civil society, community groups, feminist

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<sup>34</sup> Gennari, P. 2025. "[Citizen Data and Official Statistics: Opportunities and Critical Questions](#)." *Statistical Journal of the IAOS* 41, 4.

networks, citizen science initiatives, human rights actors and academics to capture realities often missed by official statistics. What is changing now is that the official statistical community is creating a more structured space for citizen data within global data systems, while country experience shows that it can also deliver tangible impact at national and local levels.

The examples below are grouped by the contribution they make to institutional change: global recognition, co-production with official systems, community accountability and local responsiveness, including in crisis settings.

### **Global recognition of citizen data**

The significance of recent global milestones is not official validation alone but the recognition that inclusive data ecosystems require contributions beyond official producers. Several developments show this shift clearly: the mandate given by the United Nations Security Council at its 54th session; the launch of the Collaborative on Citizen Data at the 2023 World Data Forum;<sup>35</sup> the development and endorsement of the Copenhagen Framework;<sup>36</sup> the implementation roadmap, stocktaking and working groups;<sup>37</sup> and the move from discussing citizen data mainly under the 2030 Agenda data and indicators agenda item toward a more dedicated United Nations Security Council agenda for citizen data.

This shift is both institutional and conceptual. Official systems increasingly recognize civil society, communities, academia and women's rights organizations as integral parts of the data ecosystem rather than as peripheral contributors. The Copenhagen Framework has helped create this opening by defining citizen data as data originating from initiatives in which citizens are meaningfully engaged in the data value chain, irrespective of whether such data are integrated into official statistics. This definition is important because it makes citizen data acceptable to the official statistical community and creates a practical opportunity for NSOs to support, coordinate, co-produce or use citizen data as part of broader national data systems. It therefore provides a pathway for moving from recognition to institutionalization: building evidence systems that are more inclusive, responsive, accountable and capable of drawing on the legitimacy and insight that citizen data can bring to decision-making.

### **Collaboration of non-state and state actors**

Citizen data can support both immediate inclusion measures and longer-term accountability when affected groups help define who is counted and how. Colombia provides a strong example. Waste pickers' work and living conditions were poorly captured in official statistics despite their central

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<sup>35</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). 2023. "[Statistical Commission: Report on the Fifty-fourth Session \(28 February-3 March 2023\)](#)." E/2023/24E/CN.3/2023/37, Decision 54/102, paragraph (h).

<sup>36</sup> Collaborative on Citizen Data. 2025. "[The Copenhagen Framework on Citizen Data](#)."

<sup>37</sup> United Nations Statistical Commission. 2026. [Harnessing Data by Citizens for Public Policy and Sustainable Development: Report of the Collaborative on Citizen Data](#)." Background document, 57th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission.

role in urban recycling and their legal recognition as subjects of affirmative action. In Bogotá, the waste picker census was shaped not only by the city administration and technical teams but also by waste picker organizations and leaders, who helped define who should be counted, reviewed the questionnaire, supported outreach, mapped collection routes and monitored implementation.<sup>38</sup> Quality was strengthened through an assessment of previous censuses and administrative records, field-based enumeration at warehouses and along collection routes to reduce false registration, verification procedures, post-census household visits and the later creation of the Unified Registry of Waste Pickers to keep the evidence updated. What changed was substantial: The census enabled the implementation of remuneration schemes and social protection measures, provided organizations with evidence to negotiate with the city, strengthened accountability by exposing irregularities and helped establish a model that informed national guidance and wider municipal practice on identifying and supporting waste pickers.

### **Community accountability**

Participatory and feminist approaches show that meaningful evidence is not only counted but also defined by those most affected. Feminist evaluation and participatory storytelling approaches capture dimensions of change that are often difficult to measure through conventional indicators alone. Rather than relying solely on quantitative measures, affected communities have contributed narrative evidence and lived experiences to define what meaningful change looked like in their own contexts. Participatory validation processes helped strengthen trust, credibility and ownership of the findings. By combining qualitative and quantitative forms of evidence, these approaches informed learning, accountability and programme improvement while ensuring that those most affected by interventions had a direct role in shaping the evidence base.<sup>39</sup>

### **Local responsiveness**

Participatory and methodologically rigorous citizen data can influence sector policy when community knowledge is combined with formal quality assurance. Senegal is a case in point. Major dimensions of women's exclusion from the extractive sector remained under-measured, including access to local content opportunities, working conditions, pay, participation in decision-making and the differentiated impacts of mining on women in host communities and artisanal mining sites.<sup>40</sup> The Women in Mining (WIM) association, with support from partners including UN Women and with engagement from the NSO, local authorities, communities, women entrepreneurs and women workers, developed the WIM Index as a participatory gender index for the sector. Quality and ethics were addressed through a mixed-methods design, a multi-stakeholder technical committee, structured sampling, focus groups and interviews across affected regions, informed consent procedures, anonymized data collection, secure storage, daily validation and

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<sup>38</sup> Chikarmane, P. and L. Narayanan. 2024. "[Statistics on Waste Pickers: A Case Studies Guide](#)." Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), 1 May.

<sup>39</sup> Collaborative on Citizen Data. 2026. "[Citizen Data in Action: Measuring Impact and Telling Stories that Matter](#)."

<sup>40</sup> Ross, J. 2025. "[A Gender Index in the Extractive Sector Is Shaping Industry Policies and Evaluations in Senegal](#)." UN Women Impact Story, 21 November.

supervision during fieldwork and triangulation across quantitative and qualitative sources. The evidence has since been used in advocacy and policy processes, including support for the operationalization of the Local Development Support Fund, the inclusion of women's organizations in follow-up mechanisms, the integration of gender concerns into sector policy frameworks and the use of WIM Index findings in Senegal's Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative reporting.

In crisis settings, citizen data can make emergency response faster and more inclusive by identifying intersecting vulnerabilities that standard counts often miss. For example, emergency response in flood-affected informal settlements in Kenya risked overlooking how vulnerability was shaped by gender, health status, disability and caregiving responsibilities, especially in the chaotic first hours after displacement.<sup>41</sup> This gap was addressed by a community health promoter, drawing on gender data skills strengthened through a UN Women and GROOTS-Kenya initiative under Women Count. She rapidly documented survivors, including pregnant women, and identified people living with HIV/AIDS, children with diarrhoea and persons with disabilities for priority attention. Quality and ethics were supported by community-rooted knowledge, rapid on-site verification and the use of disaggregated data to record intersecting vulnerabilities rather than only aggregate headcounts. When the Kenya Red Cross arrived, the data helped target food relief and specialized assistance more effectively, including support for pregnant and lactating women and households with young children.

Conflicts and crises are also periods where surveys and administrative data collection are risky, and development responses have to be extremely localized and grounded in lived experience. Here citizen data, particularly from community-based civil society organizations and women's rights organizations, can fill a very important gap. On the front lines of responding to the crisis, these organizations are constantly engaging with their own service data in dynamic ways and triangulating them with community-level responses to adapt according to the current needs of at-risk women and girls. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Trust Fund grantee partners – Women's Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) in Palestine and the International Foundation for Crime Prevention and Victim Care (PCVC) in India – systematically recorded violations reported to their services every week during the lockdown and provided powerful data that shaped local and national responses to the shadow pandemic of violence against women and girls.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Maina, S. and J. Ross. 2025. "[How Citizen Gender Data Helped Target Relief during Floods in Kenya](#)." UN Women Impact Story, 2 July.

<sup>42</sup> Majumdar, S. and G. Wood. 2020. "[UNFT EVAW Briefing Note on the Impact of COVID-19 on Ending Violence against Women Through the Lens of Civil Society and Women's Rights Organizations](#)." New York: UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women.

## 7. Recommendations

Citizen data is not a technical supplement to official statistics but a democratic and representational practice that strengthens the legitimacy of evidence systems, makes intersecting inequalities visible and creates new pathways for accountability. If the first decade of the SDGs taught us how to measure progress, the next must determine who has the authority to define it. Rebuilding trust in multilateralism requires monitoring systems that are not only statistically robust but also representative, participatory and legitimate. Under current fiscal constraints, this is also an investment case. Intersectional evidence that supports one coordinated policy response is more cost-effective than commissioning separate, single-axis data collection for each affected group.

Translating this principle into practice requires different actions from different actors. Recommendations are the following:

### **Governments and national statistical offices**

1. Recognize citizen data as a representational practice in national SDG monitoring and reporting and as a key contributor to the leave-no-one-behind principle in practice. Governments should treat citizen data not as an optional technical addition but as a legitimate part of national evidence systems.
2. Institutionalize collaboration with civil society, with national statistical offices as data stewards. NSOs should assume an explicit stewardship role, setting the governance, standards and quality criteria that allow citizen data to inform SDG reporting and move from occasional pilots to permanent partnerships.
3. Protect domestic financing for gender and citizen statistics. Governments should maintain and, where possible, increase national budget allocations for gender statistics and community-led data initiatives, treating them as core infrastructure rather than discretionary spending.
4. Build cross-disaggregation and co-production into statistical systems. Statistical systems should enable cross-disaggregation and adopt participatory methods that let affected communities, including young people, help define what is measured and how.
5. Protect civic space and apply do-no-harm standards to data on defenders and at-risk groups. Governments should protect the space in which communities collect, interpret and use evidence and uphold strict confidentiality, informed consent and do-no-harm standards for data concerning women human rights defenders, criminalized groups and others at heightened risk.
6. Use community evidence in national and sub-national planning, budgeting and reporting. Governments should draw on citizen data not only in VNRs but also in national and local planning and budget decisions, where community evidence can help direct resources to where they are most needed.
7. Lead, with civil society, the development of collaborative quality assurance frameworks. Governments and NSOs should work with civil society to establish quality assurance

approaches that build confidence in citizen data without weakening the participatory methods that make it valuable.

### **United Nations**

1. Embed citizen data in global monitoring guidance and the post-2030 framework. The United Nations system should continue to build on the institutional recognition already given to citizen data, including through the Collaborative on Citizen Data and the Copenhagen Framework, as the architecture for monitoring beyond 2030 is designed.
2. Open structured channels for community evidence in formal review processes. The High-level Political Forum, human rights treaty body reporting and follow-up to the CSW should provide defined pathways for civil society shadow and spotlight reports, so that community evidence reaches the bodies that assess progress.
3. Uphold protective standards. The United Nations system should continue to apply the protections set out in relevant guidance on civic space and the protection of human rights defenders.

### **Donors and development partners**

1. Protect and expand flexible, multi-year financing for gender and citizen data. This financing should be treated as core infrastructure for SDG accountability, not discretionary project spending, particularly as major survey programmes have closed and statistical funding has declined.
2. Fund civil society directly as a producer of data, not just as a deliverer of services. Funding models should recognize and support the evidence-generating role that women's rights organizations and community groups already play rather than treating them solely as implementing partners.
3. Fund the institutional infrastructure that citizen data initiatives depend on in addition to the data collection itself. Quality assurance processes, co-validation mechanisms and partnerships between NSOs and civil society require sustained funding to move beyond isolated pilots.

### **Civil society and academic actors**

1. Engage as an institutionalized, ongoing partner to NSOs instead of having an occasional consultation. Civil society organizations should pursue standing partnerships with NSOs rather than one-off engagements limited to a single project or data collection round.
2. Engage across the full data lifecycle. Civil society and community organizations should participate in defining priorities, collecting data, interpreting findings and shaping the decisions that follow, rather than being limited to providing information.
3. Continue and expand independent monitoring, including through shadow and spotlight reporting and, where appropriate, rights-based advocacy. This remains one of the clearest routes from community evidence to institutional accountability.

4. Apply strict confidentiality and do-no-harm protocols to data concerning human rights defenders and other at-risk groups. These protections should be standard practice for civil society organizations, independent of what governments or funders require.
5. Strengthen institutional capacity for data collection, analysis, reporting and use.

Integration into official statistics is not always the appropriate goal. Statistical and policy actors should decide, case by case, when to integrate, link, use alongside or keep citizen data independent, guided by the rule of law, institutional trust, the independence of civil society and the safeguards in place. The objective is to make citizen data usable for decision-making while preserving the participation, independence and safety of the communities that produce it.