



This research is an in-depth and ambitious look at female leadership: close to 10,000 girls and young women share their ideas and experiences. What does it take for them to become leaders, what does leadership mean to them and what helps or hinders them from taking control of their lives and their futures: at home, at work and in their communities and countries?

“She sees an equal society without discrimination. She wants to stop discrimination based on gender, disabilities, and race. This is her ideal future.”

GIRL, JAPAN

THE FACE OF LEADERSHIP

Girls are defining leadership for themselves and, for them, the most important leadership qualities are striving for social and gender justice, making decisions collectively and leading in a way that empowers and helps others.

Their vision suggests leadership as a force for collective good: embedded in bringing about positive change, particularly for girls and young women. But what girls and young women see around them is not encouraging.

In terms of power and control – who makes the decisions at family, local, corporate and national level – we are a long way from their vision of leadership and from achieving gender equality.

The lack of female role models, which runs through all levels of society, restricts girls’ ambitions and means that changing the face and qualities of leadership will be harder for them to achieve.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

- ▶ **Girls aspire to lead:** 76%¹ of girls and young women aspire to be a leader in their country, community or career.
- ▶ Girls and young women **have a different definition of leadership:** one that is collaborative and brings about positive change, rather than authoritarian and controlling.
- ▶ **Girls and young women have confidence in their leadership abilities:** only 5% said they felt no confidence at all, with 62% confident or very confident in their ability to lead.
- ▶ Career aspirations **increase with education and social standing** and decrease with marriage.
- ▶ **Girls look to their family members as role models and supporters:** family support alone will not be enough, but achieving progress and equal representation without it is likely to be impossible.
- ▶ **Gender discrimination, blatant sexism and stereotyping** are all named as barriers: tied in with gendered expectations around balancing work and family life.
- ▶ 60% of girls and young women believe women have to **work harder than men** to be respected and, overall, women leaders receive harsher criticism.
- ▶ 93% believe female leaders will have experienced **unwanted physical contact**.
- ▶ 94% believe **women aren’t treated as well as men** in leadership positions
- ▶ **Young women who have actual experience of leading often reported even higher expectation of gender discrimination** than respondents with less or no experience of leading.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

“I find it unacceptable that women’s place is only at home. Women should be educated and participating in the change of their country.” **YOUNG WOMAN, SENEGAL**

CULTIVATE YOUNG LEADERS, STARTING AT HOME

- ▶ Policy makers and civil society organisations must work with families, local leaders and communities to **challenge sexism and discrimination and create a strong support network for girls’ leadership aspirations**. The promotion of women’s leadership must begin in childhood and increase during adolescence.
- ▶ Mothers, fathers and brothers can all act as champions within the home and the local community. Fathers and brothers can **share responsibility** for housework and childcare in order to undermine stereotypes.
- ▶ **Community and government leaders must create safe spaces** where girls and young women can discuss issues that matter to them.

ENCOURAGE NEW VISIONS OF LEADERSHIP

- ▶ Those in authority must **challenge the perception** of what it means to be a leader. Governments, the private sector and the media should send out a clear message, by example and through public campaigns, that **girls and women belong in the spaces and places of decision-making and power**.
- ▶ Government departments, corporations and civil society organisations **must support mentorship schemes and other ways to connect women who hold leadership positions to younger generations** to provide a critical intergenerational exchange.
- ▶ Media organisations in particular must recognise their role in perpetrating stereotypes around women leaders. **Diversity, positive images and affirmative language** will provide girls and young women with the encouragement they need.
- ▶ Key changes to **public policy and legislation** must be made to ensure that more women can enter into and stay in leadership and decision-making spaces, becoming the role models that girls need.
- ▶ Employers at all levels **need to recognise and address gender bias** in formal processes, and enable young women.

CHALLENGE SEXISM AND DISCRIMINATION

- ▶ Governments and workplaces **must take concrete steps to prevent and respond** to the very real and perceived experiences of sexual harassment and violence, that women leaders of all ages are subjected to by enforcing existing laws and policies and strengthening reporting mechanisms.
- ▶ **Public campaigning** against all forms of violence against women must be funded and promoted. Men and boys need to **become allies and champions** in promoting gender equality and women’s leadership and recognise that sexist behaviour will not be tolerated.

SET GIRLS UP TO SUCCEED

- ▶ Governments, international organisations, school governing bodies and other key stakeholders **must increase girls’ access to schools and to wider educational opportunities**, including safe spaces and mentor programmes, giving them the tools, resources and support to challenge the status quo.
- ▶ Education ministries must **remove any gender bias and discrimination** within and across education systems, ensuring that learning materials do not reinforce gender stereotyping around leadership roles and styles.
- ▶ Governments and civil society must **support and encourage girls’ and young women’s networks and youth-led civic action**, recognising that youth-driven collective action is one of the main avenues for adolescent girls to act on their aspirations to drive social change.

About the Research: The research by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media and Plan International includes the voices of close to 10,000 girls and young women in 19 countries across the globe. Data was gathered by survey and by in-depth focus group discussions in five countries. In the focus group discussions participants were asked to reflect on what qualities a young female leader might have and to identify inspirational people in their lives. The survey included ten questions on aspirations to lead, experience of leading, confidence, encouragement, role models and discrimination and asked young women about their leadership aspirations in terms of career, country, community and family.