# FULL PARTICIPATION:
FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCLUDING YOUNG WOMEN IN DECISION-MAKING

Globally, women make up half the population, yet only 25.2% of parliamentary seats in the world are held by women, with less than 2% held by women under 30. Only 21% of government ministers are women, with only 14 countries having achieved parity. In the private sector, women are slowly breaking through to senior management roles, but the numbers are still low with 29%. With growing demand by young women to take part in decisions that impact their lives comes the imperative for global leaders in all sectors to open pathways for participation.

In March 2021, the UN Commission for the Status of Women will meet for its 65th session. A priority theme for this year's meeting features "women's full and effective participation in decision-making in public life". G(irls)20's mission is to advance the full participation of young women leaders in decision-making spaces to change the status quo. From boardrooms to policy committees and everything in between, G(irls)20 works with young women globally who are pushing for meaningful inclusion in spaces of power. We are calling on decision-makers to ensure full representation by young women.
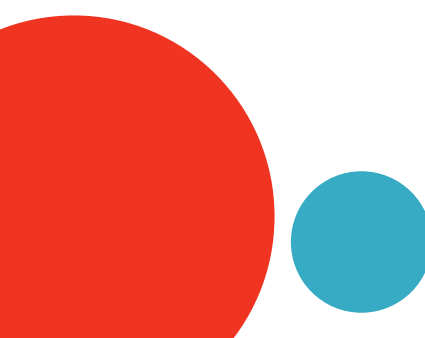
#1: Avoid the Trap of Tokenism

Young women want to be heard. There is important talk of diversity, but without meaningful inclusion the result is tokenism: the practice of making only a symbolic effort, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of equality or diversity within a workforce. As institutions embrace equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts without enabling marginalized young women to make real decisions, they may become disengaged or cynical. This is the trap of tokenism; the real opportunity lies in working with young women and then giving them the trust, space, and power to lead.

#2: Invest in Mentorship and Coaching

As young women enter decision-making spaces, they may to experience blatant sexism, racism and harassment. Providing access to women role models allows the younger generation to navigate these disturbing power dynamics and assert their right to have a safe seat at the table. Mentorship allows young women to see what is possible and can be a source of inspiration for those with high aspirations and confidence.

To take it a step further, coaching by mentors enables rapid feedback, joint solution-building, sharing of experiences and guidance that can accelerate learning and confidence-building for aspiring leaders. Mentorship and coaching are also relationship-builders and can be used to expand the mentees network and increase access to related opportunities for growth and leadership development. By investing in coaches– especially those from shared identities or backgrounds – young women have a network of support to excel into decision- making spaces.

#3: Acknowledge Imposter Syndrome

Imposter syndrome is understood to be the chronic self-doubt experienced by high-achievers; a belief that one doesn't deserve the success they have earned. Imposter Syndrome poses as a psychological barrier to young women's access to and success in decision-making spaces. The experience is especially prominent among young people from backgrounds that have experienced systemic marginalization and oppression, who have been purpose-ly designed out of decision-making spaces. When young women believe they are not qualified or do not deserve their success, they are at risk of checking out or not putting themselves forward for opportunities.

The first step is to name Imposter Syndrome: help young women recognize the feelings associated with Imposter Syndrome and understand the pervasive phenomenon. Connect young women to mental health resources to unpack these beliefs and provide safe spaces for young women to discuss Imposter Syndrome. Most importantly, ensure the phenomenon of Imposter Syndrome is situated in a historical context marked by racism and sexism.

#4: Amplify Young Women's Voices

In order to bring diverse perspectives into decision-making to change the status quo, it is insufficient to place *one* young woman in a space of power. Research shows the need for a "critical mass" of young women to encourage innovative ideas and empower diverse perspectives. For example, evidence points to having three or more women on a corporate board in order to change the dynamic. Former female White House staff reference the "amplification" strategy -- the repetition of key points by multiple people – to push for the acceptance of different perspectives.

Further, when only one young woman is elevated to a position of leadership, she is at risk for Tall Poppy Syndrome. This term, coined in Australia, refers to the cutting down of the "tallest poppy" by those in their peer group. By ensuring a "critical mass" of young women in decision-making spaces are in leadership positions, we can begin to end the phenomenon of Tall Poppy Syndrome. When striving for representation, ensure the box is not checked when there is merely one new person in the room.

#5: Measure Progress

When institutions fail to collect disaggregated data about progress on intersectional gender markers, they contribute to the silencing of underrepresented voices and experiences. This absence of data makes it challenging for institutions to identify gaps and to build a case for organizational and systemic change. Institutions must adopt policies to track the progress made of young women from many diverse backgrounds, identities and lived experiences. Applying an intersectional lens to evaluation and learning initiatives is critical to achieving equitable outcomes for underrepresented young women leaders.

Learn more! **Visit girls20.org/our-research** to find out how young women are changing the status quo in decision-making spaces.

References
UN Women: Facts and Figures: Women's leadership and Political Participation
Catalyst: Women Business Leaders: Global Statistics
Harvard Business Review: Stop Telling Women they have Imposter Syndrome

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