



#WhatGirlsWant Series Issue 1: Meaningful participation and engagement



#WhatWomenWant is a global movement, led by the ATHENA Initiative and powered by women in all our diversity. It is a platform for those who want to be meaningfully involved in making change for women and girls and to build accountability from the ground up. **#WhatWomenWant** promotes a bold gender equality, human rights and global health agenda, placing women's lived experience directly at the center of policy debates and at the table with decision-makers.

Launched on the 2017 International Day of the Girl, **#WhatGirlsWant** is a new development and expansion of the campaign, creating space for girls and young women to lead, define their own priorities, and articulate the issues that affect and matter to them. With **#WhatGirlsWant** ATHENA is creating space for an advocacy strategy and campaign that reflects the distinct experiences of girls and young women, and that fosters inter-generational dialogue and advocacy. We are building the momentum, traction and movement of **#WhatGirlsWant** into a platform for action and information sharing, and co-creating an inter-generational and intersectional feminist agenda that recognizes the leadership, insights and perspectives of girls and young women.

On International Human Rights Day, **#WhatGirlsWant** presents this first in an occasional series of issue briefs to create new accountability avenues and provide:

- 👩 a framework for the meaningful participation and leadership of girls and young women
- 👩 nuanced and deeper insights into the specifics of engaging girls and young women
- 👩 topical deep dives
- 👩 tools for campaigning and advocacy
- 👩 support and guidance for skills building

#WhatGirlsWant: meaningful participation and engagement

Meaningful participation is essential in order to deliver policy, programmes and campaigns that are effective in upholding the rights and addressing the needs of girls and young women. It is vital that those with the power to make decisions, investments and commitments are accountable to the people most affected by the outcomes and impact they have. Engaging girls and young women in all their diversity has been a key success of the **#WhatWomenWant** campaign. ATHENA Initiative has developed a set of practical methodologies, grounded in a core commitment to accountability, diversity and inclusion.

As part of **#WhatWomenWant** we created a WhatsApp focus group with adolescent girls and young women, with almost 200 members, from at least eight different countries: Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Our methods provide safe spaces that enable information exchange, connection, consultation, and sharing ideas and experiences. Using tools that girls and young women already use and are familiar with promotes diverse participation, and removes barriers to engagement

that other methods may create. Taking part requires little data, no special downloads, and no travel or fixed time commitment. The group is ongoing, and remains active. Setting up a similar group can be a really effective way to engage girls and young women, providing a space for real-time feedback, sharing views and experiences and for accountability processes.

Setting up a #WhatGirlsWant consultation group

- 1. Identify and engage participants from the community you seek to reach**, ensuring diversity in membership using ‘snowball recruitment’, where existing contacts recruit more participants from among their peers. Invites can go to a broader group of women through existing WhatsApp organizing groups and other virtual platforms and list-servs. Use this to build a movement, not just for one-off engagement.
- 2. Moderate and facilitate the group** as an ongoing activity. Keep on topic and steer the dialogue. Ensure all members understand the purpose of the group.
- 3. Set ‘ground rules’** that include principles of participation, at the beginning of the consultation process to set clear expectations, keep the process focused and maximize engagement. One of the first things you and your group should do is create and agree upon some ground rules to keep the process productive and respectful and foster ownership of the process.
 - Set the theme, for example: “We welcome ideas and posts from all young women in the group that are related to HIV and sexual and reproductive health and rights”.
 - Set the tone, affirm and validate: “Your ideas, comments, and topics are valuable” and encourage questions, openness and learning throughout the process.
 - Set boundaries: “This space is meant for adolescent girls and young women under 30. There are a number of other spaces for men, boys, older women, children, and all others.” Articulate why it is important to your respective organization, goals or community to have specific focus and highlight the benefits.
- 4. Provide only factual, evidenced-based information.** However, as the participants are sharing the majority of the content themselves, sometimes there may be inaccurate information shared. In these cases, the moderator can ask questions to clarify and provide information when necessary. When information is shared that is inaccurate, participants should be thanked and correct information should be shared by the moderator supported by infographics and/or links. Stay mindful that this is a learning process that participants engage in with varying knowledge levels and stay engaged to ensure the space is safe and collegial.
- 5. Provide ongoing encouragement.**
 - Thank everyone who has shared ideas, key messages and those who have raised important issues to the health and well-being of women and girls. Encourage participants that their contributions are valued and appreciated. Take interest in your group members and their ideas.



- b. Follow up one-to-one with members if they are reluctant to participate in the group, or if they seem to be struggling to contribute. A reassurance that their input is valued can be really important.

- 6. Moderate and steer the dialogue topic when necessary.** It is important to ask the right kinds of questions, in the right way, to steer the dialogue. To generate and move along discussion, ask open-ended questions. At times, clarifying questions are useful to dig deeper and get more information.
- 7. Keep focused, but be accountable to the diversity of lives and experiences.** Experiences are intersectional, so allow discussions to be broad and bring in topics that may not have originally been included. For example, menstrual health as well as initiatives to keep girls in school are both critical to sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- 8. Create space for different experiences and points of view.** For example, adolescent girls may have different experiences or needs to young women, and participants with different identities and experiences might have different contributions to make. Ensure the group is diverse and welcoming, and if appropriate, create focused discussions or different side groups for different participants.
- 9. Encourage connections among the group,** share information and opportunities related to the group topic.
- 10. Track responses,** by developing a system to transfer comments from WhatsApp (or other tools you are using), so that the data can be used for further analysis and accountability purposes.
- 11. Create a feedback loop.** When reports, strategies and other products are created based on the consultation, share drafts with the group for critical review, feedback and validation. This is critical in ensuring that their perspectives and engagement remains meaningful across all stages and throughout the process.
- 12. Share all outputs** so that the girls and young women taking part have the tools and information to take into different spaces and use in their advocacy

Please share, post, feedback and join in the movement to realize #WhatGirlsWant!

<http://www.athenanetwork.org/>

<http://whatwomenwant.format.com/>

@NetworkATHENA

