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GENDER STATISTICS TRAINING FOR STATISTICIANS

Why do we need Gender Statistics?

Note by the UNECE Task Force on Gender Statistics Training for Statisticians

Summary

This paper is Chapter 2 of the forthcoming UNECE training manual entitled *Developing Gender Statistics: A Practical Tool*. In this paper, the rationale for why we need to collect, analyze, and disseminate gender statistics is presented. Gender statistics provide information needed to inform public debate and support policy development and research. In the final section, tools for using gender statistics in the policy process are discussed.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. As gender issues move forward in national and global agendas, new demands are created for statistics. Advocates, researchers and policy makers request additional data and also argue, more generally, that the gender perspective should be a basic assumption guiding which data to collect and to analyze. In doing so, they are not only asking for data needed for the development of policies on gender equality but also their efforts encourage change and reform in statistical systems to make them produce more useable information. The “*why*” of gender statistics is answered by both objectives. Gender statistics are needed to provide an evidence base for advocacy and policy development. In addition gender statistics have an important role in improving the whole statistical system, pushing it to describe more accurately and fully the activities and characteristics of the whole population and not only of men.

II. IMPORTANCE OF GENDER STATISTICS

2. Gender statistics provide the information needed to inform public debate and support policy development and research. Gender statistics provide the numbers and are the basis for the analysis to assess differences in the situations of women and men and how conditions are changing or not changing. In this way gender statistics raise consciousness and provide the impetus for public debate and change. Gender statistics are also required for research to support the development and testing of explanations and theories to better understand how gender operates in a society. All of these uses form the basis for developing policies to foster greater gender equality. Furthermore, gender statistics are needed to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of policy developments.

3. The policies, research questions and public debate for which gender statistics are needed focus on issues of gender equality and the advancement of women. In addition, gender statistics have uses in areas of policy where gender is not the leading issue. In many instances social and economic policies are affected by gender dimensions even when it is not immediately obvious. In these cases the availability of the evidence base to support gender analyses is important to the investigation since without an understanding of the differences in the operation and effects of the policy on different population groups, such as gender, the full implications of the policy may not be understood and its objectives not be fulfilled.

4. Underlying all of these uses for gender statistics is their role in improving statistical systems. It is important to have a dialogue between producers and users of gender statistics. For example, gender advocates bring their own demands for data and in doing so identify deficiencies in the data currently available to them. They push for improvements in the concepts, methods, topics and data series to better reflect the activities and contributions made by women as well as by men. The result of such efforts is often not simply better information on women, but improvements in measuring the realities of economic and social life. For example, the box on developing statistics on employment in India describes how the efforts of advocates to improve data on poor working women resulted in better data not only on these women but also on most employed women and men in India.

Developing statistics on employment in India

Since the mid-1980's, the Self Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA) has worked tirelessly to promote the development of the Government of India's statistics on informal employment. SEWA- particularly its founder Ela Bhatt and its national coordinator Renana Jhabvala - recognized the power of statistics to advocate the cause of its workers and to inform policies and programs to improve their situation. As Ela Bhatt put it: "...the employers used to say: 'Who are homeworkers? How many are there? Where are they? They are not there.' And they used to make fun of us – to ridicule us". SEWA recognized that by collecting data on specific categories of homeworkers - bidi rollers and then incense workers – they were able to convince authorities of the importance of these workers and to negotiate their coverage by welfare funds. SEWA also used statistics to support passage of the 1996 ILO Homework Convention and to stimulate efforts in India and more broadly in Southeast Asia to improve the conditions of homeworkers. The results of these efforts also included the overall improvement in national labor force data.

SEWA has not restricted itself to small research studies but have taken an active role in shaping national statistical policy. It has lobbied the Government of India to set up commissions to study the problems of self-employed women, participated actively in the commissions once formed, collaborated with partners to do research studies, participated in the planning of surveys, and followed carefully decisions on data collection efforts that relate to their members.

These efforts have secured improvements in the livelihood of low income workers. Another result which is important to the field of statistics is that India is now a leading country in the development of statistics on informal employment. This achievement owes a lot to the close collaboration of the national statistical services with groups such as SEWA. The impact of these efforts on statistics goes beyond improving data on women in informal employment. As over 90 per cent of the country's workers are in informal employment, a result has been the improvement of data on the total labor force.

III. GENDER STATISTICS IN THE POLICY-MAKING PROCESS

5. The process of producing gender statistics is closely linked to the policy-making process. The paragraphs below briefly describe some of the more important steps in these closely related processes. The descriptions illustrate how the process in reality usually consists of an iterative cyclical process:

- (a) Identification of gender issue in society.
The process starts with the realization that a gender issue exists in the society on which greater knowledge is needed. The gender issue could relate to a particular key policy issue in the country, such as poverty, and the realization that the gender aspects of poverty are not well understood. Alternatively, there could be an explicit gender issue, such as gender-based violence, on which policy makers realize they need more information.
- (b) Production and presentation of gender statistics.
The next step involves production of statistics to help fill the gap in existing

knowledge. This might involve the introduction of a completely new instrument, such as a survey on gender-based violence. Alternatively, it could involve an enhancement of existing data collection, through the addition of question/s in a survey or administrative form, expansion of response options to a question or administrative form, or changes in the way that questions are asked to make them less gender-biased. Yet another possibility is changes in the recruitment and training of data collectors, to ensure they are aware of the interrelationship between the relevant gender issues and their role in their interview process.

(c) Marketing and dissemination of gender statistics.

Presentation of the enhanced statistics is not enough. In order to be used, they need to reach the policy makers (both civil servants and elected representatives) and those who advise them. They also need to reach the advocates, such as women's groups, who can put pressure on the policy makers for the necessary changes. Finally, the statistics need to reach those who have influence in the policy arena but who would normally not recognize gender issues. Different products, different marketing strategies, and different dissemination techniques may be needed for each of the different audiences.

(d) Gender and policy analysis.

Generally national statistical agencies are tasked with producing statistics and are not expected to analyze them from a policy perspective. Indeed, in many countries there is an explicit requirement that the national statistical office should not make policy statements. Instead, they are meant simply to present the 'facts'. The situation might be different for data producers in some other parts of the national statistical services, for example those located in line agencies. However, here again those responsible for policy analysis and proposals will usually differ from those responsible for production of statistics, including their publication. This fourth step therefore involves different actors, who are usually outside the national statistical service and who analyze the meaning and implications of the statistics. While national statisticians are not directly responsible for this step, they need to be aware that the way they present statistics can influence the analysis.

(e) Use of gender analysis for policy actions.

This step involves the use of the analysis in developing or amending policy and implementing it. It would, of course, be naïve to assume that policy is regularly based mainly on facts and figures. There are many different forces that influence policy. However, the existence of reliable facts and figures strengthens the hand of any policy proponent. It also promotes the development of 'evidence-based' policy, rather than policy that is driven by supposition or ideology. Further, it promotes sensible debate among policy makers of the different options.

(f) Change in the society.

All policies are intended to promote some sort of change in society, or to avoid changes that would happen without the policy. From a gender perspective, the hope is that policies will promote movement towards gender equality. In some cases these changes can happen fairly rapidly. For example, the introduction of free anti-retroviral medicines for those with HIV should result in a very rapid increase in the life expectancy of these people. In other cases change will be much slower. For example, a policy change that encourages young women to study in fields that will

enable them to occupy higher-paying jobs will only result in a lessening in the wage gap years later when these students become part of the labor market.

- (g) Identification of gaps and formulation of new questions.
Ideally, governments should be monitoring all policies that are implemented in respect of both outputs (deliverables) and outcomes (impact on the society). Other actors, too, might be monitoring the impact of policies seen to have potential to address gender issues. For example, an organization working in the area of women's health might monitor the impact of a new policy approach in respect of contraception, while an NGO providing services for battered women might monitor the impact of the introduction of interdicts. This monitoring process might well lead back to the beginning of the chain by establishing that there are aspects on which knowledge is lacking.
- (h) New production of gender statistics.
This is an iteration of the second step described above.

6. The above description is very general. The specifics of how the process works will differ from country to country and from topic to topic. It will depend, among others, on which actors in the national statistical office are responsible for a particular issue. For example, it is likely to differ if the statistics concerned are produced by the statistical office or by a line agency. It will depend, also, on the level and breadth of awareness of a particular gender issue, and the degree to which the issue is politically or otherwise sensitive. It will depend on the approach of government, and the extent to which it prides itself on producing evidence-based policy, as well as on its commitment to gender equality. In some cases, the process of asking for statistics that enhance gender knowledge might be instigated by someone who opposes change, and is asking for more evidence as a delaying tactic.

IV. SUPPORTING POLICY DEVELOPMENT

7. A series of United Nations intergovernmental resolutions provide a mandate for the development of policies on the advancement of women and gender equality as well as for the statistics required for the development of these policies. These include the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 1979, the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals in 2000. Regional governments have further developed mandates, for example the European Union's 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, and legislation, such as directives on the equal treatment of women and men in employment and in the delivery of goods and services. Many national governments have their own specific policy and legislative programs to achieve women's empowerment and gender equality.

8. As an example of policy areas related to gender, Chapter 1 described the 12 critical areas of concern identified in the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women.¹

¹ United Nations, *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, Beijing 4-15 September 1995 (United Nations publication, Sales no. 96.IV.13)

The Platform for Action called on Governments, the international community and civil society to take strategic actions on the following areas of concern:

- 1) poverty;
- 2) education;
- 3) health;
- 4) violence against women;
- 5) armed conflict;
- 6) the economy;
- 7) power and decision making;
- 8) institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women;
- 9) human rights;
- 10) the media;
- 11) the environment;
- 12) the girl-child

9. The Platform supports these areas of concern with strategic objectives and actions to be taken. One of the strategic objectives focuses on statistics. Specifically, objective H.3 is: “generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.” It is followed by a detailed set of actions, in fact an agenda for needed work in statistics. Some actions address the general need for statistics: “Ensure that statistics related to individuals are collected, compiled, analyzed and presented by sex and age and reflect problems, issues and questions related to women and men in society.” Other actions specify what needs to be done to develop statistics related to the specific topics of concern.

10. Gender statistics are also relevant for the development of policies that are not overtly related to gender. Many policies that appear to have little to do with gender equality are actually affected in an indirect way by aspects of the relationships between women and men. It is often necessary to investigate the gender aspect of a policy even if it is not directly articulated in a way that draws attention to this interaction. An example of the relevance of gender to policies that appear not to be relevant from a gender perspective is that of violent crime. The concept of ‘violent crime’ might appear to have little to do with gender. Yet, one of the hidden aspects of violent crime is violence in the home from husbands to wives. Omitting this part of violent crime would mean that a significant part of violent crime is not measured and therefore not considered in policies and programs. The inclusion of a gender perspective enables a more nuanced and multi-faceted policy to be developed; one that is likely to be more successful.

11. The interconnection between gender relations/policies and wider social issues is recognized prominently in the Platform for Action:

para. 41. The advancement of women and the achievement of equality between women and men are a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and should not be seen in isolation as a women's issue. They are the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society. Empowerment of women and equality between women and men are prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security among all peoples.’

V. TOOLS FOR USING GENDER STATISTICS IN THE POLICY PROCESS

12. Developing effective gender policies requires the assessment of the impact of both proposed and existing policies on women and men. New importance has been placed on gender assessments and on a specific form of such assessment, gender budgeting. Indicators, benchmarks and targets are additional tools used to monitor change in the situation of women and men and the success or failure of policies and programs. All such tools require an extensive body of reliable gender statistics to be used successfully in the policy-making process.

A. Gender impact assessment

13. Gender impact assessment is an important tool in policy-making that can be used to reveal gender biases. Gender impact assessment takes place during the design stage, before decisions are made to show the implications of proposed policies on women and men. Gender impact assessment involves several stages. First the gender relevance of a proposed policy must be identified. This involves both analysis and consultation with relevant expert and representative groups. Second, the potential impact must be conceptualized and operationalized so that it can be represented as a measurable phenomenon. Third, the impact of the proposed policy must be analyzed and measured. Fourth, the implications of the impact for gender equality and the wider policy must be considered.

B. Gender Budgets

14. Gender budgeting is the application of gender impact assessment to the financial realm. Gender budgeting is a tool that places a gender equality perspective at the highest levels of financial decision-making. It challenges the traditional notion that financial decisions are gender-free. It involves a process of disaggregating budgets by gender in order to discover the extent to which policies that have made gender-relevant are differentially funded. It is not a separate budget for women. The purpose is to make financial decision-making at governmental level transparent in relation to gender (increased budget transparency is recommended by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)² as a good governance practice). (The topic gender budgets is considered in more detail in chapter 6 section 1.)

C. Indicators

15. An indicator is designed as a succinct measure of a body of statistics. It simplifies complicated information in a way that is unambiguous and easy to interpret. An indicator should be meaningful and relevant to policy makers, service providers and the wider public. It should be supported by reliable and robust quantitative data; be available at regular intervals and be comparable between countries and population groups. Indicators for two points in time enable an assessment of trends, that is, whether an improvement or deterioration has occurred. An indicator is often most useful when it is part of a set of indicators in relation to a specific topic or field. The set of indicators should neither be so many as to confuse, nor so few as to mislead.

² OCED *Gender Tipsheet on Gender Budgeting* <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/3/27/1896544.pdf>

16. A more complex form of indicator, the composite indicator or index, is developed as a summary across various domains of statistics. For example, the United Nations Development Program's *Human Development Report* presents such composite indicators, that is, a gender-related development index and a gender empowerment measure³. However while such composite indicators may be useful for purposes of advocacy, they oversimplify the phenomenon they are measuring and are generally not meaningful indicators for measuring trends or framing policy issues.

17. In order for gender statistics to be of use in policy development, research and public debate, it is necessary not only to have a large and sophisticated database, but also ways of authoritatively summarizing the data in formats that are easily accessible to policy makers and others who are not statistical experts. *The World's Women: Trends and Statistics*⁴, a series of reports first published in 1991 analyzes key indicators on the situation of women and men globally. The approach of these publications is to present the indicators and data in a format that will be accessible to the media, advocates and policy-makers. These publications were prepared by the United Nations Statistics Division as a collaborative effort with other parts of the United Nations more directly concerned with using data to develop policies on gender. Gender indicator publications have also been prepared at regional and national levels as an input to raising consciousness on gender issues and input to the development of policies.

D. Benchmarking

18. Benchmarks are stable reference points. They are points against which future positions can be compared (for better or worse). They depend upon both indicators and robust gender statistics. They depend on the routine replication of data collection exercises, so that comparisons can be made using data that has been collected at different points in time.

E. Targets

19. Targets are the goals of a policy represented in a figure that is measurable. They indicate the intended outcome of the policy after a specific period of time of its implementation. A target will thus contain both a specific level of an indicator and a time period or date. For example, the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000 not only included a set of Goals (MDG's) but also a set of specific measurable and time-bound targets for each Goal, with progress to be measured on the basis of a list of internationally-agreed indicators. With respect to the MDG on gender equality and the empowerment of women, the target is: eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and in all levels of education no later than 2015.

³ UNDP *Human Development Reports* http://hdr.undp.org/reports/view_reports.cfm?type=1

⁴ United Nations, *The World's Women 1970-1990: Trends and Statistics* (United Nations publication, Sales No.E.90.XVII.3); *The World's Women 1995:Trends and Statistics* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XVII.2); *The World's Women 2000: Trends and Statistics*, (United Nations publication,Sales No. E. 00.XVII.14); United Nations, *The World's Women 20005: Progress in Statistics*, (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.XVII.7).