

Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (OWG)

Statistical note for the issue brief on:

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment¹

(draft, 17 January 2014)

1. Main policy issues, potential goals and targets

Gender inequality is the most pervasive form of inequality around the world and a pressing human rights concern. Recent decades have seen gains in some areas, such as in girls' enrolment in education; however progress has been uneven, with gender inequalities persisting and even growing along several dimensions, such as the gender gap in unemployment since the 2008 crisis.²

A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. Women's empowerment is vital to sustainable development and the realization of human rights for all.

Many groups, including the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons,³ have proposed a stand-alone gender equality goal in the future framework to galvanize resources and political will, and to serve as an accountability mechanism to monitor progress and address the remaining gaps in implementation. Several proposals emphasize that any future goal must be comprehensive and transform gender relations by tackling the structural underpinnings of gender inequalities. Based on these proposals, the TST Issues Brief on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment has highlighted the following areas:

- Freedom from violence against women and girls;
- Equality in human capabilities, access to opportunities and resources; and
- Equality in agency, voice and participation across the full range of decision-making arenas.

As stated in the report, *Statistics and Indicators for the Post-2015 Development Agenda*, depending on the content of the new framework, some targets and indicators under these three areas can be included in a stand-alone goal while others can be mainstreamed into other goals.⁴

With regard to targets, the Task Team on Lessons Learned from MDG Monitoring of the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on MDGs (IAEG-MDGs), in its report "*Lessons Learned from MDG Monitoring from a Statistical Perspective*", identified nine criteria for setting targets. Key to setting realistic targets on gender equality and women's rights is the existence of adequate baseline statistics to provide benchmarks for measuring progress.

¹ The following countries and organizations contributed to the drafting and review of this statistical note: Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, United Kingdom, Eurostat and UNWomen.

² TST Issues Brief: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

³ United Nations. 2013. *A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies through Sustainable Development*. The Report of the High Level panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. New York: United Nations. (pp. 7.) <http://www.post2015hlp.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/UN-Report.pdf>

⁴ United Nations. 2013. *UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 UN Development Agenda: Statistics and Indicators for the post-2015 development agenda*. New York: United Nations. pp. 27-28.

2. Conceptual and methodological tools

Work in the area of gender statistics was initiated in 1980s, following the proclamation of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (1976-1985). To improve the production of gender statistics, over the years many international, supranational and regional agencies have issued methodological publications aimed at providing practical guidance to countries on a variety of topics including: concepts and methods, training of users and producers, database development and statistical reporting.

Most recently, at its forty-fourth session in February 2013, the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) endorsed the minimum set of gender indicators.⁵ As it will be discussed in the section that follows, the Inter-Agency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics (IAEG-GS) developed the list of indicators, intended as a common basic set across countries and regions, for national production and international compilation of gender statistics. The IAEG-GS, through its Advisory Group on Emerging Issues, is working to develop tools and to promote data production for selected indicators of the minimum set, including work on time use and violence against women statistics.

Important methodological work is also underway on selected gender indicators for which internationally agreed concepts and comparable data are not currently available. An example of such work is the Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) project implemented by the UN Statistics Division and UN-Women, in collaboration with the World Bank, OECD, FAO, Asian Development Bank and African Development Bank, whose aim is to develop and test methodologies to measure asset ownership and entrepreneurship from a gender perspective, by 2016.

3. Existing and new indicators

Much progress has taken place in identifying the gender indicators which can be applicable globally.

The MDGs comprises Goal 3, a stand-alone goal which explicitly “promotes gender equality and empower women”, with specific target of “eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015” (Target 3A). The progress towards the target has been measured by the following three indicators: 1) ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education; 2) share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector; and 3) proportion of seats held by women in national parliament.

The Goal 3 of the MDGs is closely linked with Goal 2 “Achieve universal primary education, under which the specific target of “Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling” (Target 2A) is set. The indicators introduced to monitor the progress of this domain are 1) net enrolment ratio in primary education; 2) Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach last grade of primary; and 3) literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds, women and men.

⁵ United Nations. 2013. *Statistical Commission: Report on the forty-fourth session*. E/CN.3/2013/33. <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc13/2013-Report-E.pdf>

In addition, MDG Goal 5 addresses the empowerment of women by improving maternal health. Two targets under the goal are measured by a set of health related indicators including maternal mortality ratio and contraceptive prevalence rate.

In February 2013, following the recommendations of the UNSC, the IAEG-GS⁶ identified a minimum set of 52 gender indicators covering the following areas: (1) Economic structures, participation in productive activities and access to resources; (2) Education; (3) Health and related services; (4) Public life and decision-making; and (5) Human rights of women and the girl children.⁷ The choice of indicators included in the minimum set was guided by the primary policy concerns addressed in the Beijing Platform for Action and other more recent international commitments, including the MDGs.

In addition, the set of indicators are classified into the following three tiers: Tier 1 indicators which are conceptually clear, with an agreed international definition and regularly produced by countries; Tier 2 indicators which are conceptually clear, with an agreed international definition, but not yet regularly produced by countries; and Tier 3 indicators for which international standards need still to be developed and not regularly produced by countries. For many of the indicators of the minimum set, adequate baselines generally exist and targets that take into account past achievements can be set. Because of their solid technical foundation and wide international acceptance, the minimum set of gender indicators provide a strong basis for monitoring gender equality and women's rights⁸.

A viable and sustainable monitoring framework needs to balance data availability, statistical capacity of countries and the relevance of different policy issues in different countries and regions. While data sources for gender indicators may improve over time, it is highly recommended in considering a monitoring framework for the SDGs and/or the Post-2015 development agenda to take into account data availability at the global level for global monitoring. At present, indicators for which there is reasonably internationally comparable data, include those on health, education, labour market, and to a minor extent violence against women, and unpaid domestic and care work. For those indicators for which methodological work is underway, it is important to design a flexible monitoring framework that can be revisited at different time intervals (e.g. every five years) in order to take into account new conceptual and methodological developments and data availability.

4. Gaps, limitations and challenges

While the minimum set, as noted above, provides a good basis for monitoring, it should also be noted that nearly a third of its indicators still suffer from significant statistical gaps in terms of international comparability and/or data availability. Furthermore, the minimum set does not address all issues related to gender equality and women's rights. For example, because income and consumption data are collected at the household level, headline income poverty data do not address gendered poverty and the unequal intra-household distribution of power and resources. Similarly, headline political participation indicators

⁶ IAEG-GS is composed of national and international experts on gender statistics (around 40 members) and is in charge of coordinating the Global Gender Statistics Programme (UN Statistical Commission-decision 42/102)

⁷ United Nations. 2013. *Gender Statistics: Report of the Secretary-General on the Statistical Commission Forty-fourth session*. E/CN.3/2013/10. <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc13/2013-10-GenderStats-E.pdf>

⁸ Work to compile the minimum set of gender indicators is currently under way and a public database developed and maintained by the UN Statistics Division will soon be available.

measure women's representation in national parliaments but data on women's participation in local governance institutions, which may have a more direct bearing on women and girls' lives, are still scarce. While discriminatory norms and attitudes are significant impediments to the achievement of gender equality and women's rights, their measurement still present significant conceptual and practical challenges. Therefore, in some cases, further efforts are needed to develop new methods to measure important areas of gender equality and women's empowerment and additional indicators that are not addressed in the minimum set may be needed.

A key consideration is the statistical capacity needed at national, regional and global levels to adequately monitor the new framework. One of the key challenges to monitor gender equality and women's empowerment is the lack of country-level data production. A recent review of gender statistics in 126 countries has found that although gender statistics are governed by statistics or gender-related laws, regulation or national action plans in an overwhelming majority of the countries (86 per cent), only 15 per cent of those countries have specific legislation requiring the national statistical system to conduct specialized gender-based surveys. Furthermore, while production of gender statistics has increased in recent years, the focus is still predominantly on traditional areas such as mortality, education and labour force statistics and less on emerging areas such as violence against women and girls or the measurement of unpaid care work through time use surveys.⁹

Another significant challenge relates to the need to address gender equality and women's rights for different demographic and social groups. Lifecycle analyses of gender equality suggest that women and girls face different constraints that can be age-specific or may be specific to different socio-economic groups.¹⁰ Disaggregated statistics along these lines should be promoted as well as a renewed effort to analyse existing surveys, to improve future ones and to invest in other data sources, including administrative records.

5. Conclusions

In spite of the global efforts and developments to measure gender equality and women's empowerment derived from the different international commitments such as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals, it is clear that this area still requires consistent data collection, methodological development and statistical refinement and standardization.

Significant resources will be needed to build sustainable statistical capacity in all areas of gender statistics to ensure countries have the necessary capacity to produce these data on a regular basis. Because gender statistics have not always been prioritized in national plans, particularly attention should be paid to their production.

⁹ United Nations. 2013. *Gender Statistics: Report of the Secretary-General on the Statistical Commission Forty-fourth session*. E/CN.3/2013/10. <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/doc13/2013-10-GenderStats-E.pdf>

¹⁰ UNICEF. 2011. Boys and Girls in the Life Cycle: Sex-disaggregated data on a selection of well-being indicators, from early childhood to young adulthood. http://www.unicef.org/media/files/Gender_hi_res.pdf