



**OECD Development Centre
International Expert Workshop**

**Measuring Gender Equality
*Taking Stock – Looking Forward***

I. Background

Gender equality has been defined in terms of “equality under the law, equality of opportunity ... and equality of voice”; as such it is a policy objective of nearly universal acceptance. Gender equality furthermore enhances the long-term growth prospects of countries. For these and other reasons, its pursuit is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals promulgated by the United Nations. Measuring the status and tracking the progress of gender equality is consequently an important undertaking, but a difficult one given the various dimensions along which discrimination against women occurs.

Interest in gender equality is growing in many national governments, international organisations, research institutes and political pressure groups. Evidence of this can be found in the recent proliferation of composite indicators of gender equality. In addition to longer-established indices, of which the UNDP’s Gender-related Development Index and the Gender Empowerment Measure are the most prominent and widely used, newer indicators have emerged such as the Gender Gap Index proposed by the World Economic Forum (2006) and the Gender Equity Index by Social Watch (2005). In 2005, the African Centre for Gender and Development also introduced a regional indicator of gender equality which received significant attention: the African Gender and Development Index.

Measures of gender equality generally fall into one of the following categories and either focus on (i) the economic status of women (e.g. their relative level of income as compared to male wages); (ii) women’s access to resources that are crucial for development such as education and health (e.g. women’s literacy rates and overall health status); and (iii) political participation and empowerment (e.g. women in ministerial positions in government). In fact, all of the above-mentioned composite indicators use a combination of individual indicators that can be attributed to one of these groups.

While these measures undoubtedly cover important aspects of women’s socio-economic status neither of them tackles the underlying reasons of gender equality. To address this situation, the OECD Development Centre developed the Gender, Institutions and Development Data Base (GID-DB) which it published in March 2006. Unlike other data compilations, the GID-DB specifically focuses on potential root-causes of gender inequality, in particular those that may be hidden in social norms, traditions and the family law. The GID-DB classifies these so-called social institutions into four sub-categories: the family code, women’s

civil liberties, physical integrity and ownership rights. A total of 13 innovative new variables of gender equality are codified so as to measure the extent of discrimination through a particular social institution (ranging from 0 = no discrimination to 1 = highest extent of discrimination).

Since its release in 2006, the GID-DB has received considerable attention by both policy makers and researchers as it offered a different perspective to the ongoing debate. It was referred to in the Gender Gap Index and the International Property Rights Index, discussed by non-governmental organisation (e.g. Amnesty International; the International Council on Social Welfare), international organisations (e.g. International Labour Organization; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) and think tanks (e.g. Center of Excellence, Women and Science; International Development Research Centre), and has been the focus of press articles (e.g. Le Monde; taz), presentations (e.g. OECD World Forum; Korea Women's Development Institute) and academic papers. For more information on the Gender, Institutions and Development Data Base, please visit: www.oecd.org/dev/institutions/GIDdatabase

II. Workshop objectives

The workshop aims to streamline ongoing discussions by bringing together key stakeholders to exchange their views and experiences in measuring gender equality. Participants will include experts on gender equality from international organisations, non-governmental organisations and research institutes as well as statistical experts. In addition to a presentation of the GID-DB and other data compilations, focus will be put on methodological issues, questions of data aggregation and indicator building, as well as options for improved data collection and quality.

Beyond taking stock of existing knowledge, the workshop tries to open a forum for future exchange and co-operation in the pursuit of better measures of gender equality. It is hoped that the workshop will not only provide a learning experience for participants but that it will actively influence the work programmes and research agendas of participants and the organisations they represent. The objective of the workshop is thus to discuss the current state of affairs, identify blank spots in available data collections, and allow the creation of partnerships to fill existing data needs.

III. Structure of the workshop

The opening session of the workshop will allow participants to present their specific work and experience in measuring gender equality. This session will thus be instrumental in reflecting the diversity of individual expertise of participants and laying the ground for subsequent discussions. In order to familiarise participants with the work of the OECD Development Centre, Session 1 will present the Gender, Institutions and Development Data Base and its specific focus on social institutions. In particular, this session will discuss strengths and weaknesses of current data collections and present innovative new measures that try to capture underlying reasons of gender equality.

Session 2 will critically examine the pros and cons of composite measures that have enjoyed growing popularity and visibility as they are frequently the basis of country rankings. The session will outline

various options to improve existing indicators for OECD member and non-member countries and address following questions: What are the uses and abuses of existing composite indicators that are provided by various organisations (UNDP, World Economic Forum, Social Watch, African Centre for Gender and Development, OECD)? Is there a universal indicator of gender equality or should we use a “tool box approach” that allows the building of indicators for different purposes? What are the techniques and lessons learned in the area of data aggregation?

Finding adequate measures of gender equality is challenging. Session 3 will explore current data constraints and possible ways in which existing compilations can be complemented by new and better variables. The session will equally discuss ways to improve data collection and quality. Representatives from the African Centre for Gender and Development, Social Watch, the World Bank and UNDP will share their experiences in data collection. Quality data require adequate measurement tools such as specific country surveys or modules that can be added to existing questionnaires. To avoid duplication of efforts and in order to streamline the activities of various stakeholders, responsibilities should be clearly allocated to local, national and supranational entities. Current programmes like the World Bank’s Gender Action Plan, initiatives of non-governmental organisations and national governments, and the work of the OECD Development Centre appear insufficiently harmonised. More co-operation would thus promise great gains in terms of quality and timeliness of available data.

The fourth and final session will summarise the previous discussions and present areas of follow-up activities. It is hoped that the workshop will not be a one-shot event, but will instead mark the beginning of frequent exchange and fruitful co-operation between participants. As such, the workshop may pave the way to a more systematic approach to improving measures of gender equality.

IV. Organisation – Why the OECD Development Centre?

The Development Centre occupies a unique place within the OECD and in the international community. It is a forum where countries come to share their experience of economic and social development policies. The Centre contributes expert analysis to the development policy debate. The objective is to help decision makers find policy solutions to stimulate growth and improve living conditions in developing and emerging economies. Development Centre membership is open to both OECD and non-OECD countries.

As a forum for dialogue, the Development Centre links OECD members with developing and emerging economies and brings together development partners. To foster open debate and creative policy solutions, participants in Centre events are invited in their personal capacity. Topics for dialogue are drawn from the work programme and reflect members’ priorities.

V. Further information

For more information about the workshop and the Gender, Institutions and Development Data Base, please visit: www.oecd.org/dev/institutions/GIDdatabase

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