



**MEASURING GENDER EQUALITY  
*TAKING STOCK - LOOKING FORWARD***

**International Expert's Workshop organised by the OECD Development Centre**

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## Background

1. Gender equality is a policy objective of basically universal acceptance. Apart from its important intrinsic value, gender equality has furthermore been identified as a catalyst for a country's long-term growth prospects. 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.

2. Interest in gender equality is growing in many national governments, international organisations, research institutes and political pressure groups. The United Nations Millennium Declaration, which promulgates the pursuit of gender equality as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals to be reached by 2015, is certainly the most visible illustration of this trend on the international level. Policy makers increasingly recognise that gender equality can help spur economic growth and that discrimination of women bears great economic and social costs. In their guide to *womenomics*, The Economist predicts that the future of the world economy may increasingly lie within the hands of women. In many countries today, however, women remain an under-utilised resource; their labour force participation is restricted due to insufficient education, discrimination in wage levels or difficulties in reconciling work and family life.

3. Another indication of the increased interest in gender equality – and especially the measurement thereof – can be seen 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.

4. In order to streamline ongoing discussions and to share experiences on how to produce good statistics on gender equality, the OECD Development Centre organised on 24-25 June 2007 an Expert's Workshop on "Measuring Gender Equality: Taking Stock – Looking Forward". The meeting united key stakeholders of the debate on gender statistics and included many of the participants of an earlier initiative of the United Nations Statistics Division which had organised an Inter Agency and Expert Group Meeting on the Development of Gender Statistics in December 2006. In his opening remarks, the Chief Development Economist and Deputy Director of the OECD Development Centre, Mr. Javier Santiso, emphasised the importance of improving gender statistics and explained the catalytic role the OECD Development Centre could play in this endeavour by offering a platform for discussion.

5. 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 compared to that of men that are crucial for development such as education and health (e.g. literacy ratios); and (iii) political participation and empowerment (e.g. percentage of women in ministerial positions or in parliament). In fact, all of the above-mentioned composite indicators use a combination of individual indicators that can be attributed to one of these categories.

6. However, evidence is gradually emerging that "social institutions" such as traditions, cultural practices and social norms also matter for gender equality. To address this situation, the OECD Development Centre introduced the Gender, Institutions and Development Data Base (GID-DB) in March 2006.

## Session I: Gender Equality and Social Institutions

7. In the first session, Mr. Denis Drechsler and Mr. Christian Morrisson (OECD Development Centre) introduced the structure and methodology of the Gender, Institutions and Development Database (GID-DB). They explained that the data base represents a new tool for researchers and policy makers to determine and analyse obstacles to women's economic development. It covers a total of 161 countries and comprises an array of some 60 indicators on gender equality. Unlike conventional data compilations, the GID-DB specifically takes into account potential root-causes of gender inequality, in particular those that may be hidden in social institutions. As argued by Mr. Drechsler, social institutions have thus far often been neglected, but they may be the most important determinants of gender equality: having been in existence for centuries, they are extremely difficult to change and thus frequently override formal laws and regulations.

8. Discrimination through social institutions has multiple facets. Accordingly, the GID-DB divides the social institutions variables into four categories: (i) Family Code (early marriage, polygamy, parental authority and inheritance rights); (ii) Physical Integrity (female genital mutilation, violence against women and missing women); (iii) Civil Liberties (freedom of movement and the obligation to wear a veil in public); and (iv) Ownership Rights (access to land, property and bank loans). Mr. Morrisson identified the weaknesses and strengths of each of the social institutions variables. In addition, he suggested new variables that could be included in the data base: for example, the image of women in the media and women's and men's patterns of time use.

9. The presentation of the GID Data Base stimulated a lively and sometimes controversial debate. Discussions focused on the usefulness and feasibility of measuring social institutions. Some participants pointed out that treating social norms as a contributing, and even determining factor, of gender equality may run the risk of stigmatising certain cultures and traditions from a normative – i.e. Western – perspective. Others argued that the GID Data Base provided a fresh look at the gender debate and that its innovative variables filled an existing gap in available statistics. Most participants agreed that the identification of measures of social institutions was a useful, albeit difficult and sensitive, exercise. Future work should focus on improving existing variables and including new measures including some of the ones presented by Mr. Morrisson.

10. Although their gender research was based on a very different methodology, Ms. Geske Dijkstra (Erasmus University, Rotterdam) highlighted that the categories of the GID-DB were quite similar to the dimensions she and her team had identified. Ms. Noha El-Mikawy (UNDP Oslo Governance Centre) pointed out that anthropologists and demographers have worked on the impact of social institutions on gender equality for many years. Economists should better utilise this knowledge pool in order to make a case for the usefulness of gender equality for economic development. Mr. Klasen (University of Göttingen) emphasised that the GID Data Base was a very useful starting point to *explain* rather than merely *describe* gender equality. He also suggested going one step further and looking at the causes of social institutions. In order to establish causality, however, time series data are essential which the GID Data Base currently does not provide. In general, research should pay more attention to the historical evolution of gender-based institutions. Recent work has illustrated the pivotal role of institutions for economic growth; however, the causality between the two dimensions is not yet clearly understood.

11. Ensuring the comparability of the social institutions variables across countries was identified as a major challenge. Some variables (e.g. female genital mutilation, obligation to wear a veil) may be important in their own right, but it would not be wise to include them in a composite indicator if they are only relevant for certain countries or regions. Mr. Klasen emphasised that institutional outcomes must not be confused with the institutions themselves (e.g. missing women is an outcome; parents' preference for sons is an institution). Furthermore, measures such as "access to credit or land" can be misleading as they do not capture the actual control over these resources. In the same sense, the variable "women in parliament" as an indicator of women's political empowerment could be misleading. Although women

may be underrepresented in parliament, they can nevertheless be very influential in social and political life, e.g. in business and local politics and associations. Finally, it was concluded that social institutions must not be treated as an isolated event; rather they need to be incorporated into a larger context of gender equality.

## **Session II: Data aggregation and indicator building – new trends and remaining problems**

12. In his presentation on *Gender-Related Indicators - Issues for Advocacy, Policy, and Research*, Mr. Klasen distinguished three distinct purposes of indicators of gender equality: (inter)national advocacy for gender equality, guidance for policymakers and data for research on gender issues. Each of these purposes has specific data requirements. Advocacy indicators, for example, need to be simple, comparable and have a clear advocacy message. Composite indicators can be very useful for this purpose, but they face four conceptual challenges: (i) Compensation versus cumulation: i.e. how to evaluate cases in which women are doing better/are prioritised over men; (ii) Ratio of rates versus female shares, i.e. does a ratio of 1 signify gender equality in cases where the female share of the population is over 50 per cent; (iii) Averaging of ratios, i.e. use the geometric rather than arithmetic mean; and (iv) Weighting methodologies.

13. According to Klasen, no single composite indicator currently captures gender equality satisfactorily. Neither UNDP's Gender-related Development Index (GDI) nor the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), for example, has a clear and simple advocacy message, although both measures are based on few indicators. Compared to UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) their influence and visibility is thus much more limited. The GDI is often misinterpreted, and its earned income component is problematic as it does not necessarily equal consumption in the probable case of intra-household transfers. The GEM also has its setbacks. For example, it partly depends on income levels, which means that poor countries will always have a lower GEM score than rich ones, regardless of the levels of gender equality. Mr. Klasen explained that UNDP's gender indicators had recently undergone a revision process; the adopted changes, however, remain minimal. Composite indicators of other institutions such as the Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum, the African Gender and Development Index or Social Watch's Gender Equity Index equally struggle with methodological shortcomings. According to Klasen, most of these newer indicators combine too many dimensions of gender equality, which lowers their simplicity and transparency.

14. As regards policy indicators, single measures should be preferred over composite ones. Mr. Klasen pointed out that the apparent lack of good quality data on gender equality partly stems from the fact that existing information is insufficiently utilised. As an example Mr. Klasen mentioned the Living Standard Measurement Surveys of the World Bank. Gender-disaggregated data are particularly needed in following fields: the distribution of household income and wealth; the share of women in agricultural production; data on gender-based violence; female labour force participation, unemployment and wages.

15. Ms. Saadia Zahidi (World Economic Forum, WEF) presented WEF's Gender Gap Index which covers a total of 115 countries. The index is based on following concepts: (i) it focuses on gaps instead of absolute levels; (ii) it distinguishes between outcomes and enabling factors; (iii) it rewards equality; and (iv) it ensures comparability over time and relative to an equality benchmark. 14 variables are used to measure gender equality including: health and survival; educational attainment; economic participation and opportunity; and political empowerment. All variables are converted into female/male ratios and truncated at an "equality benchmark".

16. The Chief Statistician of the OECD, Mr. Enrico Giovannini (OECD/STD), presented the *OECD Handbook on Constructing Composite Indicators – Methodology and User Guide*. He stressed the fact that (gender) statistics are not to be a goal in themselves, but constitute a first step towards changing policy. All too often people seem to use the lack of statistical evidence as an excuse to avoid making policy choices.

At present, however, statistics are widely available and people are actually overwhelmed by all the information they receive. The issue is thus not a lack of statistical evidence, but the adequate use of available information. Mr. Giovannini pledged to turn statistics into knowledge that can be used for better policy making. In theory, composite indicators could be a way of overcoming the confusion resulting from the apparent information overload. However, composite indicators often do not live up to this expectation. In fact, a workshop jointly organised by the OECD and the European Commission highlighted that composite indicators are often based on different and divergent methodologies. Furthermore, indicators often lacked transparency and allowed misinterpretation. The handbook developed jointly by the OECD and the European Commission aims to provide guidance in the construction of composite indicators.

17. Mr. Giovannini also discussed the issue of rankings that are based on composite indicators. If the differences between countries are very small in some categories, the ranking can nevertheless change enormously according to the weights attached to these categories. For this reason, ranking is a rather tricky exercise. It would be much better to group indicators according to some common characteristics or even completely renounce of composite indicators. In the case of gender equality, Mr. Giovannini would prefer specific indicators for distinct dimensions (e.g. economic, political, social, health, etc.).

18. After the presentations, discussions focused on a variety of issues including the desirability of distinct indicators for specific purposes as well as the usefulness of composite indicators and their sound construction. Participants could not agree whether or not a distinction of indicators depending on their specific purpose would be advisable. Mr. Klasen explained that indicators should be tailored to the audience they are trying to reach: a simple indicator which would be ideal for advocacy purposes, for example, would not meet the requirements of researchers or policy makers. In order to make informed policy decisions, they would generally require more detailed information than a simple advocacy indicator could provide. Others argued that introducing specific indicators for different audiences could cause even more confusion.

19. In a similar vein, some participants argued that composite measures also complicate matters as they sometimes give very divergent messages. Especially rankings can be misleading, in particular when the media publishes them without providing background information. Some also argued that countries (especially in the developing world) often do not need composite indicators. Joachim Nahem (UNDP Oslo Governance Centre) raised the point that the apparent recycling of composite indicators is particularly unproductive. At the very least, producers of composite indicators should work according to some clear division of labour (S. Klasen). On the other hand, the coexistence of different indicators could also be useful if they complemented each other. The initiative of the African Gender and Development Index furthermore showed that developing countries might very well be interested in their relative performance compared to other countries (D. Drechsler). Regardless of the shortcomings of composite indicators, participants acknowledged that such measures would most likely continue to influence the gender debate as they were powerful tools of communication.

20. With regard to the construction of composite indicators, several participants stressed the need for a democratic process to determine which variables should be considered and how they should be weighted. Such procedure could help ensure the relevance of indicators for the target audience: i.e. the public and policy makers in the countries being monitored. Democratic procedures could also strengthen ownership of the data collection process which in turn would improve data quality.

### Session III: Improving Data Collection and Data Quality

21. Data on gender equality are scarce. Session III explored in depth how data collection in developing countries can be improved and extended to include measures of social institutions. International stakeholders shared their experiences in collecting gender statistics.

22. Although much data may be available for OECD countries (E. Giovannini), data gaps in developing countries remain a major challenge. Participants agreed with Mr. Klasen's suggestion to assemble and better utilise existing data from household surveys. In the case of cross country comparisons, countries could furthermore be penalised in rankings if they did not provide adequate data with the hope to encourage better data collection in the future. In general, capacities in national statistical offices should be improved and data demands from donor countries harmonised. Currently, many statistical offices are almost entirely occupied with meeting various reporting requirements of donors.

23. In this respect, Mr. Geir Ovensen (Statistics Norway) pointed out that the private sector often buys out statistical personnel from national statistics offices that were trained by donors. In order to avoid a proliferation of data providers in developing countries, national statistical offices need to remain in the driver's seat in the data collection process. Mr. Ovensen also requested a list of desired variables and indicators of gender equality which could help streamline the work of all stakeholders involved.

24. In her presentation on *Improving Gender Sensitive Data Collection and Quality - Challenges and Opportunities*, Ms. Ruzvidzo discussed the difficulties and challenges that UNECA encountered in their data collection process in African countries. In addition, she introduced the African Gender and Development Index (AGDI), which consists of two parts: (i) The Gender Status Index (GSI); and (ii) The African Women's Progress Scoreboard (AWPS). Ms. Ruzvidzo concluded that inadequate advocacy, lack of commitment and insufficient resources complicate the collection of gender statistics in Africa. In addition, some data are extremely difficult to obtain; e.g. violence against women, female genital mutilation, trafficking of women and young girls, and gender-based abuse during armed conflicts. In other cases, data could be available, but are not systematically collected or not made accessible to the general public.

25. Ms. Karina Batthyány (Social Watch) presented the Gender Equity Index, which involves three dimensions: (i) Education; (ii) Economic Activity; and (iii) Empowerment. Ms. Battyány emphasised the need to monitor how countries are performing, as well as provide civil societies with a "tool" to promote change.

26. The work of the World Bank in the area of gender equality was summarised by Ms. Sinha (World Bank) in her presentation on *Measuring Gender Equality and Institutions – Improving Data Collection and Data Quality*. The World Bank recently reviewed nearly 500 gender indicators with the aim to improve measurement of Millennium Development Goal 3 (i.e. promote gender equality and empower women). Five indicators were recommended: completion rate of primary education; under-five mortality rate; use of modern contraceptives; adolescent motherhood; and labour force participation rates. The World Bank uses a range of different measures to monitor gender equality, such as the Country Policy and Institutional Assessment (CPIA) as well as the Living Standard Measurement Surveys.

27. Ms. Justina Demetriades (BRIDGE) announced that BRIDGE will release a *Cutting Edge Pack* on gender and indicators in July 2007. Among other things, this pack will contain a collection of resources on gender and measurements of change. Ms. Demetriades encouraged participants to hold institutions accountable to their commitments on gender equality. It would be necessary to have both the capacity and political will; more participatory work should also be encouraged. In a similar vein, Mr. Joachim Nahem (UNDP Oslo Governance Centre) noted that data on institutions are generally based on the perception of experts, when in fact it is the perception of women, poor people and marginalised groups that are needed. In conclusion, Mr. Nahem highlighted a "democratic deficit" in the production of indicators.

28. The subsequent discussion brought forth several important and useful aspects. For instance, one alternative to data collection by country would be to look at sectoral inequalities. In Africa, for example, the agricultural sector would be of high importance. While women make up the majority of the agricultural workforce, their access to land ownership and credit is heavily restricted. Ms. Angela Langenkamp (BMZ Germany) reminded participants that women are not a homogenous group; black and white women in South Africa, for example, are treated differently. In addition, data sometimes have to be disaggregated by age: girls versus women and boys versus men. Ms. Jocelyn Talbot (UNDP Beirut) added the dimension of old-age poverty which particularly affects women. Ms. Angela Me (UNECE) pointed out that changing the role of women would inevitably involve changing the role of men.

29. In order to have a true policy impact, the display and dissemination of statistics to the public is equally important. A consistent and accurate interpretation of the data needs to be ensured. Users should have transparent information on how sensitive indicators are to weighting and selection of variables. Cases in which variables or indicators only apply to a number of countries or regions should be clearly indicated.

## **Conclusions and Outlook**

30. Future success in providing better data on gender equally will depend on a strengthened co-operation between local, national and international bodies. Participants agreed that duplication of efforts should be avoided and information be shared as much as possible. The division of labour between different stakeholders should be based on expertise. As pointed out by Ms. Prudence Woodford-Berger (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden), it is important to also work closely with topic experts (i.e. not only gender specialists) in national statistical offices. Co-operation between national statistical offices should also be encouraged. Potentially important is South-South co-operation.

31. In his concluding remarks, Mr. Johannes Jütting (OECD Development Centre) shared his hopes for this workshop to be an important step towards future collaboration and follow-up meetings. To facilitate further exchange, the following division of responsibilities and work was decided: Angela Me (UNECE) takes the lead in liaising with the UN Inter Agency and Expert Group that is about to launch a Global Gender Statistics Programme. Ms. Demetriades agreed to share with the workshop participants the results of BRIDGE's mapping exercise on ongoing gender activities as soon as these become available. Finally, the Development Centre explores the possibilities of a web-based portal to publish and comment on gender-related statistics. Such a Wiki-Approach could be particularly beneficial in getting better statistics on social institutions variables, which would otherwise be very difficult to measure. The UNDP Oslo Governance Centre offered its help on developing such platforms based on their promotion of governance indicators through modern IT technologies.

## Annex 1: Links to websites (provided by participants)

- ***Gender sensitive indicators and governance indicators***

(links provided by Mr. Joachim Nahem, UNDP Oslo Governance Centre)

Measuring Democratic Governance: A Framework for selecting pro-poor and gender sensitive indicators: <http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/docs06/Framework%20paper%20-%20entire%20paper.pdf>

Governance Indicators: A Users' Guide (2nd Edition):  
[http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/docs07/undp\\_users\\_guide\\_online\\_version.pdf](http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/docs07/undp_users_guide_online_version.pdf)

- ***Measuring human rights, democracy and governance***

(links provided by Ms. Claire Naval, Metagora - Paris 21, OECD Development Co-operate Directorate)

Metagora website: <http://www.metagora.org/html/index.html>

Inventory of initiatives aimed at measuring human rights and democratic governance:  
[http://www.metagora.org/html/aboutus/about\\_inventory.html](http://www.metagora.org/html/aboutus/about_inventory.html)

- ***Mapping of activities on gender equality***

(links provided by Ms. Justina Demetriades – BRIDGE)

BRIDGE *Cutting Edge Pack on Gender and Indicators*, (this will soon be available in French):  
[http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports\\_gend\\_CEP.html#Indicators](http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports_gend_CEP.html#Indicators)

Gender and Development In Brief (with three short articles on gender and indicators - will be available in English, French and Spanish): <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/dgb19.htm>

The July *Siyanda* with theme on Gender, Indicators and Measurements of Change (focus on Palestine):  
[http://www.siyanda/archive/july07\\_siyanda.htm](http://www.siyanda/archive/july07_siyanda.htm)

For further documents on gender and indicators see: [www.siyanda.org](http://www.siyanda.org) – search ‘indicators’

International and Regional Databases of Gender Statistics (extracted and amended from the BRIDGE *Cutting Edge Pack on Gender and Indicators*):  
[http://www.siyanda.org/static/BRIDGE\\_gender\\_statistics.htm?em=0707&tag=QG](http://www.siyanda.org/static/BRIDGE_gender_statistics.htm?em=0707&tag=QG)

Expert Panel Discussion at the 51st Session of the Commission on the Status of Women - Gender-sensitive Indicators and Measurements of Change (UNDP/BRIDGE):  
[http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/UNDP\\_BRIDGE\\_CSW.pdf](http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/UNDP_BRIDGE_CSW.pdf)

Gender and monitoring - a review of practical experiences (Brambilla, P. 2001):  
<http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/re63.pdf>  
<http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/R63%20m&ew2web.doc>

Gender and development - facts and figures (Wach, H. and Reeves, H. 2000, 38pp):  
<http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/re56.pdf>  
<http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/R56%20f%20and%20fw2web.doc>

## Annex 2: List of Participants

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