

*Gender Indicators in Evidence-based Policymaking*

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## Background

*Assessing progress of women against agreed targets reveals how much progress there has been  
– but also how much still remains to be done.”*

*Noeleen Heyzer, Executive Director of the United Nations Development Fund for Women  
(UNIFEM) 2001*

Globally, there has been an increasing realization of the role of women play in a country's development process. In most developed countries and as part of the basic human right, women, who represent 50 per cent of the human race, have the right to equal treatment as their fellow men. Yet, because women and men are treated differently in the society, they tend to be influenced differently by the development process and societal changes. The statistics available show that there are significant differences in the role and responsibility performed by women and men. In other words, because of the gender differences, development policies and programs in the country do not affect women and men in the same way. Therefore, policies, programs and legislation that do not take gender into account specifically fail to achieve the desired goals. They tend also to be costly to the country and the society.

Women when provided with an environment of equal opportunity, can, evidently, through their contributions, enhance and even double their contribution to the progress of their families and societies. This in turn will enhance their share in the countries' development achievement.

Recently, the world has witnessed the “revival of gender statistics”<sup>i</sup>. There has been mounting need to collect gender statistics; compile indicators on women and men, side by side, to gauge the gap of inequality; and empower those who need it with evidence to prove it. Moreover, the availability of gender sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data has become more needed at the sub-national and national level for evidence-based policymaking. These indicators evidently, are called for both women and men to highlight the existing differences, and contribute to creating equal access to opportunities for both. The need also arises to underline the importance of women and men separately without masking over the gender difference under the pretext of one population.

There is now a global consensus regarding the need to develop an information-gathering-monitoring system for gender sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data. Such system would enable governments to keep abreast with the global commitments to gender equality and empowering women. This is clearly indicated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the United Nations Millennium Declaration. Driven by this consensus the Arab countries joint their effort with various regional UN agencies to forge a common understanding on ways and means to engender quantitative and qualitative monitoring and reporting system. This is particularly so regarding the identification of priority regional gender issues and the development of gender-sensitive measurements in the region. It is useful in this regard to note that the consensus that has been reached on the measurement tool entitled "G IS IN" Framework has made the monitoring of the MDGs and compliance with strategic objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action easier.

## I. LINKING THE INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS TO AN INFORMATION-GATHERING SYSTEM

Following the 1970s, different approaches to mainstreaming the needs and concerns of women in the development agenda emerged. The period that followed the 1970s has been marked with the realization that development and changes in the society influence women and men in different ways. This in turn led to a shift in perspective from “women in development” to “gender and development”, which in turn led to a parallel shift in data production: from “statistics on women” to “gender statistics,” or statistics on women and men in all spheres of life.<sup>ii</sup>

The globally adopted Millennium Declaration in 2000, is based on the outcomes of 12 major summits and conferences during the 1990s. It presents eight “time-bound, measurable Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Goals with corresponding targets and indicators are what the member countries of the United Nations have committed themselves to achieve by 2015.<sup>iii</sup> These goals aim at eradicating extreme poverty and improving living conditions for both men and women.<sup>iv</sup> The Beijing Platform of Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in 1995, on the other hand provides a significant and comprehensive mandate for Governments to ensure that gender equality and women empowerment are actively addressed as core development concerns. The latter also identifies 12 areas of critical concern for women together with strategic objectives to achieve women equality with men and to empower women. The Strategic Objective H3 in this document specifies and emphasises the importance of collecting sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators.

***“Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation actions to be taken” ...“Ensure that statistics related to individuals are collected, compiled, analysed and presented by sex and age and reflect problems, issues and questions related to women and men in society”***  
*The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, September 1995), Platform for Action, Strategic Objective H3 and Actions to be taken*

There is, however, a lack of a comprehensive information-gathering monitoring framework that links the existing international instruments to monitor gender equality and women’s empowerment as stipulated in the Beijing Platform for Action. Such framework would provide policy makers and statisticians with a tool to measure changes and monitor implementation. The advantage of combining these two together is that together they provide the community at large with an opportunity to serve the common goal of gender equality. They equip the society with the appropriate tools for monitoring and reporting.

Linking MDGs to Beijing Platform for Action is crucial for capitalizing on the synergies generated from both processes. The identification of gender issues through in-depth gender analysis of the processes related to CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action will better inform the MDG work and the related interventions to target efforts. Consequently, the resources and strategies for the CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action can be scaled up to meet the goals and targets of the MDGs. In turn, the resources mobilized for the achievement of the MDGs, and international political consensus and commitment to achieve the Goals, can be used to energize the implementation of the CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action.<sup>v</sup>

## II. ROLE OF GENDER INDICATORS IN EVIDENCE-BASED POLICYMAKING

*...”We are convinced that by improving gender statistics we improve the whole production of official statistics, we make it more useful as regards its social implications and more fit for the design of gender policies”*

*Luigi Biggeri, ISTAT President, Opening Remarks of Global Forum on Gender Statistics  
Rome, 2007*

Gender refers to socially constructed differences between sexes and to the social relationship between women and men; it is a cross-cutting issue among many spheres of life. The goal of policy makers is to pose gender-specific questions to identify inequalities in the impact of existing governmental policy, and to develop a process that addresses inequality in future national policies<sup>vi</sup>.

Gender statistics or sex-disaggregated statistics adequately reflect the situation of women and men in all policy areas. They allow also for a systematic study of gender inequalities to reflect gender issues. Gender indicators provide policy makers with information for better evidence-based decisions. They are necessary to understand the conditions in society for both women and men and what affects gender equality. Gender Indicators provide quantifiable information and advocacy for gender equality. Moreover, gender indicators enable policy makers target areas of concern for both women and men. They also help to make r effective monitoring of the policies impact the policies make on the conditions of women and men. They are, therefore, needed to increase evidence-based policymaking and evaluation, and to perform Gender Impact Assessments<sup>vii</sup>.

In order to use gender indicators effectively and usefully for policymaking it is essential to undertake gender analysis. Such analysis is important to understand the underlying factors that affect women and men activities differently. It is also important to understand the trend in their respective outputs, i.e, whether the causes for these differences have a gender dimension and in which areas are women and men are most affected. Each gender issue/problem/concern, for example in decision-making, economic life, family and household, laws, health, violence and education, must be investigated thoroughly. This is important to be able to identify the underlying causes and consequences, assess the effects, understand the interrelations of different issues, and propose appropriate indicators. Gender analysis, for example, reveals that women and girls in rural areas would have equal *access to opportunities* in education and employment if they were to be provided with transportation, clean cooking fuels, and improved water.

As mentioned, indicators are important tools for policy makers to make informed decisions. This is because i Indicators that measure gender equality include measuring the processes towards gender equality- such as the number of training courses; those that measure equal opportunities- such as equal level of education, and those that measure equal outcomes- such as equal participation in employment. All these measures are essential for policymaking.

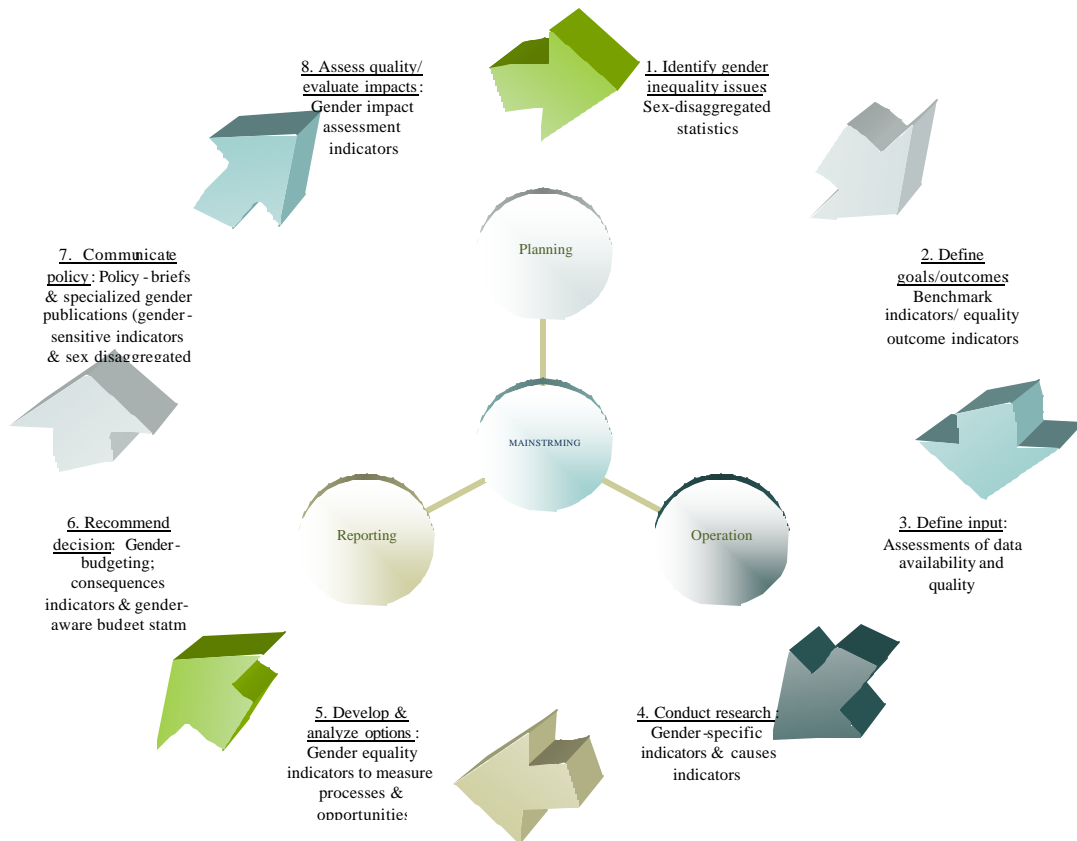
The cross-cutting nature of the gender issues requires mainstreaming of gender in the planning, operations and reporting on outcomes of the monitoring, and evaluation, at the national and sub-national level. This is essential for effective formulation, budgeting and implementation of policy and strategic interventions. It is also crucial for gender components to be an integral part of the monitoring and evaluation of the progress towards development goals. More over, in order to engender monitoring and evaluation, quality and policy-relevant, gender statistics and indicators are needed not only to shed light on priority gender issues and gaps, but also to track the progress achieved for the set targets and benchmarks. This in turn would require defining gender equality for each issue, for the set priorities needed, as well as for specifying the interventions needed at each levels.

In addition, sex-disaggregated budgets or gender budgeting provide policy makers with a transparent portrayal of the fundamental link between a policy’s expenditure and its activities. It also shed lights on the intermediate effects of its outputs and the final economic consequences to be achieved by a policy.

Moreover, the gender-sensitive indicators for a gender-aware budget statement (policy briefs, etc) are required to inform policy makers of the efforts made to redress inequality issues and gaps. These would include: the share of expenditure targeted explicitly to women victims of past inequality and neglect; the share of public services allocated to reduce the burdens on poor women; and the gender gaps in health, education, income, and leisure; the share of income transfers identified to reduce women’s income inequality and dependence, such as pensions; the gender pay gap; and women’s share in subsidies and awarded contracts<sup>viii</sup>.

Mainstreaming gender statistics and indicators is essential at every phase of the gender analysis of the policy and programme development cycle.

**Figure 1 : Gender statistics and indicators in policy cycle**



### III. ASSESSING THE GENDER DATA GAP AND QUALITY

Improving the quality and availability of gender data is essential for providing policy makers with reliable data to make informed decisions and plan effective interventions. It is, therefore, imperative to undertake assessment of data availability at the national and regional level in order to: formulate a plan for improving the production of gender statistics and indicators using and expanding on the existing sources; devising new ones and building institutional capacities to maintain reliable sources for official statistics.

Improving gender statistics requires an assessment of available data to identify the gaps in the data and the data requirements, and define the type of efforts to be made for data collection.. Data gaps may be attributed to inadequate budgets, low human and technical capacities, lack of gender mainstreaming and inadequate concepts and methods. Data gaps may arise for many other reasons, including resource allocations, technical support and limited budgets, other reasons maybe attributed to the data being collected and tabulated but not published, or data being collected but not tabulated; or the collected data not being processed; or not collected.

It is useful to note that at the regional level ESCWA undertook an assessment of the data availability in the Arab countries for each MDG indicator based on United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) online database on MDG indicators.<sup>ix</sup> The results of the assessment were presented in Gender in MDGs: Information Guide for Arab MDG Reporting. In this assessment the countries were categorized in accordance with data availability for one data point/year and for at least two data points/year. The countries were further assessed in accordance with sex-disaggregated data availability for one and at least two sex-disaggregated data points. The exercise revealed shortage of data and unavailability of data, specifically, sex-disaggregated data for the majority of the indicators. It has also revealed differences in the availability of sex-disaggregated data among the member countries.

It is perhaps useful to mention at this point that at the national level some member countries are planning to undertake an assessment of gender data quality and availability. Such assessment has already been completed for Iraq in collaboration with ESCWA under the umbrella of the project on "Development of Gender Statistics in Iraq". The assessment study reviewed the quality of data against 10 parameters. These parameters include: gender analysis, collection methods, compilation by sex-disaggregated data, measurements of gender gaps, international comparability, accuracy, timeliness, accessibility, impact, and participation of women. The assessment study also reviewed data availability against Iraq's core national indicators and issues related to gender equality and women empowerment, in addition to those identified in Arab G IS IN framework. The study identified sources for the missing indicators, and ideas to improve gender-related concepts, methodology, and data compilation from different sources.

There is also a need to improve data quality in the countries. Quality of data could be improved when national statistical offices harmonize concepts, definitions and methodologies with international standards and classifications. The concepts and methods used in data collection need to be adequately formulated to ensure that they reflect existing gender concerns and differentials. And that development and dissemination of handbooks and manuals on definitions, concepts and methodologies for more gender-sensitive data collection, analysis and dissemination would contribute to the enhancement of quality and comparable gender statistics. In this connection, several efforts at the national and regional levels have been undergoing to prepare tools for users and producers to be used as resource guides.

In order to shift from gender-blind statistics to gender-sensitive indicators, there would be a need to present and collect data by sex as a variable. This would entail the inclusion of sex in all

surveys, censuses and administrative records that were gender-blind and did not take into consideration special circumstances that might arise between women and men. In addition to expanding existing data collection systems, new collection sources can also improve availability of gender statistics such as time-use surveys.

Moreover, producing and disseminating gender-sensitive indicators are essential for presenting inequality issues between women and men in all spheres of societies. This calls for collecting data not only by sex but also by age groups, ethnicity, minorities, disability etc. and mainstreaming gender in the collection, compilation and production of statistics into national statistical systems such as agriculture, transport, business etc. It should follow the criteria of data quality, relevance for gender analysis and use of indicators by policy makers.

Gender analysis and engendering the monitoring and reporting process requires concerted and collaborative effort by different partners in the line ministries, development organizations, civil societies, women's NGOs, research centres, and academia. The collaborative effort is necessary to achieve consensus on priority gender issues, define gender equality, set benchmarks, derive indicators and set policies, monitor, report and evaluate impact of interventions.

Gender statistics would not be considered as evidence for gender analysis if the existing data are under-utilized, or the existing sources do not consider gender properly; or are the existing data are misused or misrepresented.

Quality and availability of gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data are cornerstones for policy makers. They provide the evidence for the development of national policies and programmes.

#### IV. INFORMATION-GATHERING AS MONITORING TOOL FOR ARAB COUNTRIES

In order to realize the ideals of the Millennium Declaration there is a need for gender issues to be included in the MDG framework. This will help to highlight the realities of women's and men's living conditions, and highlight their problems and concerns. But it would require identifying the causes and consequences in order to be able to draw gender-sensitive strategies to overcome the challenges that are faced to achieve gender equality. This of course cannot be achieved without producing the needed gender-sensitive measurements, namely, sex-disaggregated data, and qualitative and quantitative indicators. The latter helps to set up benchmarks and targets, monitor and report on progress, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of the development policies, and programmes.

**The diversity– and multiplicity– of gender issues and concerns in the Arab region requires a diverse selection of indicators to address all gender priority issues. They must also take into consideration the vast discrepancy between one country and another or one group of countries and another, as well as discrepancies within the countries. Arab countries have given the first level of priority to women and poverty, education and training of women, women in power and decision-making, and violence against women. A second level of priority is accorded to women and the economy, women and the media, the girl-child and women and health.**

The Arab countries joint efforts with the various regional UN agencies to forge a common understanding on ways to engender quantitative monitoring and reporting, particularly the identification of priority regional gender issues and the development of gender-sensitive measurements in the region. They agreed also on a measurement tool called "G IS IN" Framework.

The three-dimensional framework links Arab priority gender issues in the Beijing Platform for Action and MDGs to a minimum core set of gender indicators. The Framework provides an information-gathering monitoring tool for the Arab countries on the situation of women compared with that of men through engendering the MDG framework and customizing it with additional regional indicators identified through gender analysis of Arab issues in the IAEG meeting on Gender Indicators held in Cairo during September 2007.

The Gender in MDGs: The Information Guide for Arab MDG Reports<sup>x</sup> provides users and producers of statistics with information tool on how to investigate and analyse issues and identify. It shows the underlying causes, and explains how to assess the effects and to understand interrelations. Below is an illustration from the Information Guide showing how to analyze the issue of "income and poverty" and "property rights" :

*“The feminization of poverty in the Arab region is reflected in the increasing numbers of poor households headed by women and a lack of adequate social welfare systems. Gender inequality contributes to making women vulnerable to poverty. Preference of sons and discrimination in the provision of nutritional care in favour of boys is reflected in the higher prevalence of malnutrition of the Arab girl-child. The unequal distribution of care work that is not valued as a contribution to development limits women's opportunities in pursuing education and engaging in income-generating employment. Increasing child labour as a contributing component to a family's livelihood and its effects on child education and health is another dimension of poverty in the region that must be monitored and reported on.*



*In many Arab countries women have no legal rights, and social barriers to land or other property and asset ownership render them economically insecure, while also limiting their access to credit, decent work and income, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty.”*

Through the analysis of the underlying causes, problems/concerns and consequences from a gender perspective, appropriate indicators were identified. This analysis has been linked to Goal 1 of MDGs on Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, in addition to the related Beijing Platform for Action strategic objectives with specific gender indicators as shown in the table below.

Goals	Issues	Indicators	Beijing Platform for Action	Official MDG Indicators	United Nations Millennium Task Force 2005
<b>Goal 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger</b>	<b>Income and poverty</b>	Percentage of population with mean income below national poverty line, by type of household (female single household, male single household, families with children)	<b>Strategic Objective A.1</b> Review, adopt and maintain macroeconomic policies and development strategies that address the needs and efforts of women in poverty	1	
		Poverty gap ratio for single-headed household by sex (per cent)		2	
		Women’s and men’s share in poorest quintile in national consumption (per cent)		3	
		Percentage of population with mean income below national poverty line by level of education of household (female single household, male single household, families with children)	<b>Para. 58 (m)</b> “Enable women to obtain affordable housing (...), with special emphasis on meeting the needs of women, especially those living in poverty and female heads of household”		
		Number of hours of unpaid work per week for 18-44 year olds, by sex, marital status, with or without children			
		Percentage of vulnerable population recipients of poverty alleviation grants, by age and sex			
		Proportion of children under 5 years old underweight (malnutrition), by sex	<b>Strategic Objective A.1</b> <b>Para. 58 (f)</b> “Develop policies and programmes to promote equitable distribution of food within the household”	4	
		Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption, by sex		5	

Goals	Issues	Indicators	Beijing Platform for Action	Official MDG Indicators	United Nations Millennium Task Force 2005
		Percentage children 10-14 years old working, by sex	<b>Strategic Objective L.6</b> Eliminate the economic exploitation of child labour and protect young girls at work		
	<b>Property rights</b>	Percentage of all farms in individual ownership that are owned by women	<b>Para. 55</b> “...The productive capacity of women should be increased through access to capital, resources, credit, land, technology, information, technical assistance and training...”		X
		Percentage of houses owned by male, female, jointly held			X

Source: *The Gender in MDGs: The Information Guide for Arab MDG Reports*

The outcome has been a comprehensive assessment of the issues involved in each of the 12 critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform of Action linked to the eight MDG goals customized to the needs of the Arab region and compiled in one framework. .

The Framework, therefore, presents a concrete step forward for the Arab countries to realize the ideals of the Millennium Declaration and implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

## V. GENDER-SENSITIVE POLICY

While gender plays a central role in some policies in others the relevance of gender tends to be less obvious. The latter policies may be labelled as gender-neutral. This includes areas of health and town planning, with a presumption that there is a homogeneous group of people. However when some policies are erroneously perceived as gender-neutral, they will dissipate the opportunities to include the views of different groups of women and men in the policy formulation and implementation. This in turn leads to misjudging the different impact of the policies on each group, and the systems and organisations that support them<sup>xi</sup>.

The continuing gap between the aspects of policy and practice lies in the lack of sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators. Statistics and indicators are needed to make regular monitoring and measuring progress.

In some modalities sex-disaggregated data are reported at different levels, this however has not been a consistent practice. It is crucial to break down the data by sex, age and geographical location, to facilitate the identification of the target group or area where the focus of efforts and resources should be placed.

It is also to be mentioned that the insufficient use of available data for gender analysis would prevent effective understanding of gender perspectives in its various fields, namely, poverty, unemployment, education, health and violence against women. With this in mind, the reporting must highlight the causes and problems related to reaching the intended goals and targets, as well as the consequences of failure. It is equally important to describe the nature and the cultural circumstances surrounding the issues and causes. It is also important to recommend appropriate measures to eliminate them.<sup>xii</sup>

Below is a delineation of the phases adapted from the “Guide to best practices in gender analysis”<sup>xiii</sup> that are to be followed to integrate gender analysis in development policies and programmes:

Phase 1 – **Identifying and defining the issue** related to key factors affecting women and men, taking account of the respective differences in their roles and responsibilities, income levels, diversity, and legal, structural and social barriers, including cross-referencing with other issues and linking to existing instruments;

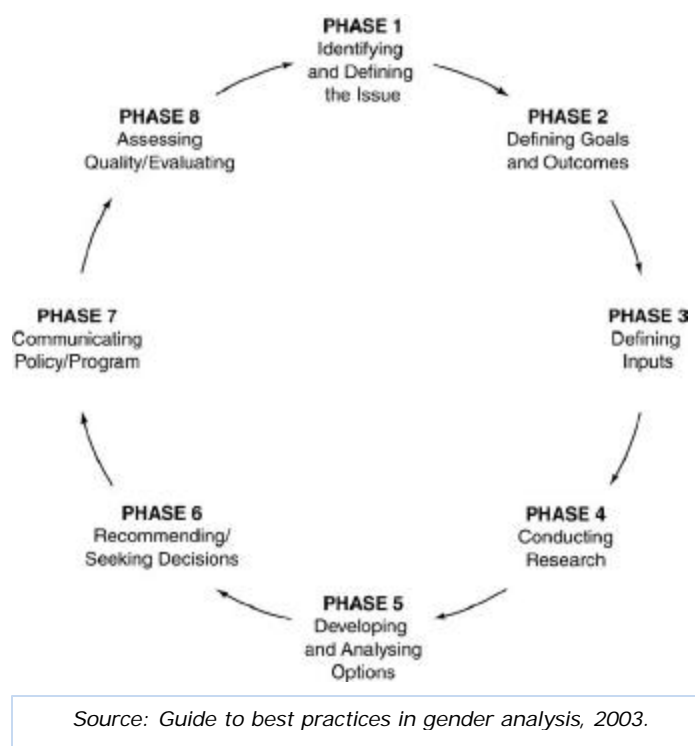
Phase 2 - **Defining goals anticipated and the desired multiple outcomes** of policy or programme on women and men. Special effort should be made to assist women in crossing barriers that limit their opportunities by identifying gender-specific factors such as pregnancy, workplace harassment, childcare, etc and develop evaluation measures to adjust policy and programmes as they are being implemented and where needed.

Phase 3 - **Defining inputs** by assessing availability of statistics from various existing sources, and gather information through consultative mechanisms.

Phase 4 - **Conducting research** with gender perspective in mind, Orient the design, methodology, and development policy and programme to ensure inclusion of gender analysis to collect quantitative and qualitative gender-specific data that addresses the particular circumstances of women and men and identifies causes.

Phase 5 - **Developing and analysing options** by considering the impacts of policy on both women and men and addressing stereotypes perceptions or other factors that impact women and men, and follow up with monitoring and evaluating policy/program impact on women and men in the processes and opportunities provided.

Phase 6 - **Recommending/seeking decisions on identified impacts** on both women and men and review recommended options in light of legal, economic, social or cultural constraints to full participation of women and men in society. Identify the consequences of the recommended options for both women and men and ensure implementation with a gender perspective including reporting on gender budgeting and gender-aware budget statements.



Phase 7 - **Communicating policy/program through reporting** using both women and men in all materials developed and involving community and diverse organisations in the communication of policies/programs, and disseminating data by sex.

Phase 8 - **Assessing quality/evaluating the impacts** of policies/programs on both women and men through gender- impact assessments.

## VI. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The increasing realization of the important role that women can play in the development process of a country has underlined the need to generate gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated statistics. These indicators help to highlight the existing differences between women and men, and contribute to creating equal access to opportunities for both. This development has resulted in the “revival of gender statistics” and stressed the importance of considering the role of women and men separately without masking over gender difference under the pretext of one population.

As a result, gender statistics and indicators have become prerequisite at all phases of gender analysis in order to mainstream gender in the policy and programme development cycle. This has also raised the need to develop the gender information-gathering system that enables governments to keep abreast with global commitments to achieving gender equality and women empowerment. In addition, the framework facilitates measuring changes and monitoring implementation for policy makers and statisticians.

Improving the availability and quality of gender statistics is essential for providing policy makers with reliable data to make informed decisions and design effective measures. These indicators would form the solid ground needed for the policy makers to formulate development programmes and national policies based on hard facts.

The gap that currently exists between aspects of policy formulation and application is caused by lack of sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators. Inadequate use of data available for gender analysis would prevent effective understanding of gender perspectives in various fields. Therefore, policies, programs and legislation that do not take gender into account would fail to achieve the desired goals. It would also be more costly for all concerned.

## End notes

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