

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The statistical review presented in the preceding chapters points to mixed progress in the capacity of countries to produce and report sex-disaggregated data and data on key gender issues of concern to women and men. Similarly, progress on statistical methodology has been mixed: there have been encouraging developments in statistical methodology in certain areas of concern but not in others.

As a result, there is a lack of sex-disaggregated data on many of the topics covered by the present report. The extent of data reporting varies by geographic region. In general, Europe reports the most data and Africa reports the least. The other regions—Asia, North America, South America and Oceania—fall between the two extremes. The differences in reporting are even more pronounced when regions and countries are categorized as “more developed regions”, “less developed regions excluding the least developed countries” and “least developed countries”, with the more developed regions providing the most data and the least developed countries the least.

In addition to varying by region, the extent of data reporting varies by topic. The same region (or country) may have relatively comprehensive data on certain topics but not on others, with more countries usually reporting on the more basic topics as compared with the number reporting on new and emerging issues. Furthermore, data availability decreases as more detail is called for, such as disaggregation by sex, age and other social characteristics.

The general lack of data necessary to address gender issues and the differences in availability of such data across regions and across topics is a reflection of three factors:

- Inadequate statistical capacity
- Lack of gender mainstreaming
- Inadequate concepts and methods

To improve gender statistics, it is crucial that all three factors be addressed. The actions proposed to address those factors can thus be categorized as follows:

- Strengthening national statistical systems
- Mainstreaming gender in all aspects of the production of statistics
- Developing and improving concepts and methods

Many strategies exist to improve statistics on the world's women and men. The list below is not exhaustive but represents the basic strategies that should be considered for each action. Gender mainstreaming necessarily cuts across all activities: both the strengthening of statistical systems and the development of concepts and methods need to be designed and implemented from a gender perspective.

Strengthening national statistical systems

In order to develop and improve gender statistics at the national level, the capacity to produce reliable and timely basic statistics must be present. For many countries in the less developed regions, this is not the case. The situation calls for strengthening the national statistical systems, starting with the national statistics office.

Strategy 1. Secure sustained commitment at the highest level of Government to strengthen the national statistical system

Governments should strive to the extent possible to support the programmes listed below, adopting a coordinated approach to produce a core set of socio-economic statistics required for policy formulation and planning. The priorities would vary according to national circumstances.

- a. Implement at least one population and housing census every 10 years and disseminate the results widely and in a timely manner;
- b. Establish, strengthen and maintain civil registration and vital statistics systems, strengthen other administrative recording systems and make statistics easily accessible to policy makers and other users;
- c. Ensure the sustainability of an integrated national survey programme that produces regular and timely statistics to guide policy and that allows population surveys addressing new research topics to be conducted as the need arises.

Strategy 2. Maximize the use of official statistics

National statistics offices and line ministries should widely disseminate and promote the use of all statistics that they produce. Both producers and users of statistics should strive to consider all available sources of data and use them complementarily as appropriate for their purposes. Since data from different sources are typically collected using different approaches and time frames, they are not expected to replicate each other. Rather, they collectively provide a more complete picture of the topic under study. In addition, evaluation of a data source can be, and often is, carried out using other relevant sources of data. Such complementary use of diverse sources of data leads to a better understanding of their various advantages and disadvantages and opens the way to improving or strengthening each source.

Strategy 3. Build capacity among producers of statistics in data presentation

Although it is Governments that ultimately provide resources, national statistics offices can do much to increase the willingness of Governments to support statistical systems. Producers of statistics need to be more proactive in making the value of gender statistics visible to Governments, the public and other stakeholders. Innovative and more user-friendly ways of presenting and disseminating data need to be developed for Government and civil society, in forms that are appropriate for a wide range of purposes, including policy-making, planning and programming, and monitoring and evaluation, as well as public education, advocacy and lobbying. Taking such steps would help widen the use of the data and in the process create a demand for statistics that would strengthen the claim of the statistics office on the national budget.

Strategy 4. Develop human resources at all levels in national statistics offices

The success of a national statistics office depends not only on commitments at the highest level but also on the commitment and skills of women and men in the organization. Continuous staff training and skill upgrading is crucial to this success. Women and men should be given the same opportunities for training and advancement. In national statistics offices where women are underrepresented at decision-making levels, increasing their representation should also be an explicit goal.

Mainstreaming gender in all aspects of the production of statistics

Mainstreaming a gender perspective into national statistical systems has to be systematic: it must be implemented in all aspects of the production of statistics, from the development of concepts and methods for collecting data to the presentation of results. This endeavour requires political will at all levels, not only in national statistics offices but also in the statistical services of other government agencies and in all institutions that provide administrative data. Gender mainstreaming includes ensuring that the following occur:¹

- Population statistics are systematically collected, collated, analysed and presented by sex and age
- Other relevant characteristics that define potential forms of discrimination, such as race, ethnicity, disability status, place of residence and socio-economic status, are likewise collected, collated, analysed and presented
- Concepts, definitions and methods used in the collection, production and analysis of data are developed to reflect gender issues and gender disparities in society
- Statistics are produced with the full participation of women and men
- Information is disseminated and presented in ways that are easily accessible to users
- Producers and users of statistics, including women's groups, work together to review regularly the adequacy of the official statistical system and its coverage of gender issues

Some strategies for mainstreaming gender in statistics are presented below.

Strategy 5. Specify the development of gender statistics within the legal framework of official statistics

Of crucial importance to improving the availability of gender statistics is the specification of formal requirements for sex-disaggregation and the incorporation of a gender perspective within national statistical legislation that regulates the production and dissemination of official statistics.

To expand the range of information available for gender analysis, the requirements need to be established not only for statistics already officially

collected by the national statistics office but also for other sources of data, particularly administrative data being collected and disseminated by other government agencies and organizations in the public and private sectors.

In addition, legislation can be especially important in establishing standards for transparency in data systems. Freedom-of-information legislation can empower civil society groups, including women's groups, to gain access to administrative data, within the principles and rules of privacy and confidentiality.

Strategy 6. Support and strengthen gender statistics units

National statistics offices can benefit from setting up a gender statistics unit within their organizations. Such a unit can play a catalytic role in initiating and monitoring the process of mainstreaming a gender perspective into national statistical systems, especially at the early stages. Through their contacts with national machineries for women and non-governmental organizations, gender statistics units facilitate communication between the producers and end users of gender statistics. The units provide information to users and help them understand the uses of existing statistics. At the same time, they can increase the awareness among statisticians of the need to produce or disseminate statistics that address gender concerns and to develop gender statistics in new areas such as violence against women, the informal sector and unpaid work.

National statistics offices should strengthen the technical capacity of gender statistics units and as much as possible integrate their activities into the regular statistical work programme.

Strategy 7. Foster dialogue between statistics offices and interested stakeholders, including women's groups

Dialogue between national statistics offices and interested stakeholders can enable women's groups and gender advocates to understand, gain access to and use gender statistics more effectively. Women's groups need statistics to monitor, advocate and lobby for gender-sensitive policies and to hold Governments accountable to commitments they have made, both nationally and as signatories to such international agreements as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. At the

same time, the dialogue can help to increase the capacity of statisticians to identify and understand gender issues and to present data in formats that better address the needs of users.

National machineries for women and other user groups, including NGOs, can also be effective in gathering support for collecting statistics in new areas and in raising awareness of the need for revision of concepts, definitions and methods of data collection. Indeed, in many cases involving gender mainstreaming of statistics, the need for change has first been voiced by women's groups, who may continue to play an important role in the actual mainstreaming activities. The experiences of India and Nepal in incorporating gender concerns into the conduct of their 2001 censuses are examples of how women's groups and the national statistics office can work together. The 2010 round of the population and housing censuses creates a significant opportunity for dialogue between statistics offices and interested stakeholders to improve the overall statistical base on women and men through activities at the national level.

Strategy 8. Train producers of statistics to incorporate a gender perspective into their work

One way to achieve gender-mainstreamed statistics is through the provision of regular training courses on gender statistics for general statisticians, either within tertiary training institutions or in national statistics offices.

The training should be extended to field personnel and other staff members involved in the production of statistics. Gender statistics units can also participate in the training.

Strategy 9. Tap existing sources of data and enhance their usefulness for producing gender statistics

Administrative data, much of which is currently underutilized, represent a potential source of gender statistics. Using administrative data to produce needed statistics is a cost-effective approach since these data are already routinely collected by organizations as part of regular administrative processes. National statistical systems may already include a wide range of such data collected by the Government and other agencies for various purposes. With the introduction of appropriate changes in the methods of collecting and processing information, the resulting data can be

compiled into statistics for addressing gender issues. For example, police and court records can be used to understand the criminal justice system's response to domestic violence, but this is possible only if information on the victim's sex and relationship to offender is collected in the primary record.

Other potential sources of administrative data are personnel records, credit and banking records, and land and housing registers. For some of those sources, statistics may have been produced but not disseminated separately by sex; for others, statistics may not have been produced at all from the primary records. Information on sex is often available in the primary records, allowing the production of sex-disaggregated statistics for monitoring gender equality in access to resources and opportunities, such as access to decision-making positions, access to and utilization of commercial services and credit, and access to land and housing.

For all of the above administrative data, the collection of additional information on the primary record and the production and dissemination of statistics from those records may require legislation. These activities would in all cases have to be governed by the rules and principles of privacy and confidentiality.

Statistics on agriculture, industry, business, the environment, finance, trade and transport represent additional potential sources of gender statistics. Although women and men often have different interests in and access to resources in those areas, the differences are not readily obvious because the individual is typically not the unit of data collection. However, in some cases, sex can be recorded as a characteristic of the primary unit of data collection, thereby increasing the value of the data for gender analysis. For example, in transport surveys information on the sex of the traveller can be included to enable analysis of gender differences in travel patterns.²

Strategy 10. Make official national statistics a required component of international reporting mechanisms

The periodic country reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and of the Beijing Platform for Action provide opportunities to promote the production and reporting of more standardized and harmonized gender statistics. Utilization of statistics in the country reports has

been limited to date. Consideration should be given to establishing formal requirements for the inclusion of official national statistics on gender issues in a standardized format in those reports.

Developing and improving concepts and methods

Strategy 11. Promote collaboration between international and regional organizations and agencies, national statistics offices and academic and research institutions

International and regional organizations and agencies, national statistics offices and academic and research institutions need to work together to mainstream gender in the development and revision of concepts, definitions and methods of collecting data on topics where methods are inadequate. The collaboration extends to all methodological issues, including the design of survey questionnaires or modules within questionnaires, the revision of international classifications and standards and the development of analytical methods and appropriate indicators, among others.

Some of the areas identified in the present report as requiring further development of concepts and methods are statistics on migration, poverty, human rights, violence against women, trafficking in women and girls, time use, informal employment, unpaid work, morbidity, disability, access to health services and access to positions of power and decision-making.

Concluding remarks

Ten years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, limited progress has been made in producing the statistics needed to monitor implementation of the Platform for Action and of the goals of other international conferences and summits, including the Millennium Development Goals. Consequently, a more comprehensive approach to improving gender statistics is required. Gender-sensitive concepts, definitions and methods of data collection, presentation and dissemination are necessary not only in demographic and social statistics but also throughout entire statistical systems. New data sources must be developed and existing sources adapted in order to provide comprehensive statistics that reflect the situation and concerns of women and men equally.

At the national level, increasing the coverage of statistics on gender issues and ensuring that concepts and methods incorporate a gender perspective is particularly challenging in view of the human and financial resource constraints faced by most national statistical systems. Resource constraints are particularly severe in the least developed countries, where the most pressing need is to strengthen national statistical systems to produce the most basic statistics in a timely manner.

In the long term, to improve the lives of women and men, statistical systems and budgets at the national as well as international level must bring about the sustained and institutionalized change needed to ensure the availability of quality gender statistics.

Notes

- 1 *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, para 206; and *Gender Mainstreaming: An Overview*, Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (United Nations, New York, 2002), available from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/e65237.pdf>.
- 2 See United Kingdom, Equal Opportunities Commission, "Gender statistics for the 21st century: challenges and priorities", Economic Commission for Europe Work Session on Gender Statistics, Geneva, 18-20 October 2004, Working Paper No. 2, para. 10.

