

# Measuring gender-based discrimination in social institutions at international and national levels

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## Abstract:

**Social institutions – social norms, informal and formal laws, beliefs and practices – have gained prominence as a useful analytical framework to illuminate what drives gender inequalities and development outcomes.** By determining collective understanding of what are acceptable attitudes and behaviours, they can either drive processes of social change or act as brakes and barriers to such processes. From a gender perspective, they explain the partial implementation of laws intended to protect and promote women’s economic, political, social and cultural rights.

**Gender-based discrimination in social institutions features high up the priority scale in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Goal 5.** One of the proposed indicators to track progress on this is “whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex” (target 5.1.1). However, this indicator is considered as Tier 3, as there are no established methodology and standards.

**At the international level, the OECD’s Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) was the first attempt to capture and measure gender-based discrimination in social institutions.** As such, the SIGI offers a unique evidence base for measuring progress towards gender equality in the SDG framework. The SIGI exposes the ongoing prevalence of discrimination in all regions of the world and across all cultures irrespective of their levels of development. It testifies to the global nature of gender discrimination but provides evidence that national and local solutions can catalyse more equitable social transformation and improve the development potential of countries.

**At the national level, the country studies help to build new knowledge and capacity on measuring gender equality and social institutions.** While the SIGI provides an assessment of discriminatory social institutions at a country level, country-specific studies (e.g. in Uganda) provide policy makers, civil society and the development community with a comprehensive database of information on discriminatory social institutions at the sub-national level. Results highlight how regional disparities at the sub-national level are often hidden by national-level statistics. Second they provide a deeper understanding of how discrimination against women plays out at a sub-national level, particularly in relation to compounding factors such as urban/rural differences, socio-economic status, ethnicity and education level.

**A better understanding of discriminatory social institutions, including which dimensions are most relevant in a particular context, and their implications for development outcomes will assist the design of effective policies that specifically target local issues and involve community actions.** This evidence base represents not just a “first” for Uganda but a “first” internationally, with important implications for advancing national as well as global understanding of the relationship between discriminatory social institutions, gender equality and development. As the development community looks forward to implementation of the SDGs, these fruitful studies underscore the multiple reciprocal advantages of such international technical exchanges to capture, benchmark and analyse the root causes of inequality.