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**Gender Statistics:
Central to Achieving Gender Equality***

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Let me begin by congratulating all the co-organizers of this Global Forum on Gender Statistics, the Government of Italy, the United Nations and the World Bank. I want to specifically congratulate ISTAT and the United Nations Division for Statistics in the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) for their leadership on this issue. DAW is honoured to be associated with this important initiative – the launch of the Global Gender Statistics Programme, the Interagency and Expert Group on Gender Statistics and GenderInfo.

Introduction

Statistics have been important in the work of the United Nations on gender equality since its inception. The Commission on the Status of Women, established in 1946 as the global policy-making body on gender equality, began very early on in its work to compile statistics to document the situation of women around the world, raise awareness and advocate for change.

The improvement of statistics has been one of the most repeated recommendations arising from the Commission over the past six decades. The call for reliable, comparable statistics has increased over time, as a result of the International Decade for Women (1976-1985), the four United Nations world conferences on women (1975-1995), the establishment of the Beijing Platform for Action as the global policy-framework in 1995, and the emphasis on indicators over the past decade, in particular in the context of the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Statistics are required in all contexts for many different and important uses – for awareness-raising, advocacy and stimulating public debate on gender equality; to facilitate the elimination of stereotypes by providing facts on the roles and contributions of women; for support to gender mainstreaming by providing the data required for analyses which form the basis of gender-sensitive policies and legislation and “evidence-based” planning processes and resource allocations; as well as for monitoring the implementation of the Platform for Action through the establishment of benchmarks and indicators.

What is treasured if measured

There is an important saying: “What is truly treasured, is measured”. The mandates on gender equality - established through the Platform for Action and reiterated in the Millennium Summit and the 2005 World Summit – have established gender equality as a development goal in its own right as well as a precondition for the achievement of all other development goals. It is important therefore to be able to measure achievements and benefits in relation to efforts to promote gender equality and empowerment of women, as well as to measure the costs of persistent inequality in areas where progress is slow.

The Platform for Action provided a strong mandate on gender statistics by identifying statistics as one of the key elements of the “institutional mechanisms” essential for full implementation. The Platform called for actors at national, regional and international levels to collect, compile, analyze and present data disaggregated by sex and age, and relevant socio-economic and other factors, on a regular basis. It emphasized the need for statistics to adequately reflect the situation of women and men in all critical areas to provide guidance for policies and programmes. A number of concrete actions were outlined to make this possible.

At the 5-year review of implementation of the Platform for Action in 2000, governments were further requested to provide National Statistical Offices with the institutional and financial support required and to ensure that statistics were made available in formats accessible to policy-makers and the general public in order to support gender-based analysis and monitoring and impact assessment, as well as new work in areas where information was missing.

Despite these strong clear mandates on the importance of gender equality and the need for statistics to measure progress, few targets and indicators were identified in the Platform for Action in 1995 or in the five year review in 2000. This was a disappointment for gender equality advocates who felt that an important opportunity for more effectively and systematically measuring implementation of commitments had been missed.

In 2000, following the confirmation by Member States in the Millennium Summit that gender equality is essential for the eradication of poverty and hunger and for development that is truly sustainable, the MDGs established included one specifically focused on gender equality and empowerment of women (MDG3). Indicators for MDG3 covered education, employment and political participation. Criticisms were quickly voiced that the targets and indicators were too few and not the most important ones for the promotion of gender equality. This reconfirmed the pattern emerging over the past decades - that a serious lack of gender statistics in key areas results in measurement being focused on issues for which comparable, reliable data were more readily available, rather than on those issues which are most critical for gender equality.

Many gender equality advocates felt that the vision of the Platform for Action had been undermined in this process. Others felt, more pragmatically, that efforts should be made to build on the gains made through the MDG process – the focus on monitoring results, the identification of clear, time-bound targets and indicators (even if insufficient), and the new opportunities to collaborate with a broader range of stakeholders in this process. Indeed, the fact that one MDG focused specifically on gender equality and empowerment of women – however inadequate - led immediately to increased attention to gender equality at global, regional and national levels. Gender equality advocates have made efforts to capitalize on this.

Efforts have since been made to propose an expansion of the targets and indicators under the MDGs to cover other important areas for gender equality, such as full and decent employment, violence against women, access to decision-making in areas other than parliaments, reproductive health, and access to HIV/AIDS treatment. Further expansion in one area, reproductive health, was possible through a General Assembly decision in 2007. The desired expansion in other areas was not possible at this point in time because of continuing inadequacies in the statistics required for measurement.

It is increasingly recognized that measurement of progress in gender equality and the costs of inequality cannot be achieved through a focus on MDG3 alone, but that all indicators and statistics in relation to all other MDGs must also be gender-sensitive.

Critical users and providers of guidance on gender statistics at global level

The Commission on the Status of Women

The Commission on the Status of Women monitors implementation of the Platform for Action through its annual sessions in New York. It considers and adopts recommendations on one priority theme each year. Inevitably, these recommendations include a focus on improving statistics and indicators.

Over the past three to four years, the Commission has highlighted the importance of gender statistics in a number of different ways. In 2004, the Commission considered gaps and challenges in measuring progress in implementation of the Platform for Action as the theme of its High-level Roundtable for high-level participants from capitals. The roundtable was organized in collaboration with the Statistics Commission and participants from both Commissions shared experiences in the discussions. At the ten-year review of the implementation of the Platform for Action in 2005, one of six panels organized by the Commission on priority issues focused on statistics, further indicating the importance the Commission attaches to statistics for the successful implementation of its mandate.

In revising its working methods in 2006, the Commission again illustrated the importance of statistics to its work by calling for reliable sex-disaggregated statistics and quantitative and qualitative information to support its deliberations and work on monitoring and reporting; requesting proposals for possible indicators on its priority themes, developed in collaboration with the Statistics Commission; and encouraging Member States to include statisticians on their delegations to the Commission.

In response to the call for possible indicators on its priority themes, in 2007 the Commission on the Status of Women organized a joint panel with the

Statistics Commission on indicators on the priority theme of “Eliminating all forms of discrimination against the girl child.” A key finding from the discussions was that the Commission on the Status of Women, as the policy-making body on gender equality, should first make decisions on the priority areas for action and what it would want to measure. The Statistics Commission, as the technical expert body, could then provide support in determining what statistics would be relevant and available and how these should be utilized.

A new element in the revised working methods of the Commission on the Status of Women could provide potential for further work on statistics and indicators. The Commission decided that it would come back to review implementation of new recommendations on its priority themes, two to three years after their adoption. This could provide an opportunity for regular assessment of progress in collecting, compiling and disseminating statistics to measure any indicators established for the priority themes of the Commission.

The General Assembly

The General Assembly has also given attention to statistics in the gender equality issues covered in its Second and Third Committees, including rural women, women in development, human rights and violence against women. It has also systematically called for improvements in the statistics on the situation of women in the United Nations system.

Following the presentation of the Secretary-General’s in-depth study on all forms of violence against women in October 2006, the General Assembly adopted an important resolution on intensification of efforts to eradicate violence against women. The General Assembly requested the Statistics Commission, in collaboration with the Commission on the Status of Women, and building on the work of the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences, to propose a set of possible indicators to assist in assessing the scope, prevalence and incidence of violence against women.

To begin this process, an Expert Group Meeting on indicators on violence against women was organized by the Division for the Advancement of Women, in collaboration with the UN Statistics Division in DESA and UNECE, from 8-10 October this year. In follow-up, a joint panel will be organized by the Commission on the Status of Women and the Statistics Commission in February 2008.

The work on statistics and indicators on violence against women will be an integral part of the forthcoming Secretary-General’s multi-year campaign (2008-2015) on violence against women to be launched early next year.

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

The ECOSOC has systematically highlighted the need for statistics for the successful implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy, which it monitors on an annual basis. The recent reform process in ECOSOC has introduced two new processes where statistics will play an important role – the Annual Ministerial Reviews and the biennial Development Cooperation Forums. It will be important to ensure that gender perspectives are fully integrated into all statistical work associated with these two highly visible processes.

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

The effective work of the treaty body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) also depends to a large degree on the availability of statistics. The treaty is a critical accountability mechanism for gender equality, ratified by 185 States. States parties are required to report to the Committee every four years and NGOs also produce shadow reports. Statistics form an important basis for these reports. The Committee makes tailored recommendations on the basis of constructive dialogues with the States parties when they present their reports. The need for improved statistics is raised systematically in these dialogues.

The Committee also provides some guidance on statistics for States parties in its General Recommendation No. 9 (1989).

Since States parties are required to present statistics as a basis for the regular four-yearly reporting, the CEDAW reporting process and its follow-up at national level could be used much more effectively by Member States, UN entities and non-governmental organizations to promote the further improvement of statistics.

The evolution of gender statistics

As work on gender equality evolved in the United Nations over the past decades, so did the work on gender statistics. The Commission on the Status of Women in the early years of its work focused exclusively on statistics on women. However by the late 1970s and early 1980s there was a shift from focusing exclusively on women to an emphasis on women and men (gender) and the relations between them. In this context, sex-disaggregation of data became increasingly important. Age-disaggregation was also emphasized in the context of efforts to highlight discrimination and inequality across the life-cycle.

One critical instrument during this period was the development of booklets of sex-disaggregated statistics at national level (and sometimes at city, province or regional levels). These “Women and Men in Figures” booklets were very useful for both policy-makers and the general public by highlighting progress made in achieving gender equality but also, at the same time, emphasizing important gaps

in information and the value of statistics for addressing these. The process of developing and disseminating the booklets strengthened the links between users and producers of statistics and, importantly, brought National Statistical Offices into the discussions on gender statistics.

In the late 80s and early 90s, the gender mainstreaming strategy emerged as a key approach to promoting gender equality and empowerment of women. It was evident that separate policies, mechanisms and projects were not adequate. Effective implementation of gender equality required that gender perspectives were fully incorporated into all policies, plans, mechanisms, budgets and activities, across all sectors. In 1995, the Platform for Action established a dual strategy – targeted activities complemented by the gender mainstreaming strategy. It is important to note that gender mainstreaming was never intended to replace targeted activities; separate targeted activities remain critical today.

It became also clear that the separate, limited, gender statistics programmes were not, by themselves, sufficient to ensure adequate measurement of progress on gender equality, unless these programmes ensured that gender perspectives were incorporated into all statistics, across all areas, engaging all statisticians rather than only gender specialists. Gender mainstreaming in statistics highlighted the need for changes in concepts and definitions; in methodologies, for example in relation to design of questionnaires, analysis of responses and dissemination of outcomes; in the role and competencies of enumerators; and in the involvement of gender equality specialists. It also required that the goal of achieving gender equality was more central in the legislative, policy and regulatory frameworks for statistics.

Gender mainstreaming in statistics was increasingly understood as necessary for gender equality and empowerment of women but equally important for effective work on statistics.

Current gender mainstreaming challenges and the role of gender statistics

Gender mainstreaming efforts are today focused on a number of key planning and reporting processes where availability of statistics is critical for success. These include the MDG national reporting processes, the formulation and monitoring of Poverty Reduction Strategies, and the development and monitoring of the National Development Strategies called for in the 2005 World Summit. Gender-sensitive planning and reporting processes require gender analysis, which is dependent on the availability of sex-disaggregated statistics and other relevant information.

Gender-responsive budgets are emerging as an important instrument in gender mainstreaming at national and local levels. Efforts are made to analyze both revenue and expenditure from a gender perspective, in order to foster greater coherence between policy commitments for gender equality and resource

allocations to achieve these commitments. The availability of statistics is critical for successful implementation of these gender responsive budget initiatives.

In developing countries, the changing aid environment also has implications for statistics. In the shift from sector projects and programmes to sector budget support and general budget support, policy dialogue has become a critical instrument for ensuring attention to gender perspectives in development cooperation. Effective policy dialogue is dependent on reliable statistics in a wide range of areas.

Progress made and remaining gaps and challenges

The ten-year review of progress in implementation of the Platform for Action in 2005 revealed a considerable amount of work on gender statistics and a number of good practices. Some countries in all regions reported on increased sex and age disaggregation; the development of training programmes for statisticians and guidelines and manuals to support gender mainstreaming in statistics; the production of publications on gender statistics; the use of ICT – for databases and websites; increased consultation between producers and users of statistics at different levels; and the establishment of specialist positions or units in national statistical institutions.

Gaps and challenges were, however, also reported in the ten year review and other assessments of progress in gender mainstreaming in statistics. Some of the specific gaps identified included the fact that attention to gender perspectives was focused largely in the area of social and demographic statistics and was not incorporated across other statistical areas, and many of the specialist positions and units remained relatively marginalized in the national statistics institutions and did not have regular interaction with, or influence on, other parts of the institutions.

Although there were many gender statistics publications developed and disseminated widely, there had been less success in ensuring that gender perspectives were systematically incorporated into other statistical products. There were relatively few instances of incorporation of gender perspectives into legislation, policies or regulatory frameworks on statistics. The plans of national statistical institutions did not always refer to the importance of gender equality; and national gender equality policies and plans did not always highlight the centrality of statistics for successful implementation.

Many countries had not moved beyond sex-disaggregation of statistics in limited areas of statistics. There had been little success in developing the types of statistics and information needed to make the differences and inequalities between women and men visible in order to influence policies, legislation, plans, and budgets and lead to positive outcomes for gender equality. In other words, gender mainstreaming in statistics was far from being successfully implemented. There

was a clear need for increased focus on institutionalization of the work on gender statistics within statistical institutions at all levels.

The way forward

An important starting point must be to focus specifically on responding to the recent clear mandates on gender statistics provided through intergovernmental processes – in particular the mandates from 2006 from the Commission on the Status of Women for involvement of statisticians and support on statistics and indicators in its work, and from the General Assembly on a set of possible indicators on violence against women. Greater efforts could also be made at regional and national levels to use the CEDAW reporting and follow-up processes to strengthen the focus on gender statistics.

Efforts must also be made to identify failings from past work on gender mainstreaming in statistics and develop means to overcome these in current efforts, in particular focused on the ways to more actively engage all statisticians in statistical institutions in the work. A number of possible actions can be immediately identified:

- Efforts could be made to **identify and document gains made on gender mainstreaming in statistics**. Over the past decades there have been a multitude of methodologies and tools developed, including on training. Access could be improved through more creative use of ICT to disseminate them, for example through the existing UN interagency portal, WomenWatch.
- Ways to more **actively involve statisticians working on all statistical areas** should be developed – including through training programmes which are more focused on the roles of statisticians than on advocacy roles.
- In **addressing key gaps** – particularly those identified by Member States themselves in intergovernmental processes, such as violence against women, the situation of the girl child or access to decision-making – the approach and methods used should be conducive to engaging a broad range of statisticians at all levels and ensuring that attention to these issues are incorporated into mainstream processes rather than through limited separate procedures and outputs.
- In work on indicators, the serious **constraints posed by lack of statistics** should be recognized and steps taken to address some of the gaps on statistics in key areas. Greater efforts could be made to identify and utilize existing data and to ensure that sex-disaggregation at point of collection is not lost as the data moves up the system, due to lack of demand.

- **Interaction with users** could be intensified and improved. Key users such as Parliaments, academia and the media should be more actively involved to ensure an increase in demand and more effective use of the statistics and indicators developed. As necessary, training could be provided to users to ensure a more effective role for gender equality advocates in supporting gender mainstreaming in statistics. There should be recognition of the increasing diversity of mechanisms at national level working on gender equality, including ministries, commissions, ombudspersons offices, focal points in line ministries and networks and caucuses in parliaments, and efforts should be made to engage them systematically and effectively utilize their comparative advantages.
- The issue of **resources for gender statistics** should also be addressed. Much of the work – involvement of gender specialists, publications, databases, websites, training programmes and workshops – is not financed through the regular budgets of statistical institutions. This hinders the mainstreaming of gender statistics. What is truly treasured would surely also be well resourced. Extra-budgetary resources should be strategically utilized in support of gender mainstreaming. The focus of the 2008 session of the Commission on the Status of Women on “Financing for gender equality and empowerment of women” could be used strategically to bring attention to the resource needs for gender statistics. A parallel event could be organized and a position paper on the resource situation prepared and distributed among Member States.
- Statisticians should be encouraged to participate in both **the Commission on the Status of Women and the Statistics Commission** since the annual sessions overlap. An annual parallel event could be organized on statistics and indicators in relation to the priority theme of the Commission on the Status of Women.
- Entities supporting the work on **CEDAW** at regional and national levels could consider ways to enhance the focus on statistics to improve reporting – for example through specific training programmes. National statistical institutions and statistics units in line ministries should be involved in all national-level training on CEDAW reporting.

Conclusions

The optimism of the 80s and 90s on the potential of gender statistics in the work of promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women, did not produce the results intended, for a variety of reasons. Despite the slowing of the momentum and the constraints faced in the past, the potential for significant impact remains. The commitment to re-energize this work – as evidenced by the organization of this forum and the launch of a global programme and interagency

and expert group - is certainly encouraging. If our new efforts in this area build on the lessons from the past, gender statistics holds great potential for enhancing the efforts to promote gender equality and empowerment of women, including through the critical gender mainstreaming strategy, and producing concrete results for the benefit of women and men and girls and boys.

Thank you