

Gender Data Harmonization Initiative

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“... if we’re going to improve outcomes for girls and women and make the best case for more investment, we’ll need better data and we need to coordinate our efforts to make sure we get it. So I call on organizations focused on these issues to work together on a plan to make all the data that’s collected on women more comparable and useful, and to identify a list of common indicators for future data collection. And I’m pleased to announce that the OECD, the World Bank, and the UN have already agreed to collaborate on this project in time for the High Level Forum in Busan. I hope others will join them.”

- Secretary Clinton, OECD Session on Development and Gender, May 26, 2011

Gender equality and women’s empowerment are central development goals in their own right and key to achieving other outcomes. A growing body of evidence – including academic, policy, and private sector research- shows that empowering women and reducing gender gaps in health, education, labor markets, and other areas is associated with higher economic growth, more effective management of public resources, greater agricultural productivity, improved food security, better health, nutrition, and education of children, and a variety of other outcomes. Yet, basic data are lacking or insufficient to answer both general policy questions and those in specific domains – from education to financial markets. For instance, data produced through country systems and harmonized globally is important to answer general questions about investments in women and girls like the following:

What are the economic returns to education of females - at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels?

To what extent does increasing women’s access to economic opportunities and resources (employment, entrepreneurship, assets) increase overall productivity, sector-specific (agriculture, industry, services) productivity, and overall economic growth?

Which are the most important constraints to female entrepreneurship, growth and performance of female-owned firms?

Beyond these general questions, basic sex-disaggregated data are also needed to diagnose existing gender gaps, identify relevant constraints, and design effective policy responses in areas such as education investment, workforce development, industrial and agricultural development, social protection, poverty targeting, and many others. While considerable progress has been made on data collection and analysis of education and employment indicators specified in the MDGs, there are still important gaps: in education (completion rates at primary, secondary and tertiary level, literacy and numeracy rates), employment (participation by age, sector, and type, wages and earnings, work hours), and entrepreneurship (percentage of female owned business by age, size, sector; access to credit and other forms of finance, firm entry, growth, and survival rates) are missing or outdated in a majority of developing countries. Yet, having solid sex-disaggregated data on these indicators is essential for achieving country ownership of gender equality objectives and development results.

In order to accelerate progress, the Gender Data Harmonization Initiative was launched by the United States at the OECD Ministerial Session on Gender and Development. The Initiative seeks to push existing efforts forward in a coordinated way and propose a list of internationally comparable gender indicators on education, employment, and entrepreneurship so as to facilitate learning and assist national governments in producing the necessary data to inform policies and programs. Preliminary discussions were held among the World Bank, the OECD, ILO, UN Women and the UNSD, and concurrence was reached to propose that the development of the common indicators be implemented as an activity of the IAEG on Gender Statistics. This would ensure that the proposed actions are coherent with and benefit from possible synergies with agencies' existing activities.

The informal initial discussion focused on indicators on education, employment, and entrepreneurship. The agreement was that the list should be compatible with the already existing Minimum Set of Indicators for Gender Statistics, developed at the request of the UN Statistical Commission and to be adopted at its next session in February 2012. In order for the two lists to be fully consistent, UNSD developed a proposal presented in Annex 1. The Initiative also seeks alignment of these recommendations through the PARIS21 working party on statistics.

Harmonizing this minimum list of indicators will provide countries with a set of priorities for data collection and ability to use the data to diagnose gender gaps and constraints related to labor market outcomes, business creation, productivity growth, and sector-specific and national-level economic growth, among other policy issues. In the longer-term, this Initiative seeks to develop a robust global framework to improve collection of a broader range of sex-disaggregated economic data, especially on entrepreneurship, access to finance, and asset (land and housing) ownership. Important next steps include the development of a framework for each of these areas, harmonisation of definitions and methodologies, and timeframes for collecting data worldwide. Possible activities to address capacity gaps include the creation of a pilot program for technical support for statistical institutions in a subset of developing countries to support robust national-level collection of sex disaggregated economic data. These activities will be coordinated with the IAEG to ensure they meet agreed-upon international standards. This could include regularizing data collection and computerizing database management to increase the coverage and accuracy of existing records.

This Initiative hopes to present the following at the Fourth High Level Forum for Aid Effectiveness in Busan, South Korea (Nov 29 – Dec 1), pending approval by the IAEG:

1. A list of harmonized economic indicators
2. Support to implement data harmonization based on the list of indicators
3. Action plan to develop a robust framework for broader set of economic data
4. Longer-term capacity building activities

Outcomes of the IAEG meeting could be:

1. Recommendation to the UN Statistical Commission for a harmonized list of indicators on education, employment, and entrepreneurship

2. Encouragement of technical capacity building of national level statistical agencies to implement this harmonized list
3. A review in three to five years of the extent to which the harmonized list has been embraced by country governments and adopted by international agencies.

Document 4: Comparison between Preliminary list of indicators for the Busan Initiative and the IAEG-GS Minimum Set of Indicators for Gender Statistics

		Preliminary list of indicators for Busan	IAEG-GS Minimum Set: Equivalent or proposed new indicator	Proposal notes
Health	1	Life expectancy at birth, by sex	32) life expectancy at age 60, by sex	Keep life expectancy at age 60. Life expectancy at birth is not useful as it mainly reflects infant and child mortality (which is already in the list).
	2	Infant mortality rate	23) Under-five mortality rate by sex	Keep USMR, which is now universally used (including for MDG monitoring) and recognized as a better indicator than Infant mortality.
Education	3	Net enrolment ratio in primary education, by sex	17) Net enrolment ratio in primary education, by sex	
	4	Net enrolment ratio in secondary education, by sex	18) Net enrolment ratio in secondary education, by sex	
	5	Gross enrolment ratios in tertiary education, by sex	Gross enrolment ratios in tertiary education, by sex	Proposal is to add GER in tertiary education, keeping in mind that figures in most low income countries are difficult to interpret and often fluctuate because the numbers are very small.
	6	Share of tertiary education graduates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics who are women	20) Enrolment in science, tertiary level, by sex Proposed: Share of tertiary education graduates in science, engineering, manufacturing and construction who are women	The IAEG indicator on enrolment could be replaced with "graduates". Categories to be included would be the ones according to ISCED 1997 (a. science, and b. engineering, manufacturing and construction; mathematics is included in science)
Employment	7	Participation in labour force, by sex	3) Labour force participation rates for 15-24 and 15+, by sex	We should keep the 15-24 and 15+ as in the IAEG list
	8	Employment by sector and occupation, by sex	6) Percentage distribution of the employed population by sector, each sex	It is not possible to have an indicator by occupations. Perhaps one or two occupations could be selected on which to present the data. But it would not be by sector AND occupations.
	9	Youth employment, by sex	Proposed: Youth unemployment by sex	Youth employment is already somehow covered by the indicator above on LF participation. The proposal is to add youth unemployment by sex
	10	Seats in parliament, by sex	35) Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament	
Entrepreneurship	11	Percentage of firms owned by women	Proposed: Percentage of firms owned by women	
	12	Percentage self-employed women	4) Proportion of employed who are own-account* workers, by sex	We should use IAEG-GS title as it reflects the ILO definition
Family-friendly policies	13	Weeks of maternity leave	1.4) Length of maternity leave	Indicator already included under the section on norms.

*Own-account workers are those workers who, working on their own account or with one or more partners, hold the type of job defined as a self-employed job, and have not engaged on a continuous basis any employees to work for them during the reference period.

It should be noted that during the reference period the members of this group may have engaged employees, provided that this is on a non-continuous basis. The partners may or may not be members of the same family or household.