2 Developing a National-Level Database of Gender-Sensitive Indicators

This section discusses the main sources for a national-level data base on the status of women and gender equality, and suggests ways of improving these sources so as to increase their gender sensitivity. It also provides information on training and methodological advice on gathering appropriate indicators.

Data Sources

There are three main data systems that produce indicators, which, if collected and interpreted correctly, can support national-level planning towards gender equality and equity. These are:
- census surveys;
- the System of National Accounts; and
- sample surveys of the population.

At present, census surveys and sample surveys of the population collect sex-disaggregated data, although often not in a consistent fashion. Recent changes to guidelines for the System of National Accounts means that this could be a potential future source for gender-sensitive indicators. No single source can provide all of the data needed by different countries and different users. Censuses, household surveys and registration and administrative data systems should be used to complement each other wherever possible.

Over the last ten years, serious efforts have been made to enhance the gender-sensitivity of these data systems. However, in some cases improvements to current practices may be necessary to ensure that they are fully engendered.

Censuses and labour force surveys[1]

Censuses are the mainstay of the data gathering system and as such offer considerable opportunities for gathering gender-sensitive data. However, a UN review of the census and labour force survey practices of a number of developing countries, in terms of concepts and definitions selected, uncovered certain problems.

The review (UN, 1993), which covered the period 1970 to 1990, focused on gender differentials and included the Commonwealth countries of Botswana, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Lesotho, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Trinidad and Tobago, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, as well as St Helena and Hong Kong. The findings were as follows:
- In a number of censuses, interviewers are not sufficiently trained to identify women who are primarily housewives but who nevertheless work in activities related to the production of goods and services. The principle that participation in any economic activity should be counted, irrespective of any other activity, is often not applied.

- The concept of 'usually active population' is unclear and not effectively articulated in national censuses. This concept is important for the inclusion of women's work which may be seasonal and only captured through use of a longer reference period.
- The ways in which questions about work are asked can significantly affect census results. Words such as 'employment', 'job', 'work' or 'main activity' can mean different things to different people. For example, a national sample survey in Kenya in 1974 revealed that activity rates for married women ages 20 to 49 varied from about 20 per cent to about 90 per cent depending on whether the key word in the questionnaire was 'job' or 'work'. A 'job' was regarded as a paid wage or salary employment, whereas 'work' was more broadly interpreted to include virtually all time-consuming activities required for the family's survival (see also the India case study in Section 5).

Over the last ten years extensive work has been done on making censuses and labour surveys more gender-sensitive, particularly in the area of women's paid and unpaid work, which is a key area where governments can improve their performance. Questions in censuses and labour force surveys should be developed so that women's contributions are included wherever possible. Questions regarding economic activity should be carefully phrased and follow UN and ILO recommendations. Questions related to women's work should be carefully framed so as to include both paid and unpaid work. Extensive education for enumerators and the general population as to the meaning of the term 'work' may be necessary before women's contributions can be fully captured.

These are some recommendations for improving census questions on economic activity so as to reduce gender bias (UN, 1993: 33-38[2] ; the 1991 Indian census; and the India case study in Section 5):

- The experience with asking questions on women's labour force participation illustrates the need for training and gender sensitisation of interviewers. Interviewers should receive consistent training, i.e., all trainers should transmit the same instructions to their trainees. Particular attention should be paid to the training of interviewers in asking the questions, since the possibility of introducing response and non-response biases is very strong when concepts are difficult to understand and/or interpret. For example, male interviewers may have difficulty with the concept that many of the activities carried out by women constitute work.
- Surveys need to be carried out in a participatory fashion or at least have a participatory element.
- The use is recommended of a building block approach where feasible, whereby a series of questions are asked so as to exclude those persons who do not qualify for inclusion in the particular topic, leaving those who, by definition, are entitled to be included.
- Language in the census should be non-sexist. For example, questions in the census should focus on additional questions to 'main activity' in societies where women's place is considered to be in the home.
- Instruction manuals should be developed so as to adequately inform the interviewer which concepts should be applied.
- The seasonal patterns of women's work should be taken into account.

Anker *et al* (1988) provide the following additional guidelines:

- Male interviewers may have particular problems interviewing women. In order to establish the nature of women's participation, more women interviewers should be employed.
- Typical general key word questions, as used in censuses and labour force surveys around the world were found to be inadequate. More detailed key work questions

or preferably activity schedules should be used, and where this is not feasible in censuses (because of limitations on numbers of words), separate labour force surveys should be carried out.

- The collection of information on multiple labour force activities should be encouraged. Unless such data are collected, it is likely that the true extent of female labour force activity in rural areas of developing countries will continue to be grossly under-reported.
- Additional methodological work on the collection of time-use data should be encouraged.

In producing gender-sensitive indicators and using them for policy purposes, two other priority areas are women's work in agriculture and women's work in the informal sector. In both these areas there is serious under-reporting in official statistics of women's contributions. It is beyond the scope of this manual to discuss these two key areas in detail, but further information can be found in UN (1995a), UN (1993), UN (1990b) and Dixon-Mueller (1987). See also the Gender Management System publication *Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture and Rural Development: A Reference Manual for Governments and Other Stakeholders*.

Household surveys

Due to the limits to the number of questions in censuses, their focus on a few topics, the ten-year time gap between many censuses and their formal mode, censuses and other national-level surveys usually provide very little information about household dynamics or gender relations. Censuses and other national level surveys must therefore be complemented by micro-level household surveys if a comprehensive picture relating to gender equality is to be built up.

Household surveys are surveys of a sample of the population (usually more than 2,000 households) focusing on a particular subject or subjects and with the household as the focus of investigation. They can be carried out at frequent intervals, and in some cases are carried out quarterly. The size of these surveys makes them useful instruments for the generation of gender-sensitive indicators. In developing national level data sets, household surveys should focus specifically on areas where there are serious gaps in data. In particular, they should examine gender roles, household dynamics and decision making, control of and access to economic and other resources, and violence against women.

The following guidelines should be followed to ensure the successful implementation of a gender-sensitive household survey (UN, 1988a):

- There should be an existing household survey capability of some sort and hence a team with some practical experience of both field work and subsequent analysis.
- One or more persons with professional capacity and a personal interest in innovations to improve data on women should be involved.
- The possibility should be explored of carrying out small-scale pre-trial interviews to adapt suggestions to local conditions. Even 200 interviews, 50 each in an urban and three rural areas, could be sufficient.
- A final sample of at least 2,000 households (or possibly 1,500 in a very homogeneous society) is recommended.
- The planning committee should have a significant representation of women members representing different ethnic, class/caste and age groups (including some with rural backgrounds) and strong participation by persons who can be expected to use the data.
- There should be a possibility of providing training to the interviewers and of developing a core of female interviewers.

As well as those areas noted above, there are four other areas where survey data is likely to impact significantly on policy-making which will improve women's lives (UN, 1988a):

- female resources, for example education;
- female economic activity;
- female poverty; and
- female-headed households.

Time-use studies

Time-use studies can be included as part of a larger household survey or carried out as a separate study. They are a type of micro- or meso-level survey that it is becoming increasingly useful in providing gender-sensitive indicators related to women's and men's contributions. Two main, interrelated sets of concerns are usually investigated in these studies (UN, 1990b). The first covers the utilisation of human resources in the household and the second, improvement in the measurement of employment, unemployment and underemployment. There are four main types of time-use survey, all of which have their strengths and limitations (UN, 1988):

- observation;
- random instant measurement (a schedule of random visits which record what household members were doing just before the arrival of the investigator);
- diaries; and
- recall (usually based on a recall period of 24 hours).

Extensive research was undertaken for the 1995 *Human Development Report* on the amount of time women and men spend on market and non-market activities. Time-use studies were collected for 14 industrial countries, 9 developing countries and 8 countries in Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. This and much other similar research points to the disproportionate load women bear in almost all societies.

As with any other approach, time-use studies are limited methodologically in various ways:

- "Surveys that examine only the allocation of time by women and men *during workdays* tend to underestimate the contribution of women to economic activity because their work continues unabated during 'days off'. The same is true with surveys of economic activities *during the day*, since a significant portion of women's work occurs at night" (UNDP, 1995: 91).
- "In developing countries, people do not think of their activities in terms of clock time, nor can they be expected to keep diaries listing their daily activities ... Intensive observation and interview methods require well-trained and well-supervised interviewers and a great amount of interview time" (UN, 1990b: 57).
- There may be lack of participation in survey design by those being studied.

Despite these problems, time-use studies are particularly valuable in highlighting women's work and generating gender-sensitive indicators that can be used as part of a national database. They can also be useful in the generation of satellite accounts on unpaid work.

System of National Accounts and unpaid work

The United Nations System of National Accounts (SNA) is used to measure production and growth in most countries, and since 1945 the SNA has been one of the central tools used for policy-making related to the working of a country's economic system. Implementing changes to the SNA is a key area where governments can improve the way in which gender-disaggregated data is collected and used.

Measures such as the SNA and GDP, with their concentration on measuring paid employment, have been strongly criticised for having a gender bias, and in particular for ignoring women's overall contribution to the economy and to society as a whole.

Governments are advised to experiment with the formation of satellite accounts to the System of National Accounts, focusing initially on national time-use studies that measure the extent of unpaid work in the country. Methodologies for these national time-use studies should ideally be harmonised with international norms, where they exist. More information on satellite accounts on unpaid work is provided in Section 3.

CEDAW

States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are required to submit reports every four years on all articles of CEDAW. Reporting on CEDAW offers governments an excellent opportunity to synthesise available gender-related data, to measure advancements in the status of women, and to identify and fill data gaps. While census and other national level surveys deal mainly with demography, work, health, and education, CEDAW offers governments the opportunity to synthesise and produce gender-sensitive indicators on empowerment, violence against women, cultural issues and women's rights.

Methodological Advice

The following is a checklist of methodological points to bear in mind when using gender-sensitive indicators at the national level. An indicator or indicator system need not conform to all of the following, but the closer the conformity the more likely it is that it will be useful.

- **Comparison to a norm:** Use of gender-sensitive indicators should involve comparison to a norm, for example the situation of men in the same country or the situation of women in another country. In this way the indicator can focus on questions of gender equality and equity rather than only on the status of women.
- **Disaggregation:** Data should be disaggregated by sex. Wherever possible, national level indicators should also:
  – be disaggregated by age;
  – be disaggregated by socioeconomic grouping;
  – be disaggregated by national and/or regional origin;
  – note the time period;
  – note geographical coverage; and
  – note data sources.
  This kind of information will help to inform a broader analysis of the social forces within a society which have brought about the particular status of women and men in that society.
- **Ease of access:** Data should be easy to use and understand. Indicators should be phrased in easily understandable language, and should be developed at a level relevant to the institutional capabilities of the country concerned.
- **Scope of availability:** Indicators should be available for the whole country.
- **Reliability:** Data should be relatively reliable. No data is absolutely reliable but reliability checks should be carried out. For example, findings from censuses should be compared to findings from micro-level studies for accuracy.
- **Measurability:** Indicators must be about something measurable. Concepts such as 'women's empowerment' or 'gender equity' may be difficult to define and measure. In this case proxy indicators, for example relating to greater choice for women in accessing health care or education, may have to stand as proxies for the less precise concepts.

- **Time-frames:** Gender-sensitive indicators should be reliable enough to use as a time series. The time span which the indicator covers should be clearly specified.
- **International comparability:** Gender-sensitive indicators should be collected using internationally accepted definitions. While these definitions are sometimes imprecise, they are usually the best terms available and allow for international comparison.
- **Measuring impact:** The indicator should, where feasible, measure the outcome or impact of a situation rather than the input. For example, women's literacy is often a better measure of women's educational status than female enrolment rates because literacy measures the impact of enrolment rates. Similarly, female mortality rates are a better measure of women's health status than access to health facilities.
- **Participation:** Indicators should be used and developed in as participatory a process as possible. This will involve setting up inter-departmental government committees but also holding focus group meetings with the public and eliciting public opinion from women and men wherever possible (see below).

Training for the Production of Gender-Sensitive Databases

Training related to gender-sensitive indicators is a key area for governments to pursue. This training needs to occur in two areas:

- training of statisticians, economists and others within the national level census and survey systems; and
- training of enumerators and researchers carrying out surveys at the local level.

In the first area, Ghana provides a useful example of advances that can be made:

"The Statistical Service recognises that the ability to produce reliable, timely and gender-sensitive statistics depends, to a large extent, on the availability of highly trained and experienced personnel ... Side by side with staff recruitment, a comprehensive staff training programme, involving regular in-service training, training in local institutions of higher education and external training, has been introduced for both graduate and non-graduate staff to upgrade their skills. The training programme, which covers a wide range of subjects and procedures, is geared towards strengthening the human resource capability for collection, processing, analysis and dissemination of statistical information."

Boateng, 1994: 103

In the second area, the training of interviewers, Anker (1994: 71) provides two examples where the training of enumerators led to a significant increase in coverage of women's labour force activity in large-scale surveys. The first of these examples comes from Argentina and Paraguay, where labour force information was collected for over 1,000 women and men using two different interviewer training sessions, and where interviewer training (four sessions over two days) was found to have an important effect on the reporting of female labour force activity. The second example comes from Egypt, where training organised by the Egyptian statistical office provided significantly improved information on women's labour force activity.

Popular Participation in Indicator Collection and Use

Most work on gender-sensitive indicators continues to be non-participatory, in the sense that women in developing countries, and particularly poor and marginalised women, are not included in the process whereby knowledge is generated and translated into policy. Given the importance of finding out more about the status of women and gender equity, a key goal for governments should be to facilitate popular participation in the generation of gender-related information.

One means of achieving this goal is through the use of qualitative or phenomenological indicators. These indicators are not well understood but are essentially people's perceptions and views on a given subject. Two ways of distinguishing between quantitative and qualitative indicators are by the source of information and the way in which this information is interpreted and used. Quantitative indicators focus on areas that are easy to quantify, such as wage rates or education levels, usually drawn from censuses or administrative records. Because of their focus on formal surveys they are usually interpreted using statistical methods. Qualitative indicators are usually obtained from participant observation, attitude surveys or anthropological field work, i.e., less formal surveys, and are often analysed in a descriptive fashion (CIDA, 1996b). These indicators are also developed during gender analysis.

If used correctly, qualitative indicators can be an important means of facilitating popular participation in indicator use, because many surveys involving qualitative indicators are participatory in nature. Qualitative and quantitative indicators should complement each other and ensure the inclusion of different perspectives on a topic. In addition, a focus on qualitative indicators can help ensure that poor and marginalised women's views, which are often missed in formal surveys, can be taken into account. However, one danger to be avoided is equating qualitative indicators with women; if this occurs, there may be a tendency to continue to consider such indicators as part of the female terrain and therefore as subjective, given past cultural constructs of women as 'subjective' and men as 'objective'.

Recently, there have been remarkable developments in the use of participatory qualitative methods and indicators, so much so that these indicators are now being generated on a large scale for planning and policy purposes (Chambers, 1994). A good example are the participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) undertaken by the World Bank in 36 countries. The PPA undertaken in Kenya set out the following as key questions: "What are the perspectives of the poor on poverty? What are their indicators of poverty? ... Are female-headed households poorer? If so why? How do poor people cope with poverty?" (Narayan and Nyamwaya, 1996: 1) PPAs provide extensive information on poor people's views using large samples of interviewees, and provide data which is often missing in quantitative surveys. The challenge for researchers working with indicators is how to use quantitative and qualitative indicators together, either by combining or comparing their findings. A further challenge is to remember that indicators only provide a limited amount of information, and qualitative analysis such as gender analysis is also needed to explain the trends to which indicators point.

Notes

1 This section draws on CIDA (1996a, 1996b); World Bank (1994); Westerndorff and Ghai (1993); and various UN documents.

2 This UN document also provides recommendations relating to labour force and other surveys.