

Gender Statistics: Present situation and future perspectives

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Introduction

Gender Statistics refers to the collection and compilation of sex-disaggregated data on various socioeconomic phenomena, so as to be useful for the gender analysis, planning and development. Sex rather than gender is used for classification of data because the respondent's sex is easy to identify in censuses and surveys and gender differences can be to a great extent captured through sex differentials. Gender statistics are designed to illuminate the conditions of women as well as men in order to generate awareness of the present situation, to guide policy, to mobilize action and to monitor progress towards improvement and to reveal the issues that need to be confronted.(United Nations,1991; Urdaneta-Ferran,1995).

Gender statistics may include quantitative and qualitative data for examining the sociocultural context of sex differences, sectoral data in the fields of population, health (including reproductive health), education, economically active population etc, and the indicators for measuring the gender impacts of policies and programmes. This paper presents an overview of gender statistics at the international, national and sectoral levels and their limitations. The last section presents a set of recommendations for future development.

Gender Statistics at the International level

Following the launching in 1975 of the United Nations Decade for Women, United Nations and different international agencies have participated in an international collaborative effort to collect and compile statistics by gender.The steps taken by the international organizations included the following: (1) developing standards for the collection and compilation of sex-disaggregated data; (2) compiling sex-disaggregated data at the international level, so that cross-sectional and time series comparisons can be attempted. (3) providing technical assistance to countries towards the implementations of these standards and for the collection and compilation of gender indicators.

The major outcomes of these efforts are the United Nations Women's Indicators and Statistical Database (WISTAT) released in 1995 (United Nations, 1995a) and two major statistical publications brought out by the United Nations Statistical Division, namely World's Women: Trends and Statistics, 1970-90 (United Nations, 1991) and The World's Women, 1995: Trends and Statistics (United Nations,1995b). These present statistical data and indicators on women and women compared with men on a number of subjects drawing information from official sources supplemented by specialized studies and other independent estimates. The major limitations in the time series data presented are: First, some of the data are based on extrapolations of trends observed five or ten years earlier and may not therefore reflect current trends. Secondly, some of the estimates are based on limited coverage and may therefore be subject to considerable uncertainty. (United Nations,1995). Other limitations are lack of comparability of data across nations and time periods arising from differences in concepts and

procedures followed, degree of completeness of censuses and biases and other non-sampling errors and the lack of data for some of the indicators.

Gender Statistics at the National level

Gender statistics available at the national level are usually collected through population censuses, household surveys and administrative records. Their collection and compilation is done by different agencies and not well-coordinated to provide an integrated picture on the situation of women, or gender differentials. Population and Housing Censuses provide gender-disaggregated data on demographic, social and economic characteristics as of the census date. However, since population censuses are carried out once in ten years they need to be supplemented by a programme of household surveys to collect the essential data on a current basis. Unfortunately many developing countries do not have the administrative structures, staff and funds to carry out household surveys on a regular basis. The third major source of data, namely administrative records are maintained by different administrative departments and agencies to record their performance, and to meet other administrative needs. Even within these countries certain sectors with well-established administrative structures have made more progress in the collection and compilation of gender statistics than other sectors. The Handbook for Producing National Statistics Reports on Women and Men brought out by the United Nations Statistics Division (United Nations, 1997) can serve as a guide to the national statistical offices in assembling the available data and generating the indicators on critical gender issues and concerns identified for each country.

Gender Statistics at the Sectoral Level

Population, Households and Families: The main source of data are the population censuses, followed by household surveys and civil registration systems. While data on individual characteristics are disaggregated by sex, data on households and families cannot be disaggregated by sex. Censuses have attempted to distinguish between female-headed and male-headed households, but females are often not reported as heads of households due to cultural reasons. Mere differentiation by sex of head will not be meaningful unless further investigation is made about who is the main decision maker in the household, and who provides main source of support, and who uses the resources. Since households can be of different types further differentiation by the composition of the household will also be needed.

Learning and Education: Population censuses and household surveys provide educational data such as literacy status, school enrolment by level, school attendance by grade, and levels of educational attainment disaggregated by sex. In addition, school attendance data by sex are compiled from school records on an annual basis. There are often great inconsistencies between the two sets of data, and there is also a lack of information on the transition from one grade to another and the retention, drop-out and completion rates by sex. Non-formal education including adult education is another area where information is lacking.

Economic Activity and Labour Force Participation: Population censuses and surveys are greatly deficient in the measurement of women's participation in economic activity due to social and cultural factors. The use of a longer reference period of 12 months (the usual activity status approach), the explicit inclusion of own account and unpaid family workers in the workforce and giving precedence to "availability for work" over "seeking work" in measuring unemployment are some of the means

recommended by ICLS to improve the coverage of women. Compilation of information on the participation of men and women in the informal sector, and counting the time spent by women in different household chores can improve our understanding of the productive role of women.

Income and Income Distribution: The three major sources of income data, namely the System of National Accounts (SNA), Household Income and Expenditure Surveys and wage data are subject to great limitations, in accounting women's economic contribution. The SNA definition of an economic good or service excludes childbearing, childcare, family care, housekeeping and cooking which are not "marketable", although goods and services produced in the household for own consumption are included. The second is the effective and unbiased application of the definition in the SNA. The third is the difficulty in demarcating women's and men's roles in the unorganized sectors in order to assess their relative contribution. (United Nations,1991); (United Nations,1995). Where the unit of observation is the household, it is difficult to impute incomes of individuals within the household especially if the productive assets are jointly owned or to assign value of production for own consumption and incomes received in kind. Wage data relate mainly to employees in the organized sector and excludes casual labour in agriculture, mining, construction and trade exposed to seasonal variations in employment.

Health Status: The available statistics of health status mostly relate to death rates, number of health establishments and number of medical personnel. Even the statistics of death rate, infant mortality rate and expectancy of life are often indirect estimates based on census or survey data. Data on utilization of health services, personal health expenditures and nutritional status are even more inadequate to reflect gender differentials. Reproductive health statistics such as maternal malnutrition, complications of pregnancy and childbirth, complications of induced abortion, infections of the female genital tract, and maternal mortality can be gathered only through specially designed reproductive health surveys. Apart from data on reproductive morbidity, data are required on the extent of unmet need for health and family planning services, quality of care in such services, the extent of unmet need for information necessary to make free and informed choice of childbearing etc, in order to determine the extent to which reproductive rights are maintained.(UNFPA, 1997). Other areas where information is lacking is on the extent of prevalence of HIV/AIDs and female genital mutilation and other harmful practices in several societies, particularly in Africa.

Empowerment of Women: The measurement of empowerment of women poses a challenge to statisticians, researchers and planners alike since it is not easy to develop a universally applicable set of indicators that would be sensitive to social context and meaning and at the same time comparable across different social and cultural settings.(Dixon-Mueller,1998). Apart from statistical indicators such as number of women in public life, number of cases of violence against women including forced prostitution and trafficking, we need qualitative information on laws and regulations which place men and women in different footing, portrayal of women in the media, extent of decision making by women in the family and the community, the value systems which discriminate against women etc.

Recommendations:

1. Establishing national priorities for collection and compilation of gender statistics.
2. Adopting an Integrated Approach involving different ministries and agencies.
3. Carrying out Integrated multi-subject Household Surveys on a regular basis to obtain current data.
4. Timely dissemination of data and their utilization for gender analysis, planning and development.
5. Assistance to developing countries identifying the priority areas for assistance.
6. Greater interaction between producers and users of data, including planners and women activists.

References

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Resume

Gender statistics refers to the collection and compilation of sex-disaggregated data to enable a systematic study of gender differentials and gender issues. Gender statistics may include quantitative and qualitative data for examining sociocultural context of sex differences, sectoral data in the fields of population, health (including reproductive health), education, economically active population etc, and the indicators for measuring the gender impacts of policies and programmes. This paper presents an overview of gender statistics at the international, national and sectoral levels and their limitations. The last section presents a set of recommendations for future development.