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Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

REPORT

INTER-AGENCY AND EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON GENDER AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE ARAB REGION CAIRO, 10-11 SEPTEMBER 2007

Summary

The Inter-agency and Expert Group Meeting on Gender and the Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region (Cairo, 10-11 September 2007) was organized by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Arab States (UNDP-RBAS) and in partnership with a number of United Nations specialized agencies and regional commissions.

The objective of the meeting was to forge a common framework of priority gender issues and indicators needed for more gender-responsive monitoring and reporting on the Millennium Development Goals. The following subjects were discussed during the meeting: (a) development of gender statistics; (b) data requirements for measuring progress on gender issues; (c) data sources and methodologies; and (d) enhancement of capacities for more gender-responsive MDG monitoring and reporting, and opportunities for future cooperation.

The outcome of the meeting was a recommended list of priority gender issues and gender-sensitive indicators, and recommendations for improving data availability, monitoring and reporting from a gender perspective, and for establishing a common platform for knowledge management and information sharing in the Arab region.

The current report includes a review of the recommendations proposed by the participants.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized the Inter-agency and Expert Group Meeting on Gender and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the Arab Region in Cairo from 10-11 September 2007. The meeting was organized in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme Regional Bureau for Arab States (UNDP-RBAS) and the United Nations Development Programme Sub-Regional Resource Facility for Arab States (UNDP-SURF), and in partnership with the following regional and international organizations: the Economic Commission for Africa (UN-ECA), the Economic Commission for Europe (UN-ECE), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the World Bank and the World Health Organization (WHO).
2. The meeting was convened under the auspices of the inter-agency project 'Towards More Gender-Responsive MDG Monitoring and Reporting in the Arab Region' which is being coordinated by ESCWA. The project aims to achieve a common understanding among stakeholders in the Arab region on ways to engender monitoring and reporting on the MDGs, particularly in the preparation of gender-sensitive indicators and sex-disaggregated data. The principal output of the project is a 50-page technical booklet to equip statisticians and gender experts in Governments, international development organizations and other stakeholders from civil society with a conceptual tool to facilitate more gender-responsive MDG monitoring and reporting. This will entail the identification of a core set of gender-sensitive indicators corresponding to priority gender issues in the Arab region, in line with those identified at the global and regional levels, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the MDG framework, in addition to methodologies for more gender-sensitive analysis, monitoring and reporting.
3. The Inter-agency and Expert Group Meeting is the cornerstone of the project and aims to forge a common framework of priority gender issues and indicators needed for more gender-responsive monitoring and reporting on the MDGs. The outcome of the meeting is a recommended list of priority gender issues and gender-sensitive indicators, and recommendations for improving data availability, monitoring and reporting from a gender perspective, and for establishing a common platform for knowledge management and information sharing in the Arab region. Those outcomes will be used in the preparation of the final booklet.
4. The current report outlines the main discussion points and recommendations of the meeting.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

5. The Inter-Agency and Expert Group made the following recommendations:

(a) Within the overall proposed framework of “G IS IN” for the Arab countries, aligning MDGs and relevant Beijing Platform critical areas of concern, the following are the key priority issues: (i) income and poverty; (ii) education and training; (iii) women’s empowerment in the economy, the media, positions of authority and against violence; (iv) child mortality; and (v) maternal health, along with their proposed related indicators, taking into consideration other goals and key areas of concern;

(b) National Statistical Offices (NSOs), in collaboration with line ministries, women’s machineries and non-governmental organizations, to develop and maintain a common *national* platform/website for sharing knowledge on gender statistics that are to be disseminated and utilized for the purposes of advocacy and programme development;

(c) Emphasize to NSOs the importance of disseminating available data on gender through engendering MDG national reports and continuing the publication of “Women and Men”;

(d) Encourage NSOs to apply monitoring and evaluation mechanisms by engendering statistical systems;

(e) ESCWA, in coordination with other agencies and in line with the Global Gender Statistics Programme, to develop a regional gender statistics programme for the Arab countries in order to improve the availability of data and build the capacity of NSOs with a view to more gender-responsive monitoring and reporting in the Arab region;

(f) ESCWA to develop a regional database on gender statistics and indicators within the G IS IN framework;

(g) Establish a regional task force on gender statistics in order to produce an action plan to mainstream gender statistics in national statistical systems;

(h) ESCWA, in collaboration with national and regional partners, to develop and maintain a common *regional* platform/website for sharing knowledge on gender statistics that are to be disseminated and utilized for the purposes of advocacy and programme development;

(i) Request ESCWA, in cooperation with other agencies, to assess the development of gender statistics programmes and indicators in the Arab region and to provide the NSOs in the region with the required technical capacity-building. This could entail, inter alia: (i) providing advisory services; (ii) preparing a manual on definitions, concepts, classifications, standards and other elements related to the production of gender statistics, to be adopted by Arab NSOs to ensure consistency and comparability of data; and (iii) organizing workshops and arranging fellowships to train national statisticians on the production of gender statistics;

(j) Strengthen cooperation between United Nations regional commissions to encourage the exchange of best practice for building the capacity of member countries in gender statistics.

II. TOPICS AND DISCUSSIONS

A. GENDER STATISTICS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE (Session I)

6. Nine presentations were made in this session, providing an overview of accomplishments in engendering statistical work and outlining national gender statistics initiatives. ESCWA reviewed the progress to date on efforts to engender statistics on the global, national and regional levels, including the development of technical materials such as handbooks and manuals, the preparation of statistical

publications on women and men, and such capacity-building efforts as workshops and fellowships. Representatives from seven national statistical offices, namely, Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Palestine, the Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen, presented their respective experience in producing and disseminating gender statistics and indicators, including data sources, data gaps and challenges.

7. Discussions related to this item focused on the general paucity of sex-disaggregated data, particularly data on the informal sector and domestic violence. Participants underscored the need for an extended regional MDG framework of priority gender issues with relevant indicators linked to such international instruments as CEDAW and the Beijing Platform. To that end, an assessment of the availability and quality of data is needed at the national level in order to identify data gaps and capacity-building needs. In order to support improvements in data availability and quality, participants stressed the importance of improving definitions and concepts related to gender statistics and indicators, such as “female-headed households”. The importance of implementing time-use surveys on a regular basis was also emphasized. Encouraging the use of gender statistics and indicators by targeting mid- to high-level decision-makers and policymakers, and advocacy for the establishment of gender statistics units and programmes were further highlighted as essential steps. Discussions also underscored the importance of the development and maintenance of a platform (website) for countries to share information and national experience in the development of gender statistics programmes; the necessity for improved coordination between data-producing and data-reporting entities on both the national level (between national statistical offices and line ministries) and the regional/global levels (between such international organizations as the United Nations and member countries); and the need to establish a mechanism to facilitate consistency in data reporting.

B. DATA REQUIREMENTS FOR MEASURING PROGRESS ON GENDER ISSUES (Session II)

8. In this session, the Inter-agency and Expert Group Meeting considered four items: (a) the background document/literature review on gender and the MDGs that had been prepared for discussion at the meeting; (b) regional priority gender issues; (c) regional priority gender indicators; and (d) gaps in data availability and the challenges which those pose. ESCWA presented the main findings of the background document, highlighted key gender issues in the region and gender indicators in the context of the MDGs, and outlined the main findings of its assessment of the availability of sex-disaggregated data and relevant gender indicators. Most importantly, ESCWA presented its proposal for a framework of regional priority gender issues and corresponding gender indicators in the context of the MDGs, entitled the “G IS IN” framework, and the categorization of the proposed MDG gender-relevant statistics and indicators into four tiers, based on data availability, precision, accuracy, timeliness, quality and consistency with international definitions, classification, standards and methodologies. Representatives from UN agencies also shared their proposals for priority gender issues and gender measurements (both quantitative and qualitative) in their respective areas of concern.

9. It was noted that the Background Document raised a significant number of issues. It was felt, however, that the list of issues and gender indicators should be narrowed down and the criteria for selection should be based on data availability, priority and relevance to the region. Participants noted the importance of agreeing on criteria for the selection of indicators and deemed the suggested four-tier approach of classifying and selecting indicators based on relevance, periodicity, timeliness and accuracy to be highly useful. The list of proposed indicators was then discussed and participants provided valuable feedback for its refinement. The framework will provide the basis for following up the development of a regional gender indicators database, in which the issues of data availability and methodology will be addressed through a regional programme targeting data gaps and capacity-building needs. Discussions also centred on the roll-out of the design and implementation of the time-use survey in all Arab countries, and sharing the experience of countries that have already implemented time-use surveys, namely, Iraq, Oman, Palestine and Morocco,. A manual will be prepared, fully outlining the definitions, concepts and methodologies of the agreed-upon gender indicators in the G IS IN framework.

C. DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGIES (Session III)

10. Four presentations were delivered in Session III, which focused exclusively on data sources and methodologies. The expert from Statistics Sweden presented goal-specific data sources and methodologies and this was complemented by a presentation on other sources of gender statistics and indicators by the UN-ECE representative. Representatives from two national statistical offices, namely, Morocco and UAE, set out the national sources and methodologies adopted in their respective countries in order to produce gender statistics and indicators. All the presentations covered the three main sources of data: surveys, censuses and administrative records.

11. Discussions under this item focused on the need to differentiate between the indicators used to measure outcome, impact and output. Participants also highlighted the need for a five-year action plan to follow up on the development of gender statistics in the region. The Statistics Sweden and WHO representatives underscored the importance of collecting data and reporting by sex and other such social determinants as ethnicity, income and geographic location (urban/rural). Where vital registry systems are weak, improved use of current demographic and health surveys (DHS) and/or multi-indicator cluster surveys (MICS) is crucial to the production of sex-disaggregated and gender-sensitive data. The UN-ECE representative stressed the importance of such routine administrative records as business registers and school records as good data sources that are under-utilized and inadequately exploited. These sources are complementary to census and survey data, as they are initiated upon the request of individuals, whereas census and survey data are initiated by statistical authorities. Routine administrative records may therefore provide additional detail and a high degree of accuracy. All participants agreed on the need for better harmonization and coordination in the production of data among different data-producing authorities.

D. ENHANCING CAPACITIES FOR GENDER-RESPONSIVE MONITORING AND REPORTING AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE COOPERATION (Session IV)

12. Presentations were made on the following items: (a) improving data availability; (b) gender indicators for policymaking; (c) monitoring and reporting from a gender perspective; and (d) a common platform for knowledge management and information sharing. The Statistics Sweden representative presented an assessment of the extent of data availability on the MDGs, while the UN-ECA representative shared challenges to improving the availability of gender statistics in Africa and the efforts of the Commission to address these, including the development of The African Gender and Development Index. The UN-ECE representative discussed the importance of influencing existing sources of data in order to make them more gender-sensitive, and of advocating for the development of new gender-sensitive data collection methodologies. The World Bank representative presented the Bank Gender Action Plan, which aims to promote economic advancement of women on the policy and agency level, gender-sensitization programme instruments and strategy for gender statistics. The representative from the Arab Women Organization shared the group's experience in gender mapping of the Arab region under the auspices of an AWO-ESCWA agreement for the development of a geographic information system. A national expert shared the Egyptian experience in engendering the questionnaire for the 2006 population and housing census, and field research undertaken to enhance the collection of gender statistics. In addition, a framework for engendering national statistical work and mainstreaming it in policy areas in order to gauge impact and progress was also presented.

13. In this session, participants reiterated the need to undertake an assessment or a stock-take of available sex-disaggregated data and gender indicators. It was noted that there are serious data gaps on poverty and that household budget surveys, which could provide such data, are lacking in many countries. Although education data are acceptable, they require improvement. The need for improvement in the availability of employment data was also stressed, given that 14 of the 22 Arab countries do not hold data on women's employment in the last five years. Participants also emphasized the need to identify a common set of indicators, methodologies for data collection and ways to develop survey modules and standard questions, in addition to mining existing surveys with a view to improving data availability. Discussions also focused on the importance of disseminating methodologies developed at the global and regional levels to national statistical offices and advocacy for the creation of gender statistics units in national statistical offices.

Participants also discussed the importance of developing a regional programme, including funding and technical cooperation and assistance, for the development of gender statistics, and the session closed with a discussion of the opportunities for future cooperation.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENDER-RESPONSIVE MDG MONITORING AND REPORTING
AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR FUTURE COOPERATION
(Session IV)

14. Participants discussed at length the proposed G IS IN framework of priority gender issues and indicators, and presented the recommendations outlined in Section I. It was agreed that the G IS IN framework would be circulated to agencies and national statistical offices for further revision before being submitted to the directors of national statistical offices for adoption.

III. ORGANIZATION OF THE SESSION

A. DATE AND VENUE

15. The IAEG Meeting on Gender and MDGs was held at the Cairo Sheraton Hotel from 10-11 September 2007.

B. OPENING

16. The meeting was opened by Ms. Neda Jafar, Statistician, ESCWA, who welcomed the participants and outlined the objectives of the meeting and its expected accomplishments, namely, a recommended list of priority gender issues and corresponding gender indicators; recommendations for improving data availability; the establishment of a common platform for knowledge management and information sharing in the Arab region; and the identification of opportunities for future collaboration. Ms. Jafar also underscored the importance of engendering MDG monitoring and reporting and the need for collaborative efforts.

17. In her subsequent speech, Ms. Jocelyn Talbot, Gender Policy Advisor, UNDP-SURF AS, highlighted the importance of this meeting and the need for inter-agency collaborative efforts to develop gender measurements, both quantitative and qualitative, for the Arab region.

C. PARTICIPANTS

18. The IAEG Meeting was attended by 32 participants from 11 Arab countries, namely, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, the Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Yemen and the United Arab Emirates. The meeting was also attended by representatives from nine specialized UN agencies: ILO, OHCHR, UNDP-RBAS, UNDP-SURF, UNEP, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNIFEM and WHO; two regional commissions of the United Nations, namely, UN-ECA and UN-ECE; and one sister organization, the World Bank. In addition, representatives of a number of concerned governmental and non-governmental organizations and four gender experts participated in the meeting. A full list of participants is available in annex II to this report.

D. ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

19. The IAEG adopted the agenda.

E. EVALUATION

20. In order to assess the meeting, an evaluation questionnaire was distributed, which was completed by 19 participants. The outcome of the evaluation is presented in annex I.

F. DOCUMENTS

21. A list of documents presented to the IAEG Meeting is included as annex III to this report.

Annex I

EVALUATION

Of the 32 participants in the meeting, 19 completed evaluation questionnaires rating the organizational and substantive/technical aspects of the meeting on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good).

- 75% of the respondents gave the meeting an overall rating of good or very good
- 80% of the respondents stated that the meeting was good or very good in providing a forum for the exchange of information and knowledge
- 89% of the respondents rated the quality of the presentations as good or very good and 79% gave the same rating to the quality of the written material circulated
- Organizational arrangements for and during the meeting were deemed good or very good by a significant majority of the respondents (84%)
- More than two-thirds agreed that they could make use of the knowledge obtained in their work and/or share it with their peers
- Almost all respondents requested follow-up action to the meeting and this included:
 - (a) Improving and finalizing the proposed list of indicators and circulating it to participants;
 - (b) Sharing recommendations and proposed indicators with the participating heads of national statistical offices;
 - (c) Developing and disseminating a handbook on definitions and concepts for the proposed gender indicators.
- Respondents also made the following recommendations:
 - (a) Allocating more time for presentations and/or fewer presentations and more structured discussions on issues;
 - (b) Sharing country experiences in the development of gender indicators;
 - (c) Fostering greater intra-regional collaboration in developing gender statistics;
 - (d) Making available meeting documents in both Arabic and English.

Annex II

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Annex III

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Procedural Documents

Agenda (English)

Proposed organization of work

Information Note

Session Documents

Gender Statistics in Egypt (Arabic)

Gender Statistics in Oman (Arabic)

Gender Statistics in Palestine (Arabic)

Development of Gender Statistics in Yemen (Arabic)

ESCWA Background Document on Gender and MDGs (English)

G IS IN Framework – Proposed Priority Gender Issues and Indicators for the Arab Region

Data Sources and Methodologies (English)

Gender Statistics in Morocco (Arabic)

Sources of Gender Statistics in the United Arab Emirates (Arabic)

Gender Statistics from a Policy Perspective (Arabic)

Background Documents

ILO: Decent Work and the Millennium Development Goals – MDG 3

The African Gender and Development Index: Gender Status Index

References

En Route to Gender Equality: A Gender Review of National MDG Reports 2005

Arab Women in Public Life and Decision-making (E/ESCWA/SCU/2006/Pamphlet.1)

The Millennium Development Goals in the Arab Region 2005 (Arabic/English)
(E/ESCWA/SCU/2005/3/Rev.1)

Where Do Arab Women Stand in the Development Process? A Gender-based Analysis
(E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/Booklet.1)

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