

Panel 3: Strengthening the evidence for gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Topic Introduction

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The topic for this panel – **evidence and statistics** – is an important complement to the other enabling conditions (institutions, finance, participation) being discussed in today’s Forum for making sure that the implementation of the 2030 Agenda is gender-responsive.

I will make 5 points as a backdrop to the discussion by our distinguished panelists:

First, why is evidence and statistics a critical enabler for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda?

To ensure the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda, the follow-up and review process must be informed by robust evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, on how policies and public investments are impacting on real women and men on the ground. Are women and girls in country X, especially those living in poorer regions and households, benefiting from the overall reduction in hunger? Are investments in water and sanitation in Country Y improving the health of women and girls and reducing the time they allocate to fetching water, especially in the case of women and girls who live in remote rural areas?

Without timely, reliable and disaggregated data on the indicators that have been identified it will not be possible for different stakeholders – governments, civil society organizations, and all citizens and residents – to gauge whether the strategies and policies that are being put in place are the right ones, and the extent to which they are effective in achieving the desired outcomes.

Second, how does the 2030 Agenda mark a significant advance compared to the MDGs?

From a gender perspective, the proposed 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 Targets represent a significant step forward from the MDGs, covering a more comprehensive set of issues, including the gender dimensions of poverty, education, water and sanitation, employment, political participation, justice, peace and security, among others.

Moreover, the goal to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Goal 5) has specific targets that address many of the **structural barriers** to advancing women’s rights. These structural barriers include discriminatory laws, harmful practices, violence against women, inequality in the division of unpaid care work, constraints on sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender inequality in access to and ownership of land, among others—a feminist wish list. These are accompanied by gender-specific targets and indicators across other 16 goals.

Very importantly, the underlying philosophy guiding indicator selection has been that the limitations of existing data sources should not compromise the aspirational goals and targets we want to achieve. In other words, as the then High Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, remarked in 2013: ‘In the process of selecting the MDGs, we “treasured what we measured” –

and perhaps that was the wrong way round. Rather ... we should measure what we treasure' (p.1). I think the indicator selection process under the SDGs has heeded Navi Pillay's advice.

Third, and following from the previous point, what are the main challenges we now confront?

One obvious implication of the success in trying to 'measure what we treasure' is that for many indicators that are now included, we have no base line and no methodology. We have to start from scratch: develop new methodologies and standards, pilot them, and get them approved by relevant statistical bodies, before they can guide data collection at the national level. For example, indicators on women's participation in local governance, or on women's access to and ownership of land.

For several others, including those on unpaid care work and on the incidence of violence against women, while we have the standards and methodologies, we do not have sufficient country coverage. For example, only 75 countries have relevant data for unpaid care work based on time-use surveys and very few countries have more than one survey to enable trend analysis.

Support must be provided to countries to strengthen their statistical systems - statistical bureaus - so that gender statistics are produced more regularly and more systematically. Further, to better capture intersectional inequalities throughout the framework, disaggregation by other salient socio-economic characteristics, including income/wealth, location, ethnicity and other relevant characteristics will also be required.

Fourth, and this is an important reminder to all of us, the much needed investments in gender statistics are long overdue. Statistical systems historically were not set up to capture gender statistics—'*to measure what women specifically treasure*'. For a long time the work that women do, whether paid or unpaid, has escaped statistical scrutiny. The injustices women experience—whether it is mortality from giving birth, anemia, or violence at the hands of intimate partners—have escaped proper counting in 'standard' (meaning male-centric) measures of health, hunger and safety. It is high time that our statistical systems catch up with the 'silent revolution', the struggle for gender equality. Agenda 2030 provides a wake-up call urging us to take urgent action on this front.

And fifth and finally, there is room for optimism. Yes, there are serious challenges ahead, but we have a mobilized civil society demanding implementation with results, the right to information and greater transparency. We have many governments wanting to respond to popular clamoring for equality and justice, knowing full well that injustice and inequality can fuel social unrest and violent conflict. And we have a range of actors – from philanthropists to official donors – wanting to invest in statistical systems to make the 'data revolution' happen.

Long overdue, a major investment push in gender statistics, may indeed be one of the major gains of Agenda 2030!

Questions for discussion:

- What steps are being taken at the national level to put in place a monitoring system that includes all the indicators necessary for ensuring effective tracking of gender equality across the entire Agenda 2030?
- What are some of the major gaps in national data collection for the proposed gender-specific indicators and how will those be tackled?
- How has enhanced knowledge/evidence contributed to better policy-making and resource allocation towards gender equality? And can some of these positive experiences be replicated.