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**USAGE OF STATISTICAL DATA FOR
GENDER ANALYSIS AT NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS**

Initiating a bottom-up dialogue on gender statistics

Note by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

Summary

In this document, an attempt to shed light on the links between gender inequality and institutions and governance structures is made using two innovative initiatives of the OECD. The OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database (www.oecd.org/dev/gender/gid), a comprehensive data collection on various dimensions of gender equality, including social institutions; and *Wikigender* (www.wikigender.org), an interactive Internet platform to share and exchange information on gender equality, especially hidden instances of discrimination. Through these two projects OECD hopes to bring about a better understanding of the elements that prevent gender equality and the policies that will be able to counter them.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. “Tradition is a guide and not a jailer”, wrote W. Somerset Maugham. Could it be that some traditions, however rooted in great histories and cultures, are now trapping countries in poverty? This certainly appears to be the case when it comes to the influence of social and cultural norms on the status of women. Discrimination through social institutions is often hidden, but nevertheless an important source of gender inequality; especially in countries with weak formal institutions and governance structures. In order to shed light on these issues, the OECD Development Centre created two innovative initiatives: the OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database (www.oecd.org/dev/gender/gid), a comprehensive data collection on various dimensions of gender equality, including social institutions; and *Wikigender* (www.wikigender.org), an interactive Internet platform to share and exchange information on gender equality, especially hidden instances of discrimination.

II. WHY DOES GENDER EQUALITY MATTER?

2. For many people, especially in the developed world, discrimination against women is mostly a moral issue and must be resisted as a matter of principle. What is often overlooked, however, is the economic impact of preventing women from participating actively in the economy. If the issue is starting to attract attention in OECD countries, it has been sorely neglected in poorer parts of the world, where discrimination and repression often have deep cultural and religious roots. Yet, the success with which developing countries integrate female workers into their economies will be a key factor in building their competitiveness in the global economy.

3. According to the World Bank’s World Development Report 2000/01, closing the gender gap in schooling would have significantly increased and sometimes more than doubled economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa. Despite international declarations on gender equality, as for example in the Millennium Development Goals, only few countries have actually achieved gender equality in primary and secondary education. The differences are even more pronounced in higher education. In South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, for example, girls only make up half of the number of male students in tertiary education.

4. Equally alarming are labour market indicators, which clearly highlight that countries do not adequately use their available human resources, in particular those of the female population. In many developing countries, women’s economic activities are marginalised to the informal sector, small-scale farming and/or domestic work. Cases in point are South Asia, and the Middle East and North Africa: in both regions only around 20 percent of all wage employment outside agriculture is held by women.

III. HOW CAN WE MEASURE GENDER EQUALITY?

5. As illustrated by these figures, women face serious inequalities in many regions of the world. While discrimination against women has multiple facets, traditional research in this area

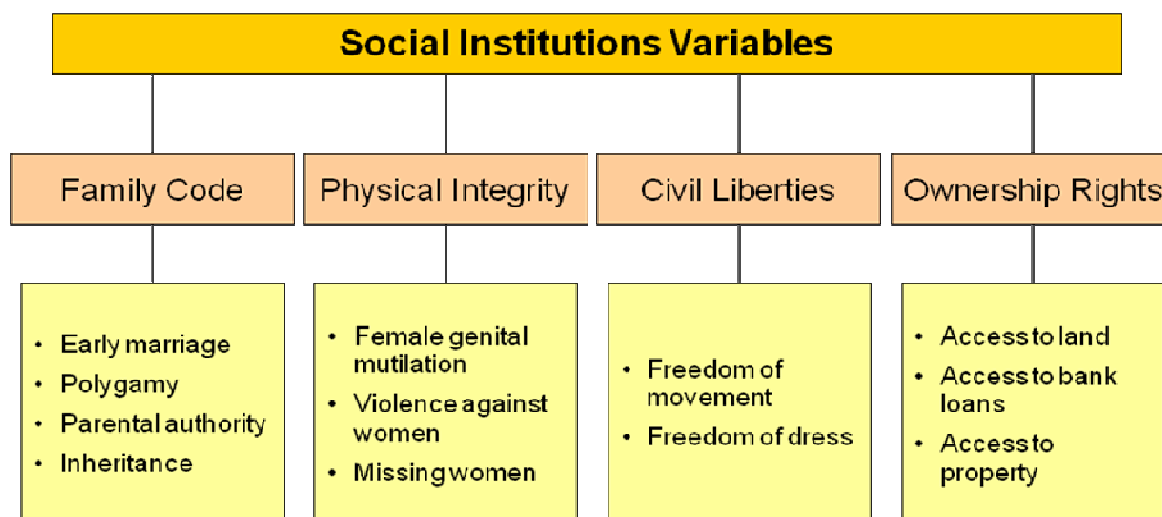
has generally focused on examining (i) the economic status of women; (ii) women's access to resources such as education and health; and/or (iii) the political participation and empowerment of women. Less attention has been given to the role of social institutions such as norms, traditions and the family law that often override the influence of formal rules and regulations. For example, government policies that try to improve women's educational attainment and their chances in the labour market will not be very successful if many girls are forced to marry at a young age.

6. In order to fill this knowledge gap, the OECD Development Centre has introduced a new comprehensive data collection on gender equality, the OECD Gender, Institutions and Development (GID) database. Unlike existing compilations, the GID introduces a new set of innovative variables to measure gender inequalities that are based on social institutions. It distinguishes twelve single indicators that are grouped into the following sub-categories: (i) the prevailing family code; (ii) women's physical integrity; (iii) women's civil liberties; and (iv) women's ownership rights (see Figure 1). Each of these variables is coded between 0 (equality) and 1 (high inequality). Ratings of social institutions variables generally consider the extent of inequality,¹ as well as the size of the female population that suffers from its application. For example, a very discriminatory institution might be prevalent in a social group that constitutes only 40 per cent of a country's population; then for that observation the value of the indicator will be

$$1 \times 0.40 = 0.4$$

where the first term indicates the highest level of discrimination and 0.40 takes account of the fact that only 40 per cent of the population is affected.

Figure 1: 12 Innovative Indicators on Gender Equality



Source: Author's illustration.

¹ In the absence of a general threshold for the level of inequality, ratings are generally based on the relative score of a country compared to other countries.

A. Family Code

7. Four variables are grouped under “family code”: early marriage, polygamy, parental authority, and inheritance practices. Inheritance practices measure whether bequests are equally shared between male and female offspring. Depending on the degree to which regulation is in favour of male heirs, the variable is coded between 0 (equal treatment of sons and daughters) and 1 (inheritance is only given to male offspring). Parental authority is coded 1 for a society where fathers, as a rule, have complete control over their children and 0 where they evenly share authority with their children’s mothers.

8. A social institution of special relevance is that of early marriage: where very young women are married, parents (fathers) and not young women themselves have the power to make important decisions about marriage and household formation. Moreover, within households, the generally older husbands have disproportionate authority and decision-making power. We use the percentage of women married before the age of 20 reported by the United Nations Development Program (2004) to construct our early marriage indicator, which varies between 0 (early marriage does not exist) to 1 (all women have been married before the age of 20 at least once).

9. In the absence of any comprehensive overview of the worldwide prevalence of polygamy, the GID database focuses on the extent of legal or customary recognition of this social institution. Our polygamy variable is therefore not an estimate of the percentage of polygamous households, but an indicator of the acceptance of polygamy within a society, which is easily comparable across countries. The value 1 (0) indicates the general approval (rejection) of polygamous practices in a society.

B. Physical Integrity

10. Three variables are grouped in the “physical integrity” sub-index: the prevalence of female genital mutilation, the existence of legislation punishing acts of violence against women, and the percentage of women that are “missing” due to sex-specific abortions or unfavourable living conditions.

11. We directly translate the share of women who have undergone genital mutilation into our 0 to 1 coding system; i.e. 18 per cent corresponds to a value of 0.18. For violence against women, we quantify information provided by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM 2003) on the existence of laws against (i) domestic violence, (ii) sexual assault or rape, and (iii) sexual harassment as follows: 0 if specific legislation is in place, 0.25 if legislation is in place but of general nature, 0.5 if specific legislation is being planned, drafted or reviewed, and 0.75 if this planned legislation is of general nature; 1 captures the absence of any legislation concerning violence against women.

12. The “missing women” variable is largely inspired by the work of Sen (1990) and is coded depending on the relative prevalence of this phenomenon in a country. Specifically, we use estimates on the number of missing women from Klasen and Wink (2003), who report the difference between the number of women that should be alive (assuming gender equality) and the actual number of women in a country. We assign the value 1 to the country with the highest percentage of missing women relative to the total number of women (i.e. Afghanistan with a share of 9.3 per cent). All other countries are assigned values between 0 (no women are missing)

and 1 accordingly. For cases in which only aggregate estimates are reported (e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa), we replicate the calculations of Klasen and Wink (2003) for individual countries. It is important to note that all of these figures are rough estimates. Due to data constraints, estimations on the number of “missing women” cannot adequately take into account important factors such as migration, which have an important impact on the sex ratio of certain countries (e.g. countries in the Middle East receive disproportionately high inflows of male migrants).

C. Civil Liberties

13. Two variables comprise the “civil liberties” indicators: women’s freedom to leave the house independently and to dress without having to obey to social or formal regulations (often tied to the obligation to wear a veil or headscarf in public). For freedom of movement, our indicators capture various degrees of restriction ranging from 0 (indicating no restriction) to 1 (signifying total dependence on male authority). Regarding the freedom of dress, women either have to follow obligations or they do not, and thus this variable is coded as 0 or 1. As with other social institutions, some of these restrictions may nevertheless only apply to certain groups in the population, in which case the value of the indicator is adjusted depending on the relative size of the group subject to this social institution.

D. Ownership Rights

14. Three variables are group under “ownership rights”: women’s access to bank loans, their right to acquire and own land, and their right to own property other than land. Variations between 0 and 1 indicate the extent of restrictions and the size of the female population for which the restrictions are relevant. As before, 1 signifies high inequality (i.e. it is impossible for women to hold property, own land or access bank loans).

IV. IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

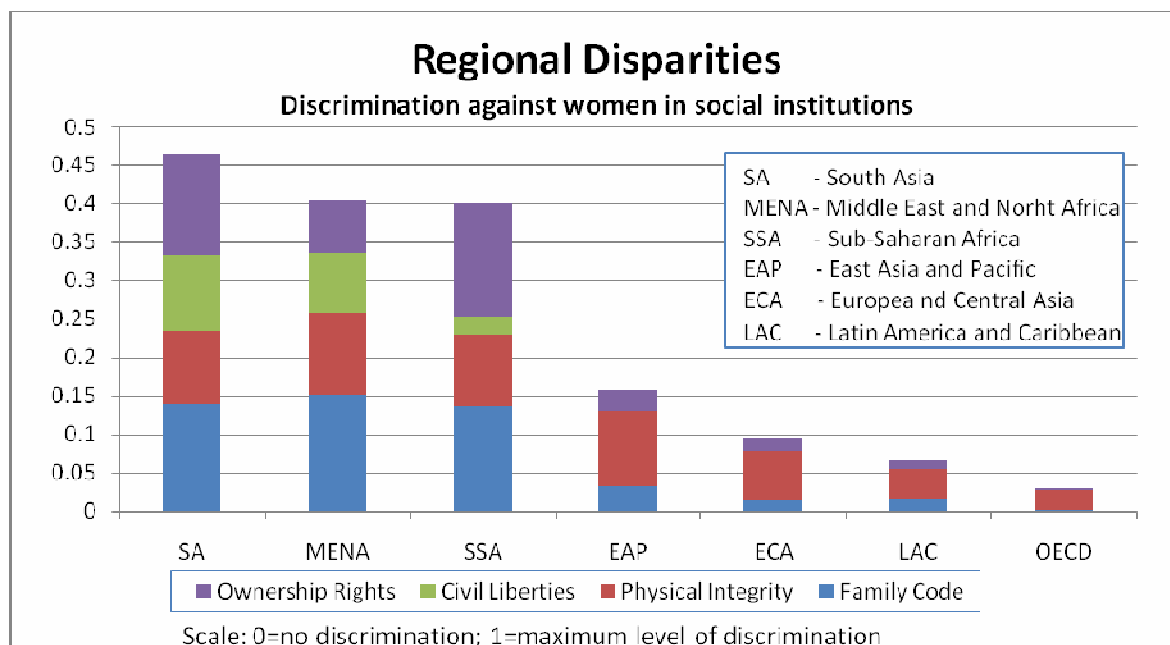
15. The GID database shows that persistent discrimination in social institutions is most marked in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East and North African. It is interesting to note that some of the richest countries in the world, such as Saudi Arabia, show high levels of gender inequality. On the other hand, discrimination is considerably lower in many poor Latin America countries. In other words, higher economic development does not directly imply more gender equality (see Figure 2).

16. Another finding of the database emphasises the important influence of social institutions on the economic role of women. Female participation in the workforce is low in areas where discrimination through social institutions is high, for example. Add to this the fact that women who are denied ownership rights cannot easily take on an entrepreneurial role, and the problem becomes clear.

17. While religious affiliations may have an effect on the institutional framework of a country, the important questions is how rules and norms are applied and implemented. Although social norms that discriminate against women appear less important in Christian and Buddhist countries, some predominantly Christian countries in Africa and Latin America still apply

several customs that reduce women’s rights. Conversely, some Muslim countries, such as Malaysia, Turkey, Tunisia and Morocco, have changed within the overall institutional framework, granting women more rights with respect to marriage, authority over children, divorce, freedom of movement, dress and access to property. This suggests that persistent discrimination can be removed without undermining religious customs or beliefs.

Figure 2: Gender Equality in Social Institutions



Source: GID database (2007).

V. CHANGING SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IS CUMBERSOME, BUT POSSIBLE

18. From Morocco and Tunisia to some states in southern India, efforts are under way to change the institutional frameworks that limit women’s employment and skills, and thereby their contribution to growth. These efforts are paying off: in Tunisia, 30-50% of judges, physicians and schoolteachers are now women. In India women have risen to the highest levels of politics and business in recent years. However, these are relatively isolated cases, and there have been setbacks. Even in India, there are strong pockets of resistance, particularly in the north of the country and among migrants to major cities, with women being murdered in some states over disputes about dowries.

19. In order to strengthen reforms, many development experts have called for more funding, to build schools, for instance. The trouble is that many shiny new classrooms would remain empty because girls are sometimes simply not allowed to attend them. Extra spending, while badly needed, will generate real returns only if the fundamental causes of discrimination are dealt with, too.

20. That may mean institutional and legal reforms, as well as better enforcement of existing laws. Similarly, the fight against gender discrimination needs to involve men much more than is currently the case. Too many reform programmes fail due to their heavy focus on women's needs, overlooking the fact that societies based on persistent discrimination generate advantages that men will not sacrifice easily. Engaging men in reform, providing incentives and perhaps even financial compensation are important. Such a debate is now taking place in Kenya in view of reforming discriminatory inheritance laws.

21. Many countries are willing to change, having signed the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and, more recently in 2000, the UN millennium goal of empowering women and combating discrimination. Helping countries improve gender equality is therefore not only important, but an international commitment as well. The question is where to begin, and how? Investing in better information and high quality data is a good starting point. The GID and other statistical resources have helped to gradually come to grips with the scale of female discrimination, which in turns helps to design more effective policies that can really make a difference. More importantly still, lasting change has to be coaxed from within the communities themselves. Here is where *Wikigender* can make a valuable contribution.

VI. WIKIGENDER – FOSTERING DIALOGUE ON GENDER STATISTICS

22. *Wikigender*, the new Internet platform of the OECD Development Centre, has proved to be instrumental in reaching out to the public and fostering a bottom-up dialogue on the importance of gender statistics. The website provides an open forum to share and exchange information on the situation of men and women around the world. It encourages a frank discussion on the elements that prevent gender equality, especially as regards improving women's social and economic empowerment. It welcomes an active participation of users who can contribute to the content of the website by posting comments, editing articles or creating new entries into this knowledge database.

23. The website, which is designed to become a one-stop-resource on gender equality, already provides a rich base of sex-disaggregated data and statistics, including the political representation of women in national governments, the role of men in child upbringing, and the importance of women for African economic development. In addition, users have access to just over 280 articles and documents, including detailed country reports on gender equality from around the world, covering many OECD member and non-member countries. During its first month of operation the site received more than 25,000 visits.

24. *Wikigender* follows a two-layer approach, which clearly distinguishes it from other websites based on "wiki" technology such as the online encyclopedia Wikipedia. Content from official sources (e.g. the OECD) is highlighted and protected. New information which is posted in the open *Wikigender* layer is subject to review from the nearly 300 specialists that have become registered users, authorised to suggest changes to the content as well as to create or upload new articles and documents. The site is therefore screened from potentially unreliable content, so ensuring highest levels of quality.

25. In its attempt to broaden the institutional foundations of the project, the OECD Development Centre recently concluded a partnership with the World Bank's International Finance Corporation. Other partnerships are in the course of negotiation. These will strengthen the organisational capacity to manage the site and increase the range of available topics and the depth of their coverage.

26. Providing a forum to reveal people's experiences with local customs and laws will have two important effects. First, it will help improve the information that is available on the situation of women around the world; some facts and figures may well feed back into existing databases like the GID. Second, involving people in this mutual learning experience will bring forth local allies such as workers' unions, business associations and teachers who can help build pressure for change, as well as garnering wider public support and dispelling inevitable fears of change among citizens.

27. In the long run, this process will help break down stubborn social attitudes and mindsets, while enabling policy makers to tailor their strategies to specific situations in a country or community. Encouraging greater openness can help tackle the prejudice and distrust that underpin persistent discrimination. It will also raise public awareness, from the international press, for example, but also the local media that can strengthen the willingness to reform.

VII. CONCLUSION

28. Reducing gender disparities may not be an easy task, but a feasible and necessary one. Gender statistics and especially the communication of data to decision makers and civil society are two important components to design better policies and to convince people of the benefits of improved gender equality.

29. With coherent, sensitive and inclusive strategies, the kind of wasteful discrimination that denies women their rights and blights the development potential of whole countries can one day be removed for good. Only by involving the public into the debate will we have a better understanding of the elements that prevent gender equality and the policies that will be able to counter them. The *GID database* and *Wikigender* are two important initiatives in this endeavour.

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