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Remaining challenges in relation to statistics and indicators, building on the discussions at the High-level round table organized in the 48th session of the Commission 2004 as well as available data from the World's Women: Trends and Statistics (2005) and the World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (2005)

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* The paper has been reproduced as submitted.

Challenges and strategies for production and use of gender indicators in the implementation and monitoring of the Millennium Development Goals

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Introduction

In September 2000, the world's leaders adopted the Millennium Declaration committing to a global partnership to eradicating global poverty and acknowledged that progress was based on sustainable economic growth, with focus on the poor and human rights at the center. To help drive these efforts and track progress, a set of time-bound and measurable goals and targets (MDGs) were derived from the Declaration, and technical consultations were held to identify the appropriate indicators to monitor trends towards achieving the goals.

Statisticians and technical experts from international and national statistical services were asked to develop a comprehensive framework to help focus national and international priority-setting and harmonize monitoring and reporting and to provide technical specifications on the indicators needed.¹ These large technical consultations, working within guidelines and rules established by the political process, led to the set of 48 indicators now endorsed by the General Assembly and used as the basis for assessment of progress towards the MDGs presented by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly every year. For the purpose of monitoring progress, the normal baseline year for the targets was fixed at 1990, which was the baseline used by the global conferences of the 1990s.

The MDG Indicators provide an agreed set of quantitative measures of progress toward the Goals, based on established principles and practices of official statistics. The indicators are now used in national, regional and international programmes for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the MDGs.

The monitoring at the global level is undertaken through an Inter-agency and Expert Group consisting of international agencies within and outside the UN system, national statistical services and other important international parties, including donor agencies. The monitoring is based on international data series compiled by specialized agencies in their areas of expertise and responsibility.

¹ United Nations, Road map towards the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration, 6 September 2001 (A/56/326).

At the national level, the monitoring is based on existing national sources. The indicators are often supplemented by more detailed national data and adapted to the country's specific needs and circumstances. The process of monitoring MDGs has engaged governments in national debates to discuss priorities and to tailor the MDG targets to these priorities and national circumstances. National statistical services have become involved in the preparation, analysis and monitoring of MDG indicators based on their country data. In some countries, this has resulted in a stronger sense of national "ownership" and also caused national policy decisions and planning efforts to gradually coalesce around a defined set of development aspirations. The assessment of progress presented in MDG country reports is widely used to inform national debate and promote the production and use of statistics for policy making and monitoring. Even in countries in special circumstances, such as conflict and post-conflict situations and countries affected by humanitarian, refugee and displaced persons crises, the MDG framework has proven useful for planning assistance and support.

The assessment of progress in countries is based on data produced by the national statistical authority and is presented in MDG country reports. Over 100 MDGs national reports have now been produced in 94 countries and more are being finalized. The reports have been widely used to inform national debate and promote the production and use of statistics for policy making and monitoring.

Gender equality and the empowerment of women in the MDGs

The Millennium Declaration resolves to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable.

Equality of opportunity is a woman's right. It is also a prerequisite to achieve progress in all other areas and goals. This means equality in all levels of education and all areas of work, equal control over resources and equal representation in public and political life.

Achieving parity in education – especially beyond the primary school years – is critical if women are to engage fully in society and the global economy. Women throughout the world play critical roles in economic growth and development and their contributions have an important impact on households, communities and national economies. It is also women who have the most direct influence on family nutrition, the health and education of children, and the use of basic hygiene, among other important factors in development.

Reducing gender inequality in the labour market—as manifested in occupational segregation, gender wage gaps, women's disproportionate representation in informal employment and higher relative unemployment rates—is key to increasing women's economic security and contributes to economic development and growth. Ensuring gender equality in property rights and access to resources is a key element in the fight against extreme poverty.

Full gender equality at all levels of decision-making represents in itself a basic human right and is critical for achieving development and peace.

If women lack the education, influence and money to care for their families and to fully participate in the development process, the Millennium Development Goals will not be met. But gender equality must be realized in all the other areas covered by the MDGs and the empowerment of women should be built into strategies for achieving all of the goals. Just a few examples: over half a million women continue to die each year from pregnancy and childbirth-related causes and rates of HIV infection among women are rapidly increasing (Goals 5 and 6). Among those 15-24 years of age, young women now constitute the majority of new infections, in part because of their economic and social vulnerability.

The MDGs and gender indicators

Progress towards goal 3 “Promote gender equality and empower women” is assessed in three aspects of gender equality: education, employment and political decision-making. The indicator used to monitor trends at the global and regional levels are as follows:²

Goal 3: Promote gender equality and empower women	
Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015	9. Ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education 10. Ratio of literate women to men, 15-24 years old 11. Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector 12. Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament

When the MDG monitoring exercise started, it became immediately evident that the indicators for goal 3 were not completely adequate to measure progress in gender equality and women’s empowerment. In March 2003, the Inter-agency and Expert Group on MDG Indicators agreed that to supplement the information provided under goal 3, all other MDG indicators should also be presented disaggregated by sex and the analysis should include—wherever relevant—a gender dimension.

In November 2003, the IAEG went a step further and recommended to establishment of thematic sub-group to deal with the more problematic areas. These sub-groups review methodologies and technical specifications related to MDG Indicators, review data and data sources normally available in countries in relation to the compilation of indicators at the country level and for inclusion in international data series and suggest guidelines and capacity building priorities to countries. They also discuss alternative ways of conducting the analysis and assessing trends. The sub-groups have also addressed the need to refine the existing indicators to better measure progress towards the target and goals and adequately reflect the situation of poorest countries, where large part of work is informal or unpaid, gender differences are significant, major diseases are still unabated and education and health systems are poorly working and difficult to measure. The sub-

² See <http://millenniumindicators.un.org>

groups work under the overall mandate of the inter-agency group, with coordination by the Statistics Division.

One of the thematic sub-group was established specifically to address the problems concerning measuring progress under goal 3 and addressing the gender dimensions in all other goals.

An important part of the work of the gender indicators sub-group is devoted to reconcile and find ways to integrate data from different sources—as in the case of education enrolment and attainment—and to identify indicators that are more suitable for analysis at the national and sub-national levels and can be presented at the disaggregated level for different population groups to be used in country reporting.

The recommendations of the group will be used as a basis for further work in refining the list of official indicators for the global monitoring and for assisting countries to identify national priorities for data production and use.

The discussion and deliberations of the group have focused on the following areas:

- Education indicators
- Employment indicators
- Reproductive health indicators
- Health indicators
- Measures of domestic violence
- Measures of political participation

Education indicators

The group has reviewed the analysis of gender differentials in education based on data from household sample surveys and administrative records and made recommendations to continue work to integrate these two different sources for the monitoring of gender differences in access to education.

Employment indicators

Several proposals were reviewed for the indicator that should be used to monitor progress in gender equality and women's empowerment in the area of work. The group agreed to assess data availability and define interpretation for an indicator that would provide a comprehensive picture of the situation of women in the labour force, by disaggregating data by different forms of employment, including non-agricultural wage employment, informal employment and agricultural employment, as follows:

1. Share of women in total employment;
2. Share of women in agricultural employment;
3. Share of women in non-agricultural wage employment (current MDG indicator);
 - a. Of which: 2.1 Informal wage employment;

4. Share of women in non-agricultural self-employment;
 - a. Of which: 3.1 informal self-employment;

This indicator could be formulated in two different ways: (i) share of women in each type of employment and (ii) women employment by type of employment as percentage of women total employment.

Reproductive health

The group has considered the inclusion of indicators to monitor the empowerment of women in the sphere of reproductive health. After discussion and consultation with the experts from the related Millennium Project Task Forces, the group has agreed to consider the following indicators:

- * The “Proportion of Demand Satisfied (PDS)” expressed as the proportion of demand for family planning that is actually satisfied (ratio between the contraceptive prevalence rate--all methods--and the sum of contraceptive prevalence rate and unmet need). Data for this new indicator are available mainly from Demographic and Health Surveys for at least 75 countries (data compiled by the UN Population Division) and two time periods 1990-1995 and 1996-2002.
- * The “Proportion of women currently 20-24 years old that were married before age 18”. Data will soon be available from a longitudinal study that the UN population Division is currently carrying out.

Health indicators

The group has emphasized the need to have data disaggregated by sex for all health indicators to the larger extent possible. This obviously represents a challenge for both the international agencies responsible for the global monitoring—as data in international data series are normally estimates and not by sex— and for national reporting— especially where health systems are poor and vital registration systems not well developed. The Department of Gender, Women and Health (GWH) of WHO has recently developed an advocacy document on the importance of collecting and reporting data by sex. The document is being used to promote the production of sex-disaggregated data by WHO itself, other UN agencies and Health Information Systems in countries.

The importance of having data on access to drugs by sex (in particular antiretroviral drugs) has also been emphasized by the group.

Domestic Violence

The group has agreed on a new more accurate definition for a possible indicator on domestic violence. The definition is as follows:

Measure of the burden of violence against women

“Proportion of women who ever had a partner, 15-49 years old, who have ever experienced physical violence by an intimate partner.”

The differences with previous definitions are: (a) the focus on women aged 15-49 (to be consistent with what is available from DHS data) rather than the larger age group, women 15-69; (b) the use in the denominator of only women who ever had a partner (thus at risk of domestic violence) rather than all women. It was recognized that data availability at this stage remains insufficient to produce the indicator for all regions and in two points in time for trend analysis to be used for global reporting. It was agreed that the focus should be on promoting adequate data collection programmes in countries and presentation and analysis of this indicators in national reporting.

Political participation

The group has considered the inclusion of an indicator on the share of women ministers. Also, the group has reviewed proposals to consider an indicator of political participation at sub-national level. Given the relevance of this indicator and the importance and impact of women's political participation at this level, the group has recommended the indicator for inclusion in national reporting. Data on this aspect of political participation cannot however be aggregated at the regional and global levels.

Remaining challenges

The discussion on indicators for monitoring the MDGs has also clearly uncovered important shortcomings in the availability of data to monitor development efforts. Key areas where efforts in statistical capacity development need to focus include: a better reflection in official statistics of women and men's participation in all types of work; improved availability of data, mainly from household surveys and, where possible, from vital registration, on health and reproductive health; improved concepts and methods and expansion of data collection programmes to measure violence against women; improved data on education enrolment and attendance, and on quality of education; and the development of a framework for the measurement and analysis of the gender dimension in monetary poverty and other aspects of poverty.

Coordination among donors will have to be improved and efforts be linked to policy priorities, based on an improved dialogue between statisticians and policy makers. Also, at the national level, more indicators need to be identified and used to assess trends and address specific national policy priorities. National statistical authorities should become engaged in the preparation of the country reports and provide the necessary data. It is also important that statistics on gender dimensions in all policy areas are available to design and manage national policies aimed at achieving the goals. This goes far beyond simply being able to measure progress. It implies using a wide range of statistics and indicators that take into account gender-based differences, to inform all development policies.

On the improvement of the current list of indicators, it is the responsibility of the international statistical community to refine the definitions and methods for the compilation of indicators to assess trends under goal 3 and to adequately incorporate a gender dimension in all other goals. This will provide a better understanding of the global and regional situation to inform the political debate at the international level.

The international statistical community also has the responsibility to further develop consistent definitions and methodologies on MDG indicators; to develop and make widely available recommendations and guidelines on the production of necessary data; and to provide technical assistance to national statistical offices.

Producing the necessary data in countries where resources are limited is obviously a significant challenge. The current situation of statistical services constrains the effectiveness and achievement of national development planning and policy in many countries, especially in those where effective development policy interventions matter most, such as the least developed countries. Over the past three years, as commitments to the MDGs have crystallized, governments, agencies and donors have mobilized around the need to monitor progress towards the MDGs, have identified the statistical programme requirements for effective and sustained monitoring and have committed themselves to addressing these needs in a concerted fashion.

The availability of good quality statistical data and the capacity of governments, donors and international organizations to systematically measure, monitor and report reliable statistics and indicators lies at the heart of development policy and the achievement of the MDGs.