2.1 Introduction

As gender issues move forward in national and global agendas, new demands are created for statistics. Policy makers, researchers and advocates request additional data and argue, more generally, that the gender perspective should be a basic assumption guiding which data to collect and to analyze. In doing so, they are not only asking for data needed for the development of policies on gender equality but also their efforts encourage change and reform in statistical systems to make them produce more relevant information. The “why” of gender statistics is answered by both objectives. Gender statistics are needed to provide an evidence base for research and policy development. In addition, gender statistics have an important role in improving the whole statistical system, pushing it to describe more accurately and fully the activities and characteristics of the whole population, which is made of women and men.

2.2 Importance of gender statistics

Gender statistics are the basis for analysis to assess differences in the situations of women and men and how their conditions are changing or not. In this way, gender statistics raise consciousness and provide the impetus for public debate and change. Gender statistics are also required for research to support the development and testing of explanations and theories to understand better how gender operates in a society. All of these uses form the basis for developing policies to foster greater gender equality. Furthermore, gender statistics are needed to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of policy developments.

The policies, research questions and public debate, for which gender statistics are needed, focus on issues of gender equality and the advancement of women. In addition, gender statistics have uses in areas of policy where gender is not the leading issue. In many instances, social and economic policies are affected by gender dimensions even when it is not immediately obvious. In these cases, the availability of the evidence base to support gender analysis is important to the investigation, since without an understanding of the differences in the operation and effects of the policy on different population groups, such as on women and men, the full implications of the policy may not be understood and its objectives may not be fulfilled.

Underlying all of these uses for gender statistics is their role in improving statistical systems. It is important to have a dialogue between producers and users of gender statistics. For example, gender specialists bring their own demands for data and in doing so identify deficiencies in the data currently available to them. They push for improvements in the concepts, methods, topics and data series to reflect better the activities and contributions made by women as well as by men. While responding to the demands of data users, it is important that statisticians take into account stereotypes and social and cultural factors that might produce gender bias. The result of such efforts is often not simply better information on women and men, but improvements in measuring the realities of economic and social life.

In gender statistics, as in all official statistics, it is important to adhere to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, adopted by the United Nations Statistical Commission in 1994. In particular, the Principles 1 Relevance, impartiality and equal access and 2 Professional standards and ethics underline the duty of official statistics to operate on an impartial and ethical basis and to decide according to strictly professional considerations on the methods for the collection, processing, storage and presentation of statistical data (UNSD 1994).

2.3 Gender statistics in the policy-making process

At the international level, a series of United Nations intergovernmental resolutions provide a mandate for the development of policies on the advancement of women and gender equality, as well as for the statistics required for the
development of these policies. These include the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women\(^1\) in 1979 and the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995\(^2\).

Gender equality is also a fundamental component of the Millennium Declaration (UN, 2000), adopted by all Member States of the United Nations in 2000\(^3\) (See Box.2.1). The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide a framework for measuring progress towards fulfilling the commitments of the Millennium Declaration. Goal 3 explicitly calls for gender equality and the empowerment of women, with the associated indicators relating to education, employment and decision-making. However, ensuring gender equality is essential for achieving all the other goals and countries are asked to provide sex-disaggregated data wherever applicable when reporting on progress\(^4\).

**Box 2.1. UN Millennium Development Goals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal 1</td>
<td>Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 2</td>
<td>Achieve universal primary education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 3</td>
<td>Promote gender equality and empower women</td>
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<td>Goal 4</td>
<td>Reduce child mortality</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 5</td>
<td>Improve maternal health</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 6</td>
<td>Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goal 7</td>
<td>Ensure environmental sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 8</td>
<td>Develop a global partnership for development</td>
</tr>
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Other international and supranational organisations have further developed mandates, for example, the European Union’s 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam (European Parliament 1997)\(^5\), legislation, such as Directives on the equal treatment of women and men in employment and in the delivery of goods and services and follow-up actions based on the recommendations from the Beijing Conference (European Commission 2000b). Many national governments have their own specific policy and legislative programs to achieve women’s empowerment and gender equality.

The availability and accessibility of gender-sensitive data are instrumental to the development and implementation of policies that can facilitate the achievement of national and international objectives. The importance of using statistical evidence to develop appropriate policies is recognized in one of the strategic objectives of the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women. The objective H.3 is: “generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation” (United Nations, 1995a). It is followed by a detailed set of actions, in fact an agenda for development of statistics. Some actions address the general need for statistics: “Ensure that statistics related to individuals are collected, compiled, analyzed and presented by sex and age and reflect problems, issues and questions related to women and men in society.” Other actions specify what needs to be done to develop statistics related to the specific topics of concern.

Gender statistics are also relevant for the development of policies that are not explicitly related to gender. Many policies that appear to have little to do with gender equality are actually affected in an indirect way by aspects of relationships between women and men. It is often necessary to investigate the gender aspect of a policy even if it is not directly articulated in a way that draws attention to this interaction. An example of the relevance of gender to policies that appear not to be relevant from a gender perspective is that of violent crime. The concept of ‘violent crime’ might appear to have little to do with gender. Yet, one of the hidden aspects of violent crime is violence in the home from husbands to wives. Omitting this part of violent crime would mean that a significant part of violent crime is not measured and therefore not considered in policies and programs. The inclusion of a gender perspective enables a more nuanced and multi-faceted policy to be developed; one that is likely to be more successful.

Policy-makers represent strategic users of statistical data (the very name ‘statistics’ is inherently linked to state activities). There are certain steps in the ‘Statistical production process’ (see section 3.2) where data producers should interact quite
closely with policy makers, in a process where role and responsibilities of both actors are clear and respected. Those steps are:

- **Identification of gender issues in society:** The process starts with the realization that a gender issue exists in society on which greater knowledge is needed. The gender issue could relate to a particular key policy issue in the country, such as poverty, and the realization that the gender aspects of poverty are not well understood. Alternatively, there could be an explicit gender issue, such as gender-based violence, on which policy makers realize they need more information.

- **Production of gender statistics:** After an issue has been identified, the next step involves production of statistics to measure it. This might involve the introduction of a completely new instrument, such as a survey on gender-based violence. Alternatively, it could involve an enhancement of existing data collection, through the addition of one or more questions in a survey or administrative form, expansion of response options to a question or administrative form, or changes in the way that questions are asked to make them less gender-biased. Yet another possibility is changes in the recruitment and training of data collectors, to ensure they are aware of the interrelationship between the relevant gender issues and their role in the interview process.

- **Marketing and dissemination of gender statistics:** Presentation of the enhanced statistics is not enough. In order to be used, they need to reach the policy makers (both civil servants and elected representatives) and those who advise them. They also need to reach the advocates, such as women’s groups, who can put pressure on the policy makers for the necessary changes. Finally, the statistics need to reach those who have influence in the policy arena but who would normally not recognize gender issues. Different products, different marketing strategies and different dissemination techniques may be needed for each audience.

- **Gender and policy analysis:** Generally, national statistical agencies are tasked with producing statistics and are not expected to analyze them from a policy perspective. Indeed, in many countries there is an explicit requirement that the national statistical office should not make policy statements. Instead, they are meant simply to present the ‘facts’. The situation might be different for data producers in some other parts of the national statistical system, such as the education or health ministries. However, those responsible for policy analysis and proposals will usually differ from those responsible for the production and publication of statistics. Therefore, gender and policy analysis often involves actors outside the national statistical service, who analyze the meaning and implications of the statistics. While national statisticians are not directly responsible for this step, they need to be aware that the way they present statistics can influence the analysis.

- **Use of gender analysis for policy actions:** From a gender perspective, the hope is that policies will promote movement towards gender equality. It would, of course, be naïve to assume that policy is often based mainly on facts and figures. Many different forces influence policy. However, the existence of reliable facts and figures strengthens the hand of any policy proponent. It also promotes the development of ‘evidence-based’ policy, rather than policy that is driven by supposition or ideology. Further, it promotes sensible debate among policy makers on the different options.

- **Identification of gaps and formulation of new questions:** Ideally, governments should be monitoring policy implementation in respect of both outputs (deliverables) and outcomes (impact on the society). Other actors might be monitoring the impact of policies seen to have potential to address gender issues. For example, an organization working in the area of women’s health might monitor the impact of a new policy approach in respect of contraception, while an NGO providing services for battered women might monitor the impact of the introduction of interdicts, such as removing a violent partner from the family home. This monitoring process might lead back to the beginning of the chain by establishing that there are areas where knowledge is lacking.

The above description is very general. The process will differ from country to country and from topic to topic. It will depend on which actors in the national statistical office are responsible for a particular issue. For example, it is likely to differ if the statistics concerned are produced by the
statistical office or by a line agency. It will depend, also, on the level and breadth of awareness of a particular gender issue, and the degree to which the issue is politically or otherwise sensitive. It will also depend on the approach of government, and the extent to which it prides itself on producing evidence-based policy, as well as on its commitment to gender equality. In some cases, the process of asking for statistics that enhance gender knowledge might be instigated by someone who opposes change, and is asking for more evidence as a delaying tactic.

2.4 Gender statistics to inform general public

In parallel to informing policy-makers, the role of the NSO is to inform other actors that the new data exists and is readily available. Researchers, analysts, NGOs and the media represent fundamental data users, who will contribute, in different ways, to informing the general public about the respective roles of women and men in society.

2.5 Gender statistics to improve national statistical systems

Gender statistics aspire to reflect reality in a more accurate way. One aim of gender statistics is to go beyond appearance and stereotypes, so that the invisible line between men and women is drawn and differences are made clear. In order to better describe reality and avoid unwanted biases, statisticians are continuously pushed to improve definitions and data collection methods.

Box 2.2 on developing statistics on employment in India describes how the efforts of advocates to improve data on poor working women resulted in better data not only on these women, but also on most employed women and men in India.

In the process of making official statistics more gender-sensitive, national statistical offices have the possibility to improve by:

- starting new data collections (for example surveys on time use or on violence against women)
- reviewing definitions
- improving data collection (wording of questions, sample designs, interviewer effect)
- improving presentation and dissemination of results.

Box 2.2: Developing statistics on employment in India

Since the mid-1980s, the Self Employed Women’s Association of India (SEWA) has worked tirelessly to promote the development of the Government of India’s statistics on informal employment. SEWA—particularly its founder Ela Bhatt and its national coordinator Renana Jhabvala—recognized the power of statistics to advocate the cause of its workers and to inform policies and programs to improve their situation. As Ela Bhatt put it: “...the employers used to say: ‘Who are homeworkers? How many are there? Where are they? They are not there.’ And they used to make fun of us - to ridicule us”. SEWA recognized that by collecting data on specific categories of homeworkers—bidi rollers and then incense workers—they were able to convince authorities of the importance of these workers and to negotiate their coverage by welfare funds. SEWA also used statistics to support passage of the 1996 ILO Homework Convention and to stimulate efforts in India and more broadly in Southeast Asia to improve the conditions of homeworkers. The results of these efforts also included the overall improvement in national labour force data.

SEWA has not restricted itself to small research studies but has taken an active role in shaping national statistical policy. It has lobbied the Government of India to set up commissions to study the problems of self-employed women, participated actively in the commissions once formed, collaborated with partners to do research studies, participated in the planning of surveys, and followed carefully decisions on data collection efforts that related to their members. These efforts have secured improvements in the livelihood of low-income workers. Another result which is important to the field of statistics is that India is now a leading country in the development of statistics on informal employment. This achievement owes a lot to the close collaboration of the national statistical services with groups such as SEWA. The impact of these efforts on statistics goes beyond improving data on women in informal employment. As over 90 per cent of the country’s workers are in informal employment, a result has been the improvement of data on the total labour force.