

Gender Statistics in Development Planning for Central and West Asia

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Despite substantial progress in recent years across the developing world, gender inequalities persist, generating differential opportunities and constraints for women and men. Gender inequality in education, employment, earnings, and decision making in the private and public sphere is not only a basic issue of equity and fairness but also matters for economic development. A large volume of research has demonstrated that inequalities overall retard economic growth and poverty reduction (World Bank 2011; Klasen and Lamanna 2009).

Data gaps in inequality, both in terms of its extent and its impact on development, continue to hinder policy development. These gaps go beyond a lack of sex-disaggregated statistics. Data are limited on hard-to-measure gender issues such as intrahousehold inequalities, the role of social institutions, and the relationship between inequality and overall development. The resulting lack of information hampers evidence-based planning to tackle these inequalities. At the same time, much existing data are underutilized in analyzing gender inequalities, identifying the determinants of inequality, and studying its development consequences.

This policy brief explains why gender inequality matters for development and inclusive growth. It identifies knowledge gaps in general and with particular focus on Central and West Asia,¹ a heterogeneous set of countries where the different dimensions of gender inequality are of particular relevance. This brief highlights examples of linking gender-based analysis and policy planning from across the world. It proposes a strategy to enhance the generation and analysis of data on gender inequalities and their impact on development outcomes. It also draws on discussions from the Regional Conference on Gender Statistics—Towards Inclusive Growth: Planning for Equitable Development Results for Women and Men in Central, West Asia and the Caucasus, organized by ADB and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) and held on 10–11 October 2012 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Key issues

- Gender statistics are crucial for developing social and economic programs that address the needs of women and men.
- Research has demonstrated a clear negative relationship between gender inequality and overall economic and social development.
- Valuable lessons can be learned from the experiences of other countries.
- Partnerships between producers of official statistics, researchers and policymakers can lead to more relevant and useful information to guide achievement of gender equality goals.

Target audiences

- National planning bodies
- Legislators and policymakers
- National women's machineries
- National statistics offices
- Economic research institutes
- International development organizations

¹ This is based on the Asian Development Bank's regional classification of its developing member countries, where Central and West Asia includes: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This policy brief was produced under Regional Technical Assistance 7563.

Why Gender Inequality Matters for Development Outcomes

Substantial evidence demonstrates that gender inequality in education, employment, access to assets, and decision-making power reduces growth and development (Blackden et al. 2006; Esteva-Volart 2005; King, Klasen, and Porter 2009; Klasen 2002; Klasen and Lamanna 2009; Knowles et al. 2004; Lagerlöf 2003; World Bank 2001, 2011; and Yamarik and Ghosh 2004). Gender inequality impacts negatively on economic growth and development because of the following:

- i. Inequalities lead to a distorted, biased, and inefficient composition of the labor force.
- ii. The positive benefits of female education and employment on fertility, child mortality, and the education of the next generation are not maximized.
- iii. Inequalities reduce governance by constricting the quantity and quality of women's political participation and reducing their ability to invest in the development of their families.

Applying methods from empirical studies, it is possible to estimate how much gender inequality in education and employment costs countries in terms of economic growth. It can be estimated how much faster a country with large gender gaps in education and employment would have grown if the gaps had been narrowed (Klasen and Lamanna 2009). Results from a cross-sectional analysis suggest that for countries such as Pakistan, for example, large gender gaps in education alone cost around 1.3% per capita growth every year. Panel analyses estimate that if Pakistan had reduced its gender inequalities in education and employment to the much lower levels seen in East Asia, its annual per capita growth would have been over 2% higher per year in the 1970s and 1980s, and about 1.6% higher in the 1990s. About two-thirds of the growth penalty is due to gender gaps in education, and about one-third to gender gaps in employment. Clearly, gender inequality in education and employment is not just about equity, but also about growth.

This is even more apparent when taking the inclusive growth perspective used by several Asian governments, the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and other development partners. According to one formulation (Klasen 2010), inclusive growth is about allowing disadvantaged groups to actively participate in growth. Growth can be considered as inclusive when income growth rates and the non-income dimensions of disadvantaged groups' well-being are larger than average (thereby reducing the disadvantage suffered). In countries where women are

disadvantaged, inclusive growth implies a greater emphasis on reducing disadvantages in education, health, labor market opportunities, and earnings. Moreover, as women have been found to invest in disadvantaged groups in the household and in society (World Bank 2001, Klasen 2006), an inclusive growth perspective would emphasize strengthening women's bargaining power at home and in the public sphere.

However, these are high-level findings and more country-specific data and analysis are needed to design the right solutions for inclusive growth and development in Central and West Asia. Transforming findings into actionable policy issues will depend on the quality and use of gender statistics.

Gender Statistics in Central and West Asia

A situational analysis conducted by ADB (2012) revealed that there has been much progress in generating and reporting gender statistics in the countries of this region. All have developed some form of institutional mechanism to support the production of sex-disaggregated data, taken steps to eliminate gender bias in data collection, and introduced new data collection activities such as surveys on time use or violence against women. All have published gender statistics products, many annually or biannually. Many of these data are publicly available in a sex-disaggregated format.

Meanwhile, there is growing interest among the research and policy community in gaining access to sex-disaggregated data. This is related to the need to monitor and report against international agreements such as the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals. These commitments have helped push production and publication of sex-disaggregated statistics. Efforts by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) through its gender-related indicators (e.g. the Gender Inequality Index and its precursors) and many other development agencies working on gender issues within and outside the UN have generated greater demand for sex-disaggregated statistics.

Yet substantial data gaps remain. Much fewer data are generated and publicly available in countries such as Turkmenistan and Afghanistan compared with other parts of Central and West Asia, although this situation is slowly improving. Concerns remain about the availability, timeliness, and accuracy of key sex-disaggregated indicators in many countries of the region, as well as the capacity of statistics agencies to meet the demands for data.

Related to this, the participation of Central and West Asian countries in internationally comparable data collection processes is somewhat patchy. An example is the externally funded Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS), which for many developing countries have become the most important source of internationally comparable national data on key health, education, mortality and fertility statistics. In the region, only Armenia participated in three rounds of DHS surveys in the recommended 5-year interval (2000, 2005, 2010); most other countries only had one or two surveys, many of which are outdated by now (e.g., in the Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan), and some have had none (Tajikistan and Georgia). This externally funded data source is now the most widely used source for internationally and inter-temporally comparable data on demographic issues (with all their gendered dimensions). Therefore, greater participation or nationally funded surveys along similar lines would be an asset.

A second concern relates to the type of data that is generated and made available. Too often, sex-disaggregated data merely report standard indicators from census and other household surveys in sex-disaggregated form, providing no clear link to specific gender issues or policy questions that could tackle inequality. These data lack a strategic focus on the relevant gender inequality issues within a country. As discussed in detail below, these issues differ significantly across the countries of the Central and West Asia. As a result, the policy impact of gender statistics is much lower than it could be.

Third, many studies examining gender issues are often isolated initiatives gathering and analyzing data for a particular purpose (often also related to a donor-driven agenda); these analyses and isolated data-generation initiatives are insufficiently integrated into comprehensive approaches to producing data and analyzing gender gaps in a sustainable manner.

Fourth, statistical bodies have had inadequate interest and capacity in analyzing sex-disaggregated statistics and packaging them as useful and relevant gender data. The result is low demand and utilization by development planners and policymakers.

All of these issues limit evidence-based development planning in achieving gender-inclusive growth. In a sense, the problem of gender statistics in Central and West Asia is less about the availability of sex-disaggregated indicators and more about a strategic vision linking gender-inequality reduction policies with adequate data generation and analysis. There are key gender issues and constraints in Central and West Asia that should ideally guide the generation and analysis of sex-disaggregated statistics.

Gender Gaps in Central and West Asia

The countries of Central and West Asia are heterogeneous when it comes to gender gaps in well-being and empowerment. Pakistan and Afghanistan, however, have some of the largest overall gender gaps in the developing world, with sizable gaps in education, employment, political rights and opportunities as well as gaps in access to assets, inputs to agricultural production, and informal sector activities. While there has been some notable progress in reducing these gaps in recent years, they remain significant. The facts demonstrating these gender inequalities are known, but much less clear are the causal mechanisms leading to their persistence. To analyze and address the issues here, merely publishing the basic indicators is clearly insufficient. It is critical to understand, for example, to what extent gender gaps in education are driven by the supply of schools for girls and boys by state (or non-state) actors versus the demand for girls' and boys' education by parents (Alderman et al. 1995, 1996). If supply issues are the constraining factor, then building and equipping schools for girls might be the key; if demand by parents is the issue, then further inducements to households to send their girls to school might be required. It may well be that both constraints operate at the same time. Similarly, understanding the drivers of low female participation in the labor market in these two countries is critical. To what extent is it driven by formal restrictions such as labor or education policies or informal barriers such as customary beliefs or practices, and the lack of security?

Based on answers to these and many more related questions, it is possible to devise strategies to address constraints in the country in question. In the case of Afghanistan and Pakistan, it is likely that action on several fronts (including promoting female education, employment, equality in law, and economic opportunities) is required to overcome sizable gender gaps.

In contrast, gender issues in the former Soviet republics of the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia are rather different. Due to the combination of a comparatively higher labor demand and an ideological commitment to gender equality, gender gaps in schooling and employment are much lower than almost anywhere else in the developing world (Klasen 1993). Here, the challenges are different and more subtle. First, how can the falling female labor employment rates in several post-Soviet states be explained? To what extent is this linked to higher female unemployment rates in many of these countries? Is this a sign of growing discrimination in the labor market, or of increasing difficulty in combining employment with family responsibilities? What explains the sharp fall in rates of political representation

of women across the region and what are then the implications for gendered policies?

In many ways, the key gender issues in these states would seem to require learning from achievements in the past and preserving some of them in the changing economic and political circumstances to ensure equal opportunities for women. Of particular importance are adequate labor market opportunities supported by family-friendly policies as well as policies to promote and enhance women's political participation.

Gender-sensitive policy making: Lessons from elsewhere

The key to improving gender outcomes in Central and West Asia lies in the continued production of sex-disaggregated statistics with pronounced efforts at strengthening links between data, analysis, and policy to support an agenda that promotes gender equality and inclusive growth. There are lessons to be learned from other developing and industrialized countries on the kind of policies that can achieve this aim.

Reducing the gender gap in education

For countries still struggling with substantial gender gaps in education (including Pakistan and Afghanistan), the lessons from Bangladesh's experience can be invaluable. Policy research using sex-disaggregated enrollment data and its determinants found that social institutions favored the education of boys. Supply-side measures alone, such as construction of schools, would not close the gender gaps. Incentives for parents to educate their daughters were needed. As a result, the government (with the support of donors) instituted a secondary school stipend program for girls only (King, Klasen, and Porter 2009). The program has been highly successful. With the help of this program, Bangladesh succeeded in closing the massive gender gaps in secondary education and actually achieving the MDG on gender equity in schooling (Abu-Ghaida and Klasen 2004; King, Klasen and Porter 2009; and World Bank 2001).

Increasing women's bargaining power

A closely related policy with the added advantage of providing social protection is the conditional cash transfer program linked to gender goals in education and health. The pioneering program in Mexico (called PROGRESA/Oportunidades) succeeded in transferring resources to poor households, thereby providing a basic safety net. By directing resources to mothers, linking the

payment to school attendance and public health check-ups for children, and making higher payments for girls' attendance, the program strengthened the bargaining power of women, had positive impacts on investments in health and education, and promoted female education (Schultz 2004; Behrman, Todd, and Parker 2009; King, Klasen, and Porter 2009). Key to the program's success was rigorous analysis of sex-disaggregated data that helped guide policy design and implementation. Randomized rollout of the policy with pilot districts selected by lottery ensured that the effects measured in these districts can be causally attributed to the program (and not some other unrelated developments), making the impact evaluation of this initiative particularly credible.

Improving water supply is not just about health

In countries where the burden of reproductive work is substantial—the case in many of the poorer countries of Central and West Asia—lessons from rural water supply in Africa might be relevant. Surveys of time use and living standards measurement surveys determined that women spend a large portion of their time fetching water and wood, thereby limiting their ability for productive employment and participation in agricultural activities (Blackden and Bhanu 1999, Blackden et al. 2006). As a result, investments in rural water supply should not be seen only as health or water supply interventions, but also as investments in female employment and productivity.

Positive impacts from increasing women's political participation

Interesting lessons on how to increase women's political participation and its effects on economic development can be taken from India's experience. Findings from policy research revealed that women were significantly underrepresented in the political system and participated little in democratic institutions. Partly based on these findings, in 1993 a constitutional amendment mandated that one-third of seats in local councils (*gram panchayats*) be reserved for women and one-third of local councils be headed by females. Prior to elections, certain local councils are randomly assigned to be female-headed and to allow only female candidates to stand for that election. Rigorous evaluations of this program have shown that in localities where women run the local councils, investments in local basic infrastructure, health, and education are higher. Moreover, democratic participation by women is higher in these localities (Duflo and Chattopaddhya 2006; King, Klasen, and Porter 2009; Sathe, Priebe, and Klasen 2012).

Economic and social benefits of family-friendly policies

The shift in family policies in Europe highlights how sex-disaggregated data and analysis can inform policy research and promote policy change. In Europe, as in most OECD and transition countries, fertility rates have been below replacement rates for some time, which is leading to rapidly aging populations, pressure on health and social security systems, and eventually rapidly falling populations. As a result, policy attention in the 1970s began to focus more on promoting fertility to slow these effects. However, approaches to family policy in Europe were quite divided, with some countries (most notably Scandinavia and France) focusing on facilitating the labor market participation of women, while other countries (including Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy) focused more on providing cash transfers to families. In the 1990s and early 2000s a gap in female labor force participation rates became increasingly apparent, with the latter group having much lower participation, particularly among highly educated women.

More surprising was the finding that the countries that strongly promoted female employment were the ones where fertility levels were substantially higher than those where the focus was on family policies (da Rocha and Fuster 2006). Since an important goal of family policies in Europe is to stabilize fertility levels at replacement rates (around 2.1 children per family) and forestall any shortage of highly qualified workers, the Scandinavian and French models have been found to be much more attractive. In countries such as Germany, this has led to drastic changes in family policies that aim to facilitate the participation of women in the labor market. These include a rapid expansion of childcare facilities with a legally binding childcare guarantee for children under three by 2013.

These examples show three things:

- i. Even when gender bias is deeply ingrained, policy changes can make a big difference in reducing gender gaps.
- ii. Gender-neutral policies and programs can affect women and men differently, in both negative and positive ways. For example, the conditional cash transfer programs were not designed with a particular gender focus in mind. But the positive gender effects have now become an important element of the programs' impact and have led to proposals to introduce such policies on gender-equity grounds (King, Klasen, and Porter 2009). Conversely, gender-neutral policies such as the PRC's One Child policy can have significant adverse effects on the health and survival of girls (Klasen and Wink 2003).
- iii. The success of these policies depends on coordination between data producers, data analysts, policy-researchers, and policy-makers. In each case, much

of the basic data were generated and published by national statistics agencies who then collaborated with policy research institutes and academics to analyze them.

A Strategy for Gender Statistics in Central and West Asia

The following strategy is suggested to promote the generation and use of gender statistics for better policies. It is based on the situational analysis of gender statistics, current gender equality issues in the region, and policy lessons from other countries. Its aim is to further develop the capacity of statistics offices and their partners in government and civil society to use gender statistics to promote better policies for equity and inclusive growth.

Data Generation

While there has been much progress in data generation of sex-disaggregated statistics in the region (ADB 2012), more can be done. A key basic source of sex-disaggregated data should be regular multipurpose household surveys that disaggregate information on earnings, consumption, education, and employment within households to allow an analysis of intrahousehold distribution. In addition, countries should leverage support to participate more regularly in the Demographic and Health Survey program which provides accurate and internationally comparable data on fertility, mortality, health behavior, and nutrition. It would be of particular value to link the samples and thus draw on the same households for both survey instruments. Countries should elect to include the modules on intrahousehold resource allocation and control, as these have proved to be a valuable source of information on intrahousehold decision making.

These two basic multipurpose survey programs should be accompanied by less frequent time-use surveys (linked to the sampling base of the household surveys) that identify particular gendered constraints to economic participation. Similarly, countries can make much more use of existing administrative data on employment, earnings, social security, and civil registries. Here the challenge is less on data generation than on linking these different administrative databases to facilitate more comprehensive gendered analyses.

Countries lacking such high-quality administrative data can make better use of universal data in two ways. First, they can use censuses to devise gendered priorities for investment in key infrastructure, health,

education, and services at the local level. Second, they can promote universal registration of vital events and use these data for planning purposes. This can be a key element in promoting a greater amount of more reliable administrative information on gender inequality and its determinants.

Data Access and Analysis

While there has been much progress on data generation, data access and analysis remains an area of concern in most countries of Central and West Asia. Too many countries still restrict access or make it procedurally difficult to obtain the data they produce. As a result, these countries forgo the opportunity of having policy research conducted by academics, students, and policy researchers from their own country as well as across the world at essentially no cost. For instance, the success of the DHS program is due in part to the availability of the data online, free of charge. The result is that for many countries of Central and West Asia, the DHS surveys are the only ones analyzed by policy researchers and academics.

Much more can be done here. For example, census microdata can be made available using international databases such as the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), which provides 10% samples of censuses from across the world free of charge online, or Retrieval of Data for Small Areas by Microcomputer (REDATAM), an analytical tool that enables dissemination of microdata without direct access to unit records. The only country from Central and West Asia that participates in IPUMS is Pakistan, which has made the results of three of its censuses available in the database.

Similarly, to leverage opportunities for research conducted by global scholars and policy researchers, countries should make the results of living standards measurement and time-use surveys available free of charge. When granting access, anonymization procedures such as top-coding, the dropping of identifying variables, or other strategies should be used to protect privacy. Furthermore, research funded with public funds or donor monies should, as a rule, be made publicly accessible and not restricted by academic journal rules or funder policies.

More generally, data analysis of gender statistics and associated policy research is an ongoing challenge in the

region. Statistics agencies often have limited capacity to engage in analysis and policy research. Moreover, there is insufficient coordination between the statistics agencies that generate basic data and the government ministries and departments that implement and monitor programs. To overcome this problem, it is critical to establish closer cooperation between the statistical, academic, and policy research communities with the support of the international community and the UN system. The policy research community can help the statistics agencies in framing the issues, asking the right questions, and presenting the most policy-relevant sex-disaggregated statistics. In return, the academic and policy research community will generate much-improved research through access to the data and increased knowledge about these data issues and problems. More interaction between the statistics agencies and other government departments is essential. Government departments should help develop national indicator frameworks by identifying the key data and indicators required to monitor implementation of their programs. Statistics agencies should produce and analyze these data and create a more direct link between data generation and policy.

Conclusions

There is a great need to generate and analyze data to address the specific gender issues that affect the different countries of Central and West Asia. While there has been substantial progress in data generation, much remains to be done in terms of data access and data analysis. Increased data quality and quantity as well as strengthened gender-analysis capacity of statistics staff and policy planners play an important role in designing and monitoring policies for gender equity and inclusive growth. This will be a long-term agenda requiring active collaboration between statistics agencies, government departments, academics, civil society, international development organizations and policy researchers. As the lessons from elsewhere show, such collaboration can lead to policies that successfully reduce gender disparities and promote inclusive development.

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