Gender Indicators: Critiques and Alternatives

Govind Kelkar
UNIFEM South Asia, New Delhi

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Key Objectives and Goals

- To identify changes that are relevant to achieve non-discrimination, equality and inclusion with identity and dignity
- To take into account a broader set of indicators into MDG-3 on gender equality
- Review of UNDP Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)
- In the background, there are gender relations that are kept in mind, e.g. the greater extent of gender equality in many indigenous societies in Asia.
Discrimination, Inequality and Exclusion

Discrimination
• In access to knowledge, new technologies, new capabilities.
• As a result, limited dignity and limited freedom, with huge disparity

Inequality
• Structural inequalities within home and outside
• Better gender relations than among non-indigenous peoples, in terms of sex ratio, violence, mobility.
• Yet, they are not the equal of men in many ways – rights-based control rights to resources and educational attainments
Discrimination, Inequality and Exclusion

Exclusion

- Decision-making in community governance, including in matrilineal societies
- From employment opportunities in formal sector and decent work
- Symbolic and systemic violence, being looked down upon
In 1995, UNDP developed two instruments as complement to HDI

- GDI the same well-being indicators as HDI
- The greater the gender disparity, the lower a country’s GDI.
- The three equally-weighted indicators are:
  - Long and healthy life, measured by life expectancy at birth for women and men
  - Knowledge, measured by adult literacy and schooling years for women and men
  - Decent standard of living, measured by the share of earned income by women and men
Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)

• Political participation and decision-making, measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by women and men

• Economic participation and decision-making, measured by the share of professional jobs and technical jobs held by women and men

• Power over economic resources, measured by the share of earned income by women and men
GDI and GEM

- The two indices drew a great deal of attention, as they have been calculated for more than 175 countries for every year since 1995.
- Also, because these indices do not consider human development as a byproduct of economic growth, but a process of widening choices.
Critique of GDI and GEM

- Selection of variables for the formulation of GDI and GEM is very narrow

- Some dimensions of gender inequality such as participation in community governance, consumption of resources within the household, dignity and personal security are not represented by GDI and GEM, though to some extent acknowledged in HDI
Critique of GDI and GEM

• GEM does not consider household and community level empowerment aspects, which are critical measures for gender equality

• These measures tend to be reductionist, ignoring dimensions of human advance in economic, social, cultural, political, environmental and spiritual spheres
Critique of GDI and GEM

• One-third weightage to income, disregarding its composition and distribution, for instance, income increases with thoughtless exploitation of natural resources and causing the damaging costs of pollution to others in society; and income does not include unpaid caring work in the household

• The structural limitations of poverty, inequality and patriarchy, such as fear of violence against women during all stages of life – and during conflict
Critique of GDI and GEM

• The need for taking care of the sharing of burden of social reproduction (solely carried on by women) are not given due consideration in GDI or GEM

• These are, for example, considered in CEDAW and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies.
Recent Approaches

Measuring Gender Development and Empowerment with a rights-based approach

• Some recasting of GDI and GEM is underway in many countries in the South

• Such recasting is being considered at two levels, micro and macro
Recasting at the micro-level

- Equality of asset distribution: Women’s unmediated access to land, housing and an enabling environment for individualized capabilities, as discussed under CEDAW

- Gender-sensitive land reforms and distribution of financial assets, and rural employment schemes that have resulted in increasing the bargaining power of women, and have created equal access to development opportunities, and in turn reduced the chances of deprivation and exploitation. Women are likely to have increased control over their resources and bodies.
Recasting at the micro-level

• Housing status of women reflects their safety and security, on the one hand, and better productivity, on the other hand, as for a large number of women house is also a workplace.

• The percentage of such houses to be measured with basic facilities within or near the house: drinking water, cleaner fuel for cooking, electricity or a renewable energy, and toilets
Recasting at the micro-level

• Empowerment at household level:
  – Intra-household equality in food, education, health care, mobility and decision-making
  – Women’s ownership and control rights over earned income and agricultural or home-based produce

• Sharing and accounting of housework and caring responsibilities
Recasting at the macro level

- **Environment and ecology**: status of natural resources, such as land, water and forests; since degradation of resources have a direct impact on indigenous women’s lives, increasing their drudgery and worsening health conditions.

- **Adaptation and mitigation strategies** to address climate change effects.

- **Energy and infrastructure**: Availability of electricity, cleaner fuels, roads, transport, health care facilities, schools, drinking water. These facilities go a long way in meeting the basic human needs and creating an enabling environment for women and men.
Recasting at the macro level

• Institutional participation and empowerment: Women’s participation in local governance and economic institution results in
  – Higher levels of freedom and mobility
  – Substantial reduction in crime rates in public sphere
  – Creating an environment of security and accessing schools and local markets

• The success in reduction of gender-based violence also needs to be measured – at state, community and household levels.