Written Statement: Expert Panel on Data – CSW61

Why improving gender data is central to broader strategies on gender equality. Experience from DFAT.

Data sets are not neutral, just as women and men are not homogenous. Gender data matters: without it, it is difficult to devise policy and programs that respond to the differential experiences of men's and women's lives. When data is blind to women's lives, we can inadvertently enforce the structural and normative barriers to gender equality. Additionally, statistical indices that are not responsive to the multiple and intersecting ways in which individuals experience discrimination, poverty and violence further entrench inequalities that go beyond gender.

The Australian Government is a strong advocate for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. In 2016 Australia released its **Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy**. The Strategy embeds the realisation of women's and girls' human rights, their empowerment and gender equality at the centre of Australia's foreign policy, economic diplomacy and development program goals.

Australia actively pursued gender equality as a priority throughout the negotiations of the 2030 Agenda and is committed to the gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda. While there is a strong inclusion of gender equality considerations in the indicator framework, the challenges of effectively monitoring the gender-sensitive implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) cannot be overstated. And, the demand for greater support for statistics will increase as the SDGs are implemented.

Australia's policy engagement and investments are strengthening the enabling environment for gender statistics globally, their production and accessibility. Australia is supporting innovative statistical programs that deepen gender-sensitive and multi-dimensional measures of poverty, as well tackling complex indicators such as the prevalence of violence against women, and unpaid work. We are doing this through our global efforts to accelerate the realisation of gender equality and our commitment and advocacy on three issues; the need to interrogate household level data, the importance of investing in data on disability, the need to build data on violence against women and girls.

Household data sets are the most common global standard for poverty measurement, however there is compelling evidence that suggests ignoring intra-household inequality significantly underestimates global poverty by a third. Inequality therefore must be understood at the individual level to ensure policies and programs better respond to the structural barriers faced by communities.

Through an innovative approach to closing gender data gaps, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has partnered with the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and leading tertiary institution, Australian National University (ANU), to deliver the Individual Deprivation Measure (IDM). The IDM is an individual, gender-sensitive and multi-dimensional measure of poverty and it overcomes some of the limitations of current household measures of poverty. It is important to global dialogue on gender statistics and can help us advance the movement towards individual level data on poverty and deprivation. The IDM can help governments and organisations to target poverty more effectively through policy and development interventions.

The IDM improves on existing approaches to measuring poverty in important ways. Data is collected from individuals, and so can be disaggregated by sex, age, and other characteristics (including, for example, disability, ethnicity, and geographic location). It measures poverty across fifteen key economic and social dimensions (for example voice, time-use, family planning), which were defined by poor women and men as important. The tool gives a multidimensional view of poverty, and can reveal intersecting deprivations. It is a scalar rather than a binary measure, so can capture degrees of deprivation in different dimensions.

Over the next four years the IDM will be tested and refined, in order to enable the measure to be picked up broadly for global use. To date, the measure has been trialled in Fiji, the Philippines and Nepal.

The global agenda to leave no-one behind is a powerful statement of inclusion, however the lack of data on disability is a major barrier. The absence of internationally comparable data on disability means that the nature and prevalence rates of disabilities is underestimated at local, national and global levels. All too often this leads to the inclusion of people with disabilities in policies and programs being overlooked. It also makes it impossible to benchmark and monitor progress globally.

Since 2001, a worldwide effort has been made to collect internationally comparable disability data through the UN's Washington City Group on Disability Statistics. The Washington Group has developed a set of questions to be inserted into national level censuses or surveys to assess disability prevalence at the country level for adults. The United Nation's Expert Group Meeting on Disability Data in July 2014 recommended that 'to allow for international comparability, the initial primary area of focus should be promoting the inclusion of the Washington Group short question set in all data systems used for monitoring'.

Australia's *Development for All* strategy highlights the lack of disability data as one of the most significant barriers to disability inclusion. In taking this strategy forward in our overseas aid program, Australia is committed to assist people with disabilities in developing countries, particularly in our region, to find pathways out of poverty. As a critical first step, Australia supports the UN recommendation that the Washington Group short question set is inserted in all data systems.

Australia is currently working closely with the United Nations Statistical Division to support the establishment of a new disability statistics team within UNSD. This team will enhance the knowledge base on disability statistics, collect existing disability statistics from available sources and build on the guidance already developed by the Washington Group to provide guidance at both the international and national levels on collection and analysis of disability data. Australia is also working towards a partnership with the Washington Group to enhance the work they currently do to provide regular technical training to National Statistics Offices to encourage and support greater use of the questions in all data systems.

The intersectionality of gender and disability highlights the unique vulnerabilities of women with disability to violence, and the barriers to seeking support. Australia supported research in Cambodia by Monash University, CBM Australia and the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) with Cambodian partners Banteay Srei and the Cambodian Disabled People's Organisation to undertake ground-breaking research on violence against women with disability in Cambodia.

The research combined the World Health Organization approach to measuring rates of violence against women, with two key disability indexes in order to get more detailed information on how violence affects women with disabilities. It found that women with disability face similar levels of sexual, physical and emotional violence by partners to non-disabled women but endure much higher levels of other forms of family violence. They suffer sexual violence perpetrated by family members at a rate five times higher than women without disability and are much more likely to be insulted, made to feel bad about themselves, belittled and intimidated. Few women faced with violence ever seek help from police or from community support services.

Highlighting the power of data as evidence for policy and programming, the research team has used the findings to develop training resources and guidelines to improve access to services and assist specialist and mainstream services to address these issues more effectively. The research results will also assist with the implementation of Cambodia's National Disability Strategic Plan and National Action Plan on Violence Against Women.

The Sustainable Development Goals powerfully highlight the importance of addressing violence against women and girls. The pervasive nature of sexual and gender based violence affects the lives of individuals, families, communities and countries, however there is a gender data gap in understanding the situation, extent and nature of violence against women and girls. Australia is helping to close this gap by increasing the international evidence base on violence against women. We are working with a range of partners, including national governments, regional organisations and civil society groups to take this forward.

Australia has supported more than 12 violence prevalence studies in the Indo-Pacific region and in South-East Asia, we have supported studies in Timor-Leste and Cambodia. In the Pacific we have supported studies in Solomon Islands, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Tonga, Fiji, Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Samoa and Palau. The studies provide the evidence needed for the development of responses to violence against women, for example in Solomon Islands the studies were an important factor to building support for strengthening the violence against women legislation.

Australia supported the United Nations Multi-Country Study on Men and Violence in Asia and The Pacific. This study collected data on men's violence against women at nine sites in six countries in the region (Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Papua New Guinea). This was a ground breaking study that provided us with insights into why some men use violence against women.

With high prevalence rates, there are social an economic costs. A 2015 study by the Overseas Development Institute on the cost to business of gender based violence in Papua New Guinea sought to quantify these costs. The study found that 68 per cent of survey participants experienced gender-based violence (GBV) during the past year, with 47 per cent experiencing more severe forms of GBV; and on average, each staff member loses 11.1 days of work per year as a result of the impacts of gender violence: 2.0 days lost to 'presenteeism', 5.0 days to absenteeism and 4.1 days helping other victims of GBV. For one of the firms in this survey, this means an estimated 26,200 staff days lost per year.

Collecting data on violence against women is just the start. We then need to make sure that we have the expertise needed to analyse the data. As with its collection, the analysis and use

of this data must be done with care. We must not only be careful with the women's lives who share their stories with us and ensure that our studies do not put them in harm's way but we also must make sure that we then respect the information they have provided us and report on it accurately and appropriately. There are very few shortcuts with this work and we need to develop the skills and experience in our region so these studies can be conducted ethically, efficiently and deliver data and analysis that can make a serious contributing to policy and program development.

These issues highlight Australia's commitments to progressing key global challenges on gender statistics. It is crucial that these efforts, and those of others, are harnessed and aggregated to influence global discussions. Australia is a proud contributor to the UN Women's Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) program, which aims to accelerate existing efforts to generate comparable gender indicators on health, education, employment, asset ownership and entrepreneurship. Australia is now supporting UN Women's flagship programme on better gender statistics for evidence-based localisation of the SDGs, '***Making every woman and girl count: supporting the monitoring and implementation of the SDGs through better production and use of gender statistics'***.

Working with partner governments, international agencies and other actors, and building on existing initiatives this global flagship program will build a supportive enabling environment for gender statistics in national contexts, and increase the production and accessibility of good gender data. The program aims to achieve results in three interlinked areas of work:
− Enabling environment: building a supportive policy and institutional environment for the localisation (i.e. national and local adaptation) and effective monitoring of the SDGs.
− Data production: increasing the quality, comparability and regularity of gender statistics to address national data gaps and meet reporting commitments under the SDGs and other international treaties and agreements, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as national priorities.
− Data accessibility: ensuring that gender statistics are accessible to users in governments, civil society, academia and the private sector and are analysed to inform policy-making and advocacy and to monitor progress on the SDGs.
As a pilot initiative (2016-2020) work will be implemented in 12 pathfinder countries through partnerships with national statistical offices in coordination with other actors. It is a powerful program for global collective action.

Closing the gender data gap is a critical issue for evidence based policy making- at local, national and global levels. Australia's efforts are investing in going deeper than the household level for our analysis of poverty and gender. Australia is investing in detailed data on disability and on the prevalence of violence against women and girls. Australia is investing in both national and global efforts, to harness these efforts with collective action. Gender equality and women's empowerment requires sustained, strategic and coordinated change, and it requires evidence to underpin the assumptions of policy and programming. Investing in closing these gender data gaps is a crucial element to ensure we have the evidence based required for our efforts to be effective and to make the difference the Sustainable Development Goals commit us to achieve.