



**Commission on the Status of Women  
Sixty-third Session**

**Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable  
development**

**INTERACTIVE EXPERT PANEL**

**Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable  
development – the data challenge and opportunity**

**Addressing key gender data challenges through  
partnering with UN Women's "Making Every  
Woman and Girl Count" programme**

by

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\* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

## **Introduction**

In 2015, the United Nations launched the inspirational Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda, aiming at sustainable, inclusive, equitable solutions to the world's most pressing challenges. This Global Agenda at-large and specifically SDG Number 5 offer an unprecedented call to action to strengthen gender data and statistics. However, to make sure this data contributes usefully to the empowerment of women and the betterment of society at-large, several urgent course corrections are needed.

First, we must envision and invest in new strategies which ensure that the SDGs (specifically Goal Number 5) are localized to unique domestic contexts and prioritize building capacity within those contexts to collect and use the new, cross-cutting data which will emerge. This is a critical first step to ensure data is collected in a sustainable, scalable manner which is both relevant and aligned with national planning efforts.

Second, we must seek to de-stigmatize gender data and gender-related issues more broadly. Women in Jordan and countries around the world are more than vulnerable groups. Enabling female participation and empowerment is critical to unlocking innovation and progress towards sustainable growth for Jordan and in countries around the world.

Finally, we must develop strong theories of change which translate the data collected into usable evidence which informs and guides policy making. Furthermore, improved capacity for data collection and use must be coupled with strong accountability mechanisms to ensure that improved data and statistics translate into results for women's lives everywhere.

## **Country Context**

Jordan is at the forefront within the Arab world and globally in terms of innovation and planning for the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2015, the Jordanian Government formulated a 'Roadmap for SDG Implementation' led by the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MOPIC) and in close cooperation with UN agencies. Gender Statistics Division (GSD) within the Department of Statistics (DoS), established in 2005 contributes significantly to this roadmap.

Key tasks of the GSD include:

- Establishing and updating a database which reflects the status of women and men in Jordan in a transparent and credible manner
- Conducting studies and research on gender related issues
- Building national capacity in Gender Statistics and implementing training programs related to gender statistics
- Creating awareness among the wide range of data users about the importance of using gender statistics and its indicators in different development issues
- Coordinating with local, regional, and international parties related to gender statistics
- Reviewing international reports on Jordan from a gender perspective
- Serving on the National Committee for Gender Equality and SDGs

Given the deep challenges inherent to these specific directives, UN Women provides critical support to GSD, DoS, and MOPIC via the ‘Making Every Woman and Girl in Jordan Count’ project in an effort to improve the development of gender sensitive indicators, data collection, production, analysis, accessibility, and use of gender statistics. This support comes in the form of technical support; capacity development; and coordination and comprises a critical component of Jordan’s efforts to achieve gender-related targets set forth in the Global Agenda.

### **Opportunity One: Addressing Data Challenges and Localizing the Global Agenda**

Strong political will within the Jordanian Government alongside the Global Goals offer an unprecedented opportunity to increase demand for gender statistics and an opportunity to bring gender issues into the national conversation. In Jordan, we have already begun to see the impact of this data.

For example, in Jordan, women are very highly educated as compared with men. However, higher levels of education do not correspond with greater participation in the labor market. This state of affairs represents an enormous drag on the Jordanian economy, but until GSD began collecting data on this issue, there was no case for a shift in policy.

However, in 2017, GSD and our partners used nationally collected data to successfully advocate for greater labor law gender neutrality. Policies were instituted to allow flexible working arrangements for all women; paternity leave for new children; and the provision of day care in the workplace. As a result of this evidence-driven policy, female unemployment rates were reduced from 31% to 25% and the female economic participation rate has increased from 13% to 17%.

In order to expand upon successes like this example, GSD requires increased capacity for data collection and use. There are inherent financial and human costs in developing indicators, training enumerators, and fielding new data collection for the cross-cutting data necessary to achieve the SDGs for women.

Additionally, given the unique situation of Jordan, decision makers within our government require concrete and replicable options for implementing or improving efforts to integrate the SDGs with national planning. Given the myriad objectives for increased data collection, technical, human, and financial capacity support is needed to lower the cost of entry as Jordan seeks to fully integrate the SDGs framework with its national planning processes. The Jordanian Government would benefit from opportunities to learn from peers and better understand the benefits, challenges, and resources required to undertake different approaches to sustainable, inclusive, equitable development for gender-related issues and more broadly.

A potential solution might be a cross-country initiative to document current efforts to align national planning with the SDGs – with a specific focus on Goal Number 5 and related indicators; identify best practices; strengthen national capacity for cross-cutting data collection/use; and develop roadmaps to help national statistics and planning offices more efficiently align domestic budget and indicator frameworks with the SDGs.

Outputs from such a program could significantly improve the ability of GSD to effectively approach our ambitious goal of improving the use of gender statistics for evidence-based policy making in Jordan. More broadly, it would provide the international community with common metrics for understanding countries' progress on SDG targets that lack reliable data at the global level and a better understanding of domestic financing for different aspects of the SDGs agenda.

In sum, the international community needs to continue looking for ways to provide assistance localizing and operationalizing the Sustainable Development Goals if we are to translate this aspirational vision into reality.

### **Opportunity Two: Gender Data De-Stigmatization**

Compounding technical, human, and financial capacity constraints, gender statistics in Jordan and across the Arab world face significant negative stigma. The impression unfortunately is that gender data is a fringe issue relevant to only to women and representative of a feminist agenda which may not be compatible with our culture.

Consequently, it is very difficult to recruit men with relevant statistics backgrounds to work in this space. Throughout the existence of GSD, only two men were hired. Both left after brief tenures, citing the potential risk to their credibility as statisticians if they were perceived to only focus on gender issues. When men are not involved in gender data production and analysis, it reduces their ability to advocate for improved data, perpetuating the belief that this is an issue which only impacts women.

This is a sad and costly misperception. As noted elsewhere, issues which affect women and require the collection and use of gendered data have broad ranging impacts across a society. Despite its importance, it remains unclear where Gender Statistical Strengthening ranks in the list of priorities of Jordan's overall national statistical strengthening strategy or broader, global statistical strengthening strategies. The international community must continue to pursue initiatives which work to inform and re-shape perspectives of key stakeholders regarding the broader benefits and far reaching implications of gender data in order to help it reach its potential impact.

### **Concluding Thoughts: Towards Stronger Theories of Change**

Localizing the global goals; increasing domestic capacity for their implementation; and reducing stigma are all critical components to improving gender data collection and use. However, in order to truly move towards tangible progress on the 2030 Agenda, we must be sure to use the political will that we have to develop and adhere to stronger theories of change in terms of how this data is translated into policy transformation.

For example, Jordan has a persistent gender pay gap that fluctuates between 10% and 19%. There is strong data to support that when pay disparity exists, it is not just women who struggle, but the whole economy. This issue and its impact to the economy and broader Jordanian society were recognized for decades. However, efforts up to this point were of minimal impact in bringing about desperately needed equity.

It is important to note that there exists significant political will within the Jordanian Government to address this issue and other gender-related problems. In 2011, on the basis of GSD data on the intractability of this issue, the government created a pay equity commission. The work of this commission led Jordan to be invited as the first Arab country to the ILO's Equal Pay International Coalition.

Jordan is making significant effort towards improved data collection level and policy formation. But, the critical question remains: *how do we translate advances into tangible change within Jordanian society?*

Throughout the lifecycle of data collection, data use, policy making, and accountability we must strive towards increased intentionality. Only through strong, cohesive theories of change and thoughtful collaboration between data producers, data users, and policy makers can we hope to unleash the potential of women in Jordan and around the world.