

# Measuring women's progress in a global era

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## Introduction

The 1995 UN Conference on Women in Beijing agreed a Platform for Action to improve the lives of the world's women (United Nations 1995). This constituted a challenge to many conventional conceptions of progress, of equality, and of justice. It remains a challenge to see the full implementation of this programme, agreed by all the world's countries. In 2005 there was a review of the progress made in implementing the Platform, the Beijing +10 process. A series of meetings and reports were prepared for this process, including at a regional level (Luxembourg Presidency 2005, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe 2004).

The Platform for Action is a challenge to the notion that progress can be measured by the extent of economic growth. In challenging this traditional indicator of success, it is not alone, since this is contested by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 1990). But what exactly should replace this dominant paradigm is highly contested. There are various alternative bases on which assessments of progress and claims for justice can be made, including justice, equality, human rights, and capabilities (Nussbaum 2000, Sandel 1998, Sen 1984, 1987, 1992, 1999, Walby 2001). Further, in the act of agreeing the Platform for Action, the UN conference challenged the view that differences

between cultures made standards of justice incommensurable, but nevertheless there remain important issues in how these standards are operationalised in different locations.

But what is gender equality? The concept and content of "gender equality" is highly contested. "Gender equality" is a "signifier" that actors attempt to fill with their own preferences. How is the tension between models of gender equality that are based on sameness, the equal

valuation of difference, and the transformation of existing gender practices and standards to be resolved (Bacchi 1999, Rees 1998, Verloo 2001, Walby 2005)? There are important differences between the routes by which gender equality might be achieved.

While the sources of change in gender relations are many, three main types can be identified. Some are common to processes of economic and human de-

velopment; some are specific to path-dependent forms of change that vary between countries; and others are related to global political waves and the development of international regimes. The UN initiatives associated with the Platform for Action take place within these wider sources of change.

The UN Platform for Action requires attention to the specificities of gender disadvantage, which were not to be subsumed within a generic concept of inequality, and, by further

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differentiating this into 12 critical areas for action, it challenges any simple treatment of gender inequality as reducible to a single dimension. One of the critical areas identified by the Platform for Action was that of the “institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women”. The capacity for effective policy developments to achieve gender equality needs to be established in institutional mechanisms, of which three kinds were identified: national machinery and other governmental bodies, the integration of gender perspectives in policy making, and the generation of gender-disaggregated data for policy evaluation. It is important to be able to measure the extent to which progress has been made on the 12 critical areas of the Platform for Action. In order to do this, it is necessary to operationalise the concepts behind these critical areas and to develop summary indicators supported by data. This matters for both social science analysis and policy development. The movement from abstract concepts to measurable quantifiable indicators supported by valid and reliable data is complex. In this context it is important to have indicators and data that are comparable between countries and over time.

The Beijing +10 process is not the only one that is demanding the development of indicators of gender equality. A similar policy dynamic can be seen within the EU strategy for gender equality. In the context of the development of gender mainstreaming, there is an ever-present concern with the relationship between gender-specific measures and those of the mainstream, so that gender is no longer a marginalised concern. While the development of gender equality indicators in the EU has often been framed by the needs of economic policy, there is an additional impetus, which comes from their attention to the Beijing +10 process. While several UN bodies, such as UNDP and UNIFEM, and objectives, such as the Millennium Development Goals, have focused primarily on issues for the South (Kabeer 2003), the concern in this article is the EU context for translating the Beijing +10 process into one relevant for the more developed world.

There has been some ambivalence in feminist theory about the process and implications of abstraction, since it entails the production of representations of the gendered world

that are somewhat removed from women’s direct experiences. Some of the early forms of feminist challenges to patriarchal representations of knowledge prioritised the use of women’s experiences to confront and replace mistaken conceptions. However, as the exclusion of women from science and formalised knowledge institutions has diminished, there has been an increased capacity to generate forms of knowledge that are more consistent with the world as experienced by women. Statistics, once treated with suspicion, on the basis that they were most likely to reflect a patriarchal view of the world order, can now be viewed as a newly important domain of contestation over the representation of gender inequality. Gender statistics are a new and key site of activity of the global feminist epistemic community.

### **Conceptualising progress, equality, justice, human rights, and capabilities**

In order to situate the challenge constituted by the Platform for Action, I shall begin with a review of some contemporary debates about the concept and measurement of progress, equality, and justice. First, is the challenge to the use of GDP per capita as the key measure of progress by the capabilities approach (Nussbaum, 2000, 2003, Sen, 1984, 1987, 1992, 1999). Second, a consideration of the concepts of equality, justice, and human rights as diverse frames within which gender progress might be conceptualised. Third, a consideration of the implications of different models of gender equality for determining the appropriate standards of gender equality, in particular, whether they are the same ones for men and women, promote equal valuation of different contributions, or propose new transformed gender standards for all. Fourth, addressing the tension in developing concepts and indicators of progress and equality for gender that are either separate from or close to the mainstream (Jahan 1995, Walby 2005).

#### **GDP per capita**

The most traditional indicators of economic progress are the level of economic development

and the rate of economic growth, used by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and many national government Finance Ministries. The measure of progress embodied in most global institutions of financial governance, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, as well as adopted by many other governmental bodies from the EU to the UK, is that of the level of economic development, as measured by the size of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita, and its rate of growth. This is defended as the prime indicator of progress on the basis that this constitutes an indication of the average standard of living of people in a country and that governments are repeatedly democratically elected on such a mandate (HM Treasury 2004).

It is well known that this has been subject to many challenges. While it is widely noted as a measure of the performance of the monetary sector of an economy, the extent to which it correlates with human, as well as economic, development is highly disputed, not least by the United Nations Development Project. The critique of the use of GDP per capita as the key performance indicator of economic development is most developed in the context of development politics and theory. It is contested on the grounds that the average income per person hides inequalities such as those associated with class and gender, and that income is not an adequate measure of human development in the sense of the capacity to function. Thus it is not an adequate measure of human progress, which is the proper goal of economic policy. The debate has broadened into questions of how development is best conceptualised as well as measured, engaging in philosophical as well as substantive questions. It addresses the question of what values should be incorporated into global economic policy, in particular, what it means, both abstractly and substantively, to value human development as the end goal of economic development.

### **Capacities, capabilities, and the UNDP**

The contestation between these rival approaches is most clearly articulated in the work of Sen (1984, 1987, 1992, 1999) and Nussbaum (2000, 2003). Sen argues for a re-focusing of the ultimate goal of economic policy away from

the level of monetary income per person to that of human capabilities. Human capabilities are understood as what people are actually able to do and to be. Human capabilities can be understood in relationship to the notion of well-being. In this approach monetary income is merely one of the means by which the outcome of human capabilities is generated. It implies that merely raising the level of average income may not be an adequate goal of economic policy, if the pattern of its distribution and use are not optimal for the achievement of human capabilities. High levels of inequality may preclude the development of human capabilities in all the people of a country, and may be hidden by the use of average income as the key indicator. The change in the key performance indicator from income per person to some measure of human capabilities is likely to change the nature of economic policy.

Sen rejects approaches that rely on people's articulated subjective preferences on the grounds that oppressed people may have adjusted to their subordinated status. Adaptive preferences are not always the best guide to best policy. Rather it is necessary to make more fundamental claims about what is needed to enhance capabilities. But Sen leaves the question as to exactly what are human capabilities rather open. So how is a more concrete list to be developed?

Nussbaum (2000, 2003) argues for the development of a concrete list of central human capabilities, though not in quantified form. She lists ten: life and not dying prematurely; bodily health, including good health, reproductive health and shelter; bodily integrity, including freedom to be mobile, to be secure from violent assault including domestic violence, and opportunities for sexual satisfaction; being able to use the senses, imagination and thought in a way informed and cultivated by education, as well as freedom of expression and religion; being able to have emotional attachments; being able to engage in practical reason and reflection; ability to affiliate with others and to receive social respect, whatever one's race or sex; live with other species successfully; ability to play; and the ability to participate politically, to hold property, and to enter decent employment. Nussbaum considers that these are valid universally, though always subject to revision. The basis of her list

appears to be her own reading of the literature and engagement with the issues.

Nussbaum (2003), while agreeing with Sen on many matters, is critical of Sen for leaving his argument at too abstract a level. She considers his strong stance on many issues of social justice and his role in the development of the UNDP measures as puzzlingly inconsistent with his refusal to endorse any given list of capabilities. She suggests that the most likely explanation for this is the priority that he gives to processes of democratic deliberation, which he feels would be inhibited by the endorsement of a set of capabilities at the international level. Sen (2004) confirmed this as part of the explanation. So who and how are the key lists determined? What balance of democracy, power, and expertise?

An attempt to operationalise the concept of human capabilities in measurable forms in a manner informed by the work of Sen has been conducted by the UNDP (1990). The advocacy by the UNDP of its human development indices constitutes one of the most significant policy challenges to the use of GDP per capita. This contestation over the goals of global economic policy is led at the policy level by the United Nations Development Project (UNDP), which produces an annual publication with a set of alternative summary and detailed performance indicators for almost all countries in the world. This is considered in detail below.

### **Varieties of models of gender equality**

There has been more than one way of conceptualising the nature of and route to gender equality. At least three major types of approach can be identified: equality through sameness (equal opportunities or equal treatment), through equal valuation of difference (special programmes), and the transformation of gendered practices and standards of evaluation. The first model is one in which equality based on sameness is fostered, especially where women enter previously male domains, and the existing male norm remains the standard. The second is one in which there is a move towards the equal valuation of existing and different contributions of women and men in a gender segregated society. The third is one where there is a new

standard for both men and women, that is, the transformation of gender relations.

There is question as to whether the first two models actually constitute gender mainstreaming, because they retain the gender standards of the status quo in some form. For Rees (1998), only the third strategy constitutes gender mainstreaming and has the potential to deliver gender justice because this is the only strategy that involves the transformation of the institutions and the standards necessary for effective equality, while Booth and Bennett (2002) argue that all three are gender mainstreaming approaches.

While the elimination of gender inequality is the goal of the gender mainstreaming strategy, the extent to which this can mean accepting and valuing existing gendered differences is a key source of disagreement within gender mainstreaming theory and practice. This has been a debate within gender theory more generally. While all the definitions of gender equality include equality within each social domain, they vary as to whether a change in the balance of the domains, and the equalisation of any differential representation of women and men in each domain, constitute legitimate areas for intervention or not.

Underlying these discussions is the “sameness/difference” debate that has taken place within feminist theory (Felski 1997, Folbre 2001, Fraser 1997, Lorber 2000). This is a multi-faceted debate, which is simultaneously normative, philosophical, theoretical, substantive, empirical, and policy-relevant. Thus within an analysis of gender mainstreaming are the classic arguments within feminist theory about difference, universalism, and particularism. In particular, there are dilemmas in how to recognise difference, while avoiding the trap of essentialism (Ferree and Gamson 2003, Fraser 1997), and taking account of the global horizon. There is an issue as to whether traditional equal opportunities policies are limited because they mean that women can only gain equality with men if they are able to perform to the standards set by men (Guerrina 2002, Rossilli 1997). However, there is a question as to whether there can be an effective route to gender justice in which existing separate gender norms/standards are retained, in that it is not possible to be “different but equal” because differences are too entwined with power and resources.

The Council of Europe definition of gender equality includes diverse elements:

Gender equality means an equal visibility, empowerment and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life ... Gender equality is not synonymous with sameness, with establishing men, their life style and conditions as the norm. ... Gender equality means accepting and valuing equally the differences between women and men and the diverse roles they play in society (Council of Europe 1998: 7–8).

The Council of Europe (1998) specifies the need for the “equal participation of women and men in political and public life” and for “the individual’s economic independence”, and that “education is a key target for gender equality”. This defines equal participation in political and public life, in education and the achievement of economic independence, as universal goals, while other spheres (notably the family and care-work) remain sites of difference. An underlying question is that of the assumed degree of connection among the gender practices in different domains. If they are coupled tightly, it may not be possible to have equality through sameness in one domain and equality with difference in another. If the links are looser, this may be theoretically and practically possible. This debate depends on an implied theory of gender relations that needs to be made explicit in order to understand the nature and degree of the postulated connections between different gendered domains and the implications of changes in one of them for the others (Walby 2004).

These theoretical debates about models of gender equality underpin the empirically based debates as to preferred indicators of gendered progress. In particular, they are relevant to the issue of whether equal participation in employment should be taken as an indicator of gender equality, or whether unequal participation may be consistent with gender equality since there might be equal valuation of women’s unpaid work with paid work. This is one of the important issues underlying the debates on the development of indicators of the advancement of women.

The debates on the conceptualisation of gender equality are informed by debates on the nature of the processes of change in gender relations. In particular, there is the question of

the extent to which progress for women is closely associated with economic development as contrasted with a democratically inspired human development that involves state or community provision of welfare services.

## **Development of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women**

### **Gender and the mainstream**

Gender mainstreaming was identified by the Platform for Action as a key process in the development of policies for the advancement of women. Gender mainstreaming is an essentially contested process (Bacchi 1999, Elgström 2000, Walby 2005). This is because it inevitably involves tension between the “mainstream” and the “gender equality” positions. Nevertheless, there is often a focus on those areas where there is potential overlap between the two agendas. In practice, there is often a difficult strategic decision as to how close to or distant from the mainstream should be the position adopted by the advocates of gender equality. If it is too close, then it is likely to end in the serious dilution and even loss of the gender equality perspective as it becomes integrated into the mainstream (Jahan 1995). If it is too distant, then it may be rejected as “extremist” and have little impact.

These general considerations concerning gender mainstreaming apply to the process of the conceptualisation and operationalisation of gender equality. On the one hand, there is a need to identify separately the gender issue at stake and to capture its specificity. On the other, if the indicator that is developed is too far from the existing repertoire, then there is a danger that it will be marginalised and that the data needed to support it will not be forthcoming.

### **Institutional mechanisms**

The Platform for Action identified the development of institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women as one of the 12 critical areas. This involved three strategic objectives: H1, create or strengthen national machineries



and other governmental bodies; H2, integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes, and projects; and H3, generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation (UN 1995). These three developments are highly inter-related. The development of gender perspectives in policy making requires information about the potential gender impact of policies. This requires the development of indicators in order to benchmark what would be important gender impacts, as well as the data necessary to support these. It is unlikely that this information would be produced without an institutional infrastructure, so it is necessary to have specialised national gender machinery and other governmental bodies and to have forms of independent scrutiny and democratic input.

The development of the institutional mechanisms has involved the creation of specialised gender units within government. Although they have been created in most countries, the forms they take are highly varied. These have been located at various levels, from the highest level with a remit to overview all government activities, to whole or major parts of ministries, to small units tucked away within another ministry. The unit may be headed politically by a Cabinet or more junior minister. The unit and its political head may be dedicated to gender issues, or have many other duties. They may have many or few resources; authority to determine the practices of other ministries or not (Luxembourg Presidency 2005). They may operate with much public scrutiny from and engagement with civil society and NGOs, or not (Clavero *et al.* 2004, Rai 2003, Verloo 2001). They may be affected by the presence of women in decision-making bodies, for example the extent to which women are elected as parliamentary representatives, promoted as governmental ministers, and involved in other governance institutions (Huber and Stephens 2000, Manza and Brooks 1998). The relationship between the gender machinery, elected women political representatives and civil society may be key to understanding the impact of the gender machinery (Halsaa 1998, Mazur 2002), for example in the development of a 'velvet triangle' (Woodward 2004). The nature of the relationship with transnational and international governance bodies, for example, EU,

ILO, World Bank, IMF, UN may also be of importance (Keck and Sikkink 1998, Pietilä 1996, Walby 2002).

The implementation of gender mainstreaming and gender equality policies more generally requires the development of specific tools and processes. Major tools include "gender impact assessment" and "gender budgeting". These in turn require further tools including "indicators", "benchmarking", "targets" and "gender disaggregated statistics". These tools are utilised by the normal policy actors in engagement with those representing women's interests. Gender impact assessment is an example of a new form of gender mainstreaming practice that uses both a new gender toolkit and new forms of inclusion of women in decision-making processes. Gender budgeting is a specific form of gender impact assessment that is applied to financial decision-making.

Gender impact assessment involves the analysis of the gender implications of policies. It is best performed during the early stages of policy development, so that revisions can be made to the proposed policy if its impact appears to be detrimental to gender equality. It is recommended in the Platform for Action.

Gender budgeting challenges the traditional notion that financial governance is a gender-free zone. Gender budgeting is a gender mainstreaming tool that includes a gender equality perspective in financial decision-making at the highest levels. It is a process of disaggregation of budgets by gender in order to discover the extent to which policies that have gendered implications are differentially funded. It is not about a separate budget for women. It involves the introduction of a gender equality perspective in forms of policy making which had been beyond the reach of more traditional equal opportunities approaches. The purpose is to make financial decision-making at governmental level transparent in relation to gender (increased budget transparency is recommended by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2001) as a good governance practice) (Balmori 2003, Budlender *et al.* 1998, 2002; European Commission 2003a, European Parliament 2003, Sen 1999, Sharp and Broomhill 2002, Villagomez 2004).

The development of both gender impact assessment and gender budgeting depend

upon the availability of gender-disaggregated statistics, indicators and benchmarks. It is important to have available the necessary data, as well as knowledge as to the preferred levels of summary indicators, and to be able to construct relevant benchmarks to assist in the monitoring change. For example, gender budget projects that examine the implications of tax and benefit policies require the generation of data disaggregated by gendered individuals, not merely constituted at the traditional household level.

Both processes require not only the mainstreaming of gender perspectives into the work of the normal policy actors, but also the inclusion of women's voices and interests in areas of decision-making in which they are still under-represented, often requiring the engagement of expert civil society groups and NGOs. This is especially important for the process of monitoring, where such independent expertise is important.

## **Development of gendered indicators**

Analysis of gender inequality requires the development of gendered indicators supported by gender disaggregated statistics. This is noted as a component of the UN critical area on Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women in the Platform for Action. Strategic Objective H.3 is to "Generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation". Paragraph 206 lists a series of agreed actions to be taken by "national, regional and international statistical services and relevant governmental and United Nations agencies" detailing the steps that are to be taken. The adoption of a twin strategy of gender mainstreaming alongside specific actions for gender equality (UN 1995) has increased the priority attached to gender disaggregating data in a wide range of fields previously thought to be ungendered.

The development of indicators and the data needed to support them constitute a critical link between policy aspirations and knowing whether they are working. Robust, valid and reliable indicators of changes over time and comparatively between countries are key to evaluating the effectiveness of innovative policies. Without indicators and the data to support

them, it is hard to assess the extent to which the developments in policy, such as those noted in the country reports to the UN Beijing +10 process, have positive outcomes for gender equality. Indicators are important as challenges to rhetoric. In the absence of commonly agreed indicators, there is a potential for considerable slippage between rhetoric and policy practice.

There is always a distinction between the concept and a quantitative measure that is intended to represent the concept. There are long-standing debates as to how economic and other indicators should best be developed. Beyond the economic, there is increasing interest in and development of quantitative indicators of various domains of social life that are cross-nationally comparative (Berger-Schmitt and Jankowitsch 1999, UNDP 1990). There are three major attempts to create gendered indicators appropriate for comparative cross-national analysis over time: a suite of indicators from the UNDP (discussed below); the Millennium Development Goals, for developing countries (not discussed here because of the focus of this paper on developed countries); and indicators from the EU.

## **United Nations Development Project indicators**

The United Nations Development Project has developed various indices to capture progress in human development. The UNDP (1999) produces a Human Development Index that includes not only income per person (GDP per capita) but also longevity (as an indicator of health) and education. It produces several versions of the indicator, which sharpen the focus on different inequalities, including gender and poverty. Supporting this is a series of tables on many diverse aspects of human well-being. The basic UNDP indicator is the Human Development Indicator, which is composed of three elements: life expectancy; education (both enrolment and achieved literacy); and income per capita (UNDP). However, since this measure is an average for each country it necessarily cannot reveal variations in human development within a country, which is essential if a gender analysis is to be conducted.

The UNDP provides two further indices, the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure

(GEM), which are gendered and thus address this issue. The GDI applies gender ratios to each of these three dimensions: relative life expectancy; relative education; and the proportion of earned income. The GEM attempts to measure female empowerment and is made up of three indicators: the proportion of women in parliament, the proportion of women in top jobs (professional, technical, administrative, and managerial), and the female share of earned income (UNDP). These indices have been important and influential; however, they have also been subject to several criticisms.

The first disadvantage of these indices is their conflation of absolute levels of development (such as absolute GDP per capita) with a gender relationship in a single index. This is appropriate if the intention is to measure the absolute development of women, but if what is being sought is a measure of gender inequality, then this practice does not achieve this goal (Dijkstra 2002, Dijkstra and Hanmer 2002). Second, in practice the GDI is overwhelmingly (over 90% in most countries) driven by one component, that of income share, which is inappropriate for an index that purports to have three components. This is for technical reasons associated with the greater variation in this component than the others (Bardhan and Klasen 1999). Third, the income share component is predominantly driven by the rate of participation in employment, for technical reasons associated with the paucity of data on the gender wage gap (Bardhan and Klasen 1999). Fourth, there is concern that the gender income share may be a poor proxy for gendered standard of living and women's well-being. This is because there may be household sharing (with women benefiting from resources despite no or little earned income) or there may be an uncertain correspondence between a woman's earned income and her access to resources (Bardhan and Klasen 1999, Dijkstra and Hanmer 2000). This issue can be seen as going beyond a technical problem to one that is associated with the choice of model of gender equality, which might be seen as culturally specific. In particular there is the question as to whether equal participation in employment is more likely to deliver gender equality than a gendered division of labour in the household. However, this may still be seen as an empirical

question, that is, the extent to which a woman's earned income is associated with improvements in her well-being (Anand and Sen 1995), is not one of incommensurable cultural difference. A fifth problem is that neither the GDI nor GEM encompasses all 12 critical areas. In particular, violence against women is missing. The UNDP gendered indicators of progress for women, while flawed, nevertheless constituted an innovative and important step in the process of developing more adequate indicators of human development.

## Millennium Development Goals

The launch of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 constituted a further ambitious attempt to produce indicators and targets, which were supported by robust statistical data, to measure progress towards development. Like the UNDP and capabilities approaches, they focused on outputs for people, rather than inputs such as the size of income. The 18 targets, including the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, the achievement of universal primary education, and many associated with basic health were associated with eight goals: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empower women; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; develop a global partnership for development. However, only one quantitative target named gender, that of the elimination of gender disparity in education (Millennium Development Goals 2004).

While the Millennium Goals constituted a serious attempt to operationalise the concept of development for less developed countries, most of its goals and targets have already been met by more developed countries. Hence for countries such as those in the EU they do not constitute an appropriate set of indicators and targets for further development.

## Development of EU indicators for the Platform for Action

The European Union committed itself to the development of a simple suite of indicators at the Madrid Council in 1998, in order to be able to





Workers in a Samsung Electronics factory in Suwon, South Korea, October 1999. AFP/Choo Youn-Kong

effectively carry out the annual review of the implementation of the Platform for Action to which it committed itself in 1995. The European Commission has energetically engaged in the process of developing gender equality indicators, especially those relevant to the more developed world, establishing working groups (European Commission 2001a), advisory committees (European Commission 2001b), commissioning expert reports (Plantenga *et al.* 2003, Rubery *et al.* 2002), engaging in its own research (European Commission, 2003f), discussing the issue at the High Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming, engaging with Eurostat (Eurostat 2004), gaining the support and approval of the European Council and various EU Presidencies (Luxembourg Presidency 2005) for this programme of work, and presenting reports on gender equality to the Council (European Commission 2004).

The development of indicators, benchmarks and targets is a key part of the European Union process of policy development, especially with the development of the new Open Method of policy Co-ordination (OMC) since 1997. The OMC has been especially important for new policy developments in the European Employment Strategy (EES), based on agreement of hard targets at meetings of the Spring European Council, implemented by policies developed to suit national frameworks, though with exchange and learning between different countries, and monitored through annual reports to Council, using agreed Structural Indicators, with data overseen by Eurostat. Insofar as gender equality issues have been mainstreamed within the EES, then these receive the full attention of Council and Commission combined with data support from Eurostat. The European Employment Strategy was given a key place in European Union policy development by the Lisbon Council in 2000 which established the aim for the EU to be by 2010 "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion". The achievement of this aim is considered to require an effective gender dimension, in particular the reduction of gender gaps in employment, unemployment, and pay. A key target is to increase the employment rate for women to 57% by 2005 (Stockholm Council) and to 60% by 2010 (Lisbon

Council) in the context of raising overall employment rates to 67% in 2005 and 70% by 2010 (European Commission 2003b, 2003c, 2003d).

In the early stages of the European Employment Strategy (EES), when Equal Opportunities was one of four pillars, the Commission developed seven equal opportunities indicators, which were reported annually in the *Joint Employment Report*. These were: EO1, Absolute gender unemployment gap; EO2, Absolute gender employment gap; EO3, Index of gender segregation in occupations; EO4, Index of gender segregation in sectors; EO5, Gender pay gap; EO6, Gender gap in the employment impact of parenthood; and EO7, Employment impact of parenthood (European Commission and European Council 2002a, 2002b).

In the revised and current practice, gender equality is one of ten guidelines in the EES and there is a separate annual report on equality between women and men from the Commission (European Commission 2004). This report provides a general overview of progress and challenges and provides supporting data (provided by Eurostat) on five dimensions: paid work (gender gaps in employment and unemployment, gender share of part-time working), income and pay (gender pay gap and risk of poverty), decision-making power (proportion of women in parliament and managerial positions), knowledge (educational attainment at upper secondary level and percentage of professors who are female), and time (the gap between the hours worked by women and men who have children) (European Commission 2004).

A key set of indicators for policy makers in the EU are the newly developed Structural Indicators, some of which are provided in a gender-disaggregated form: employment growth; employment rate and of older workers; effective average exit age; gender pay gap; life-long learning (adult participation in education and training); unemployment rate; science and technology graduates; at-risk-of-poverty (before and after social transfers); dispersion of regional employment rates; long-term unemployment rate; jobless households.

The EU has begun the process of developing indicators and supporting data in relation to each of the 12 critical areas of the Platform for Action, but this is not yet complete. The extent

of the development varies between the 12 critical different areas, as discussed below.

### **Women and poverty**

There are some gender disaggregated structural indicators developed within the agenda on social inclusion and social cohesion, which are reported annually to the Spring European Council, however, the Presidencies and Councils have not agreed an indicator for Women and Poverty specifically in relation to the Platform for Action. The most important indicator here is “at-risk-of-poverty (before and after social transfers)” and data are adequately and appropriately provided by EUROSTAT. The inclusion of data by age enables the especially disproportionate poverty of women older than working age to be revealed. However, this indicator is predicated on the assumption of equal sharing of resources within households. It is thus likely to understate the poverty of women. The challenge is to develop an indicator and collect data that would capture resource distribution within as well as between households. This is especially important for the development of social protection policies and tax-benefit systems that should provide economic and financial autonomy for women as well as men.

### **Education and training**

There are three structural indicators relevant to women and education and training, which are reported annually to the Spring Council, although the EU has not agreed them as indicators in relation to the Platform for Action. These are “life-long learning” (adult participation in education and training); “science and technology graduates”; and “the educational attainment of women and men”. The data for these are available from EUROSTAT. However, while these indicators capture the degree of participation of women in these forms of education and training, they omit the extent of the segregation of women in areas of education that lead to less well-paid jobs.

### **Women and health**

There are some EU-wide data on “healthy life years” by gender which is used in EU analysis of social inclusion (though not all countries pro-

vide data every year). The UNDP uses life expectancy (adjusted by the five years estimated to be women's biological advantage), which is a reasonable outcome measure. However, there is no agreed indicator on women and health, although this has been under discussion by the High Level Group on Gender Mainstreaming. This topic is not included within the European Employment Strategy, nor is it in the list of Structural Indicators.

### **Violence against women**

Several EU Presidencies (Spanish, Danish, Irish, Greek, Dutch, 2002–2004) have made progress on the development of indicators on violence against women (Presidencia de la Unión Europea 2002a, 2002b). Three indicators on domestic violence have been adopted: the number of female victims; types of victim support; and measures to end violence. Further, there are proposals from the Netherlands for indicators on sexual harassment in the workplace. In the *2002 Joint Report on Social Inclusion*, 10 out of 15 member states cited domestic violence as one of the major challenges in relation to social inclusion concerning gender equality (European Commission and European Council 2002b), but there is no structural indicator on this topic. There are three major outstanding challenges. First, to develop and adopt indicators on the remaining forms of violence against women, for example, rape and other forms of sexual assault, so-called “honour” crimes, and trafficking in women. Second, to refine the definition of domestic violence so that it can be appropriately operationalised, for example to include not only prevalence but also the number of incidents and extent of injury. This is important both to provide an indication of severity of the violence and also to ensure that it can be translated into and thus mainstreamed into crime statistics and the criminal justice system. Third, to collect data that are valid, reliable, and meaningful on an annual basis that is comparable between countries. Despite the progress in the development of indicators, the data to support them does not exist in any member state (although there have been several ad hoc one-off studies), let alone comparable data at the level of EU, nor do there appear to be any plans to collect it. The challenge is to complete the development of

indicators concerning violence against women, and to collect the data necessary to use them.

### **Women and armed conflict**

While there have been discussions about the importance of the presence of women in peace-keeping forces and armies and of the training of all personnel in conflict zones in the special issues that affect women civilians in such locations, there is neither an agreed indicator nor relevant statistical data collected on women and armed conflict.

### **Women and the economy**

The EU has made most progress in the development of indicators in the area of women and the economy. This is strongest whether there are overlaps between the recommendations of Presidencies on Platform for Action indicators with the requirements European Employment Strategy, where there are Structural Indicators that are supported with data collection directly or indirectly under the auspices of Eurostat. Nevertheless, there remain several challenges.

The gender pay gap may appear a straightforward indicator in that it was agreed as an Indicator by the Belgian Presidency and is also a Structural Indicator. Further, the 2003 Council recommended a target of a significant closing of the gender pay gap. While there are some reasonable data to support this, there remains a challenge to collect data that are fully comparable, inclusive and annual in order to support it. For example, some countries provide data for full-time workers only, even though the operational definition of the Structural Indicator includes those working more than 15 hours, thereby in some countries, but not all, excluding a particularly low paying set of workers. There is currently a gap in the main source of data collection, as one survey, the European Community Household Panel (ECHP), stops and its replacement, the Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC), has not yet started, producing a challenge to provide statistics to support the indicator at present.

The EU made progress on indicators of the provision of care for children and other dependants under the French Presidency in 2000 and the Barcelona Council in 2002 set hard targets,

within the European Employment Strategy, on childcare, so that member states should provide by 2010 childcare for at least 90% of children between 3 years and school age by 2010 and for at least 33% of children under 3 years of age. However, there is no structural indicator in this area and, currently, an absence of annually collected cross-nationally comparable data. The challenge is to provide the statistics to support the Presidency's indicators (and indeed the Barcelona targets). Eurostat has announced plans to include questions about care in two future surveys (Eurostat 2004). In the Labour Force Survey for 2005, an ad hoc module will contain a set of questions on how child care and other care responsibilities are dealt with and will also ask about the take up of parental leave. The new Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) survey will, in a couple of years, include questions on childcare. The challenge will be to ensure that the plans are delivered, the questioning sufficient, and that the repeats are sufficiently frequent to enable adequate monitoring (for example, there appears to be no commitment to repeat the LFS questions).

Statistical information on two further topics relevant to gender equality in the economy is managed by Eurostat: the gender gap in employment, and the gender gap in unemployment. Under the early version of the European Employment Strategy, these were both indicators of equal opportunities. Raising the employment rate and reducing the unemployment rate have the status of EU structural indicators. Targets to narrow these gender gaps were set by the Lisbon Council in 2000, which were qualified by age by the Stockholm Council.

### **Women in power and decision-making**

Indicators on women in political decision-making were agreed by the Finnish Presidency in 1999 and on women and men in economic decision-making by the Italian Presidency in 2003. Statistical data are available on: the proportion of women in the single or lower house of Parliament; the proportion of women who are members of national/federal governments; the proportion of women and men among the members of executive boards of the



top 50 firms publicly quoted on national stock exchanges.

### **Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women**

Although EU member states have provided qualitative information about their institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women to the UN as part of the Beijing +10 process, there is no agreed indicator and no statistical or comparable information.

### **Human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment, the girl-child**

There are no agreed indicators for the human rights of women, women and the media, women and the environment and the girl-child, although there have been discussions as to the kind of issues that should be included.

### **Discussion of EU indicators for the Platform for Action**

In 1998, the EU pledged to develop a simple suite of indicators to monitor progress on the Platform for Action to which its member states signed up in 1995. While there has been some progress in developing such indicators and the statistical information needed to support them, this programme of work is as yet incomplete. In some of the 12 critical areas the EU has agreed indicators, but in some of these the data to support them are not available. The development of indicators has progressed most in areas associated with the economy, though even here there are major gaps, especially in relation to the adequacy of data. In several areas, there are no agreed indicators. In others, such as violence against women, while there is agreement on the broad nature of the indicators, there is an absence of data to support them. The EU has most developed indicators in the area of the economy, broadly defined to encompass education, social inclusion and poverty, hence extending across several of the 12 critical areas, not only "women in the economy". However, in the remaining areas, where the policy lead lies with the member states rather than the EU, the

development of indicators and supporting comparable data is much less developed.

The initial appearance of the model of gender equality implied by the EU indicators is that of equality through sameness. The target on narrowing the gender employment gap makes it clear that the aim is to increase the employment rate of women. However, equality through sameness is not unequivocally to a male standard, since the priority and nature of the commitment to the reconciliation of working and family life has often meant the regulation of the work-place so as to enable the combination of employment and caring. Thus there is, to a limited extent, a strategy of transformation underlying the EU model of gender equality. The tension between these two strategies underlies many of the debates about the nature of gender equality in the EU and the targets and indicators that are selected for priority attention.

## **Conclusions**

In order to be able to assess the progress of the world's women it is necessary to produce relevant indicators and gender-disaggregated statistics. These are a key part of the institutional machineries agreed in the 1995 UN Platform for Action. While the Millennium Development Goals attempted to produce indicators and some (limited) targets appropriate for developing countries, there is much less development in relation to the more developed countries, despite the commitment of the EU in 1998 to do this. In most of the 12 critical areas there are as yet no widely agreed indicators appropriate for the more developed countries, and in even fewer are there appropriate data to support this. Insofar as there are data it is often uneven, collected on an ad hoc basis and inappropriate for comparisons between countries and over time.

There are two underlying issues that affect the process of development of such indicators. First there are technical difficulties in creating robust information that is comparable across different countries. The overcoming of these technical difficulties requires resources and commitment. Second, there are theoretical questions as to the nature of the model of gender equality. There is more than one preferred vision of gender equality. There are three types of approach to



this, varying as to the extent to which the standards are based on an assumption of sameness, of the equal valuation of different contributions, or the transformation of gender relations.

The EU has demonstrated priorities in the development of some indicators before others. The EU has a three-fold dynamic in the policy process for the development of gender-sensitive indicators and supporting data. First is the commitment to the UN Platform for Action; second, is the commitment to gender equality and gender mainstreaming; third, are the requirements of the EES to develop the European economy. As a consequence of these developments, in some areas the EU has been a global leader alongside the UNDP in the production of indicators to monitor the progress of women. However, progress in the EU has been in very specific fields, notably those associated with the economy, broadly defined, and primarily as part of the Lisbon Agenda and the European Employment Strategy, and in some other areas the commitment to develop the suite of indicators to monitor the development of the Platform for Action remains unfulfilled. Where the gender mainstreaming agenda overlaps with other agendas, such as the expansion of employment in order to boost GDP, then there has been considerable development of institutional machinery, indicators and statistics. Where the

gender mainstreaming agenda is more specific to gender equality, justice and women's human rights, then the development of institutional machinery, indicators, and statistics has been considerably less.

The more fundamental issue is that of the model of gender equality that underpins the development of the indicators. A key issue here is whether it is assumed that paid employment constitutes a universal or contingent route towards the advancement of women. Some of the indices that were first developed which integrated several domains, such as the UNDP GDI, were heavily weighted towards women's paid employment and were criticised by some for this weighting. The lesson from this has been to develop and report indicators separately for different areas, rather than to integrate them into a single index. Such an approach allows for the testing of various theories as to the nature of the relationship between gender relations in different domains.

The development of gendered indicators outside employment and its related fields, such as violence against women, has been slow. Only when there is the full development of indicators and the quantitative data to support them in all the major areas will it be possible to test fully theories of gender inequality and to measure uneven progress in the advancement of women.

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