

**African countries hone in on gender statistics to accelerate progress**

 **on Africa Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals**

**Casablanca, November 11.** Halfway to the deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2030, the availability of reliable and timely data to measure progress on all 17 goals remains a challenge. In the case of gender, data to monitor progress on nearly 20 percent of gender-related indicators and sub-indicators globally is missing altogether. In many instances, resource and technical constraints make the availability of gender data even more of a challenge in Africa. This is hindering the ability to effectively track progress towards both global and regional gender-related goals.

The 5th Africa Gender Statistics Forum (AGSF) held in Casablanca, Morocco this week brought together more than 120 policymakers and data experts from gender ministries and national statistical offices in nearly 40 African countries to deliberate on progress, challenges, and prospects in gender data in the region. The Forum reviewed the status of gender data production and use in Africa towards meeting regional and global development agendas and improving the lives of women and girls on the continent.

“We cannot stop using gender data for evidence. We must continue to push the boundaries to ensure that the evidence we have changes lives,” said Ms. Keiso Matashane-Marite Chief, Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment, UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

The empowerment of women and girls is one of the priority areas of Agenda 2063, Africa’s development blueprint, which is aimed at transforming Africa into the global powerhouse of the future.

Concluded on 11th November, the week-long AGSF was organized from the recognition that without gender data, it is not possible to properly understand and improve the status of women and girls.

Although more gender data is available now compared to September last year when the Forum took place in Nairobi, Kenya, data gaps remain; for instance, persisting lack of data on women’s access to land and to digital technologies continues to make the related realities of millions of women and girls invisible.

Rich country experiences from the continent at the AGSF have emphasized the importance of leveraging existing data to meet some of the gender data gaps to influence policy and other decisions. This includes administrative data from birth, death, health, and other records that public and private agencies collect in their day-to-day operations. Effectively harnessing such data for evidence-based responses and decisions will call for innovation in applying available tools and tactics to make the most of existing data.

“In Uganda, the demand for gender data is high and sometimes overstretches the available technical and human capacity to produce this data,” said Ms. Leila Ssali, Senior Economist, Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, Uganda.

“Tapping into complementary sources of data beyond surveys and censuses is thus an innovative approach that will be critical in meeting some of this demand,” said Ms. Ssali.

“African countries should focus on alternative sources of statistical information by accelerating the deployment of BIG Data and artificial intelligence. It is essential to prepare the ground for the use of these new technologies to improve the production, analysis and dissemination of gender-sensitive statistics,” said Mr Ayache KHELLAF, Secretary General at the High Commission for Planning (HCP) in Morocco.

Delegates have emphasized that harmonizing and strengthening the use of gender statistics is fundamental to improving the status of girls and women. There has also been sharp focus on strong, durable systems and strategic partnerships as vehicles to catapult the region beyond producing and using gender data for evidence to delivering transformational change in the Africa’s dynamic context.

Deliberations also included emerging gender statistics themes such as guidelines for the measurement of technology-facilitated gender-based violence (GBV) and the measurement of environmental and climate change gender data.

Due to contextual constraints, gender data is even more scarce in fragile or conflict-affected countries where the need for it is even more pressing to properly inform appropriate humanitarian responses.

“To help inform the right interventions, African countries must continue to think and work through statistical systems that can ensure timely gender data even during human and natural disasters,” said Dr. Isabella Schmidt, Gender Statistics Specialist, UN Women East and Southern Africa.

“As the impacts of climate change becomes increasingly visible in the daily lives of people, it is imperative that we understand how they are affecting women and men differently.” said Ms. Michka Seroussi, Gender Statistics Specialist, UN Women West and Central Africa.

“This will be essential if we are to ensure that women and girls are not, once again, left behind,” said Ms. Seroussi.

“Conflicts often intersect with other crises such as climate change creating complex sets of challenges. However, amidst all the tales of suffering are stories of hope that can help to direct us towards lasting solutions for which women are often at the center,” said Papa Seck, UN Women Chief of Research and Data Section.

“As statisticians and data specialists, it is our duty to ensure that the data we produce and analyze shows all these vantage points. As policymakers, it is our duty to ensure that the data is used to improve people’s lives,” Mr. Seck said.