

**SAARC Gender Database:
Mapping Progress of Women in the South Asia Region
(A Concept Note)**

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1. Introduction:

The genesis for the SAARC Gender Database dates back to the Beijing Platform for Action endorsed by governments, which among other critical areas of concerns spelt out the need for sex, disaggregated data. In successive Beijing Biennial Review meetings facilitated by UNIFEM to keep the Beijing torch alive among governments of SAARC countries, concerns regarding inadequate sex disaggregated data and gender sensitive analysis were continuously identified as thrust areas of concern which needed further strengthening. The Bhutan Forward Moving Strategy, 2003, also echoed the need for having adequate mechanisms and tools to monitor progress of women including the need for sex-disaggregated data according to South Asia region specific indicators.

Similar urgency for compiling sex disaggregated information especially in the context of women's work and violence against women and to monitor the progress of women against discrimination was urged by the CEDAW Committee.

Further, the Millennium Development Goals have also identified a number of gender responsive indicators to be monitored for targets to be achieved by 2015. While there is flexibility for countries to identify alternative indicators, the need for development of a mechanism for statistical monitoring of the progress cannot be over emphasized.

While the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between SAARC Secretariat and UNIFEM in December 2001 was a landmark in the history of the South Asian region as it provided a collaborative role for SAARC and UNIFEM to:

i) Mutually cooperate in promoting the goals of Gender Equality based upon the empowerment approach in terms of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) and the Beijing Plus Five

And

ii) Promote mutual learning and cross fertilization among developing countries for effectively tackling the challenges relating to gender discrimination, women's human rights and women's participation,

The critical point to be noted in this context is that the MoU identified the “Development of a SAARC Gender Database on progress towards gender equality in

the South Asia region” as a key area of understanding between SAARC and UNIFEM and provides UNIFEM the mandate to take this forward.

The development of the South Asia Gender Database has the concurrence of the governments of the seven SAARC countries.

UNIFEM is extremely honored to participate in this historic endeavor to bring together the gender profile of the region in what could be a ONE-STOP SHOP for gender data in the region.

2. Scope:

The Gender database is not to be looked into as any other statistical database based on traditional indicators alone. It is to include both *tangible and intangible* primary indicators to be identified after careful study. Based on regional practices, new additional indicators also need to be identified according to the *mandate* of the **Bhutan Forward Moving Strategies, 2003**. As the development of the SAARC Gender Database is not only for the purpose of dissemination of gender data only and has a much greater role for policy advocacy on burning gender issues. Data has to be tabulated, analyzed, updated from time to time, addressed for policy advocacy and be monitored on a continuous basis. Analysis of the datasets of the proposed gender database should also be able to produce the following outputs:

- a) Provide substantive inputs to the Progress of South Asian Women – a biannual publication.
- b) Documenting existing empowerment strategies along with their impact for determination of more effective future strategies.
- c) Analysis of Good practices to empower women and end gender discrimination.

3. Framework:

3.1 The development of the Gender Database should be based on well articulated conceptualized framework taking into accounts both quantitative as well as qualitative information. For making appropriate cross tabulations, well defined set of classificatory variables are also to be identified. Both primary indicators and classificatory variables should be provided with standardized codes for uniform application across the countries of the region and over a time horizon. Technically speaking, the proposed Gender database should serve as a **single-window one stop gender data-shop of SAARC countries**. Hereafter, it will designate as “**G-Datashop**”.

3.2 **The single window “G-Datashop” should have the following essential features:**

- a) Have an inbuilt feature of *data validation* for maintaining data integrity in the Gender Database.
- b) Enable data “**storage and retrieval**” for both quantitative and qualitative gender indicators including metadata and reports of gender based studies.
- c) Have *analytical capability* along with development of tabulations according to defined cross classification - both special and time series.
- d) Integrate *GIS (Geographic Information System) application* by superimposing statistical database at national and sub-national levels.
- e) Include current status of various gender promotion activities initiated by SAARC Secretariat, UNIFEM and member countries to **keep the Beijing torch alive**.
- f) Include documents on *women’s movements* around the globe.
- g) Include *legal and policy changes* and landmark judgments made to end gender discrimination.
- h) Include various important *gender responsive agreements* and materials on international and regional conventions.
- i) Feature a *Bibliographic* Database of gender related studies and papers .
- j) Enable *LINKING to* other related web databases of various organizations- both national and international.
- k) Provide for ‘*expansibility*’ for future upgradation of the scope and coverage of the “G-datashop”.
- l) Enable both *export and import of data* .
- m) Include inbuilt facility for ensuring *data integrity against unwanted intrusion by unauthorized persons*.
- n) Enable use as a *webpage of “G-datashop” (the said website may hereafter be called as G-website)* of SAARC countries along with “Search” facilities and FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions)
- o) Provide a platform for *inter-country comparison* of progress of work in the area of gender equality and gender discrimination.

- p) Last but not least the “*G-datashop*” should provide a *Unified Gender Information System (UGIS)* as well as function as an effective *user friendly TOOL for policy advocacy, strategy and programme development for gender equality.*

4. Task Ahead:

4.1 In order to carry out the above project of “**G-datashop**”, it is necessary to :

- a) **Identify the data-situation** in the region and the need for commissioning short studies
- b) **Identify list of primary tangible and intangible indicators**
- c) **Identify new primary indicators, which** throw up new paradigm of gender equality.
- d) **Initiate studies where necessary to address gaps and to complement/validate data**
- e) **Identify classificatory variables** for generation of cross tabulation
- f) **Develop standardised coding system** for all indicators / variables.
- g) Develop **validation rules** for checking the integrity of datasets to be imported into the database.
- h) Screen **research and other case studies** and documents on gender issues which could be included in the “**G-datashop**”.
- i) **Map** the programme activities, strategies, investments and materials of national governments.
- j) Prepare **Bibliography of gender literature**
- k) List the **internet sites to be linked** with Gender website (*G-website*).
- l) Development of a Demo-project for testing.
- m) Identify mechanism for **regular updating and maintenance** of the Gender database and G-website.
- n) Suggest how to **bridge gender data gaps** in the SAARC region and the statistical methodologies thereof.
- o) **Ensure timely implementation of the project.**

5. Capacity Building:

5.1 Data collection of many gender responsive indicators may not be easy since the conventional methodology of survey design may not give realistic picture. This calls for identification of appropriate data collection tools for which it is necessary **to assess the need for capacity building** in the region.

6. Equipment:

6.1 The need for appropriate hardware and software is another crucial element for the project. This inter-alia include a high-end computer server with open server system and redundant RAID level-5 Hard Disks of appropriate capacity. There should be appropriate security systems such as Firewall to protect the system as well as the data against possible virus attack and hacking.

7. Expert group:

7.1 In view of the multiplicity of issues involved, *setting up of an Expert group of Gender-Statisticians with experience in large scale data processing and Gender researchers* might go a long way for timely execution of the project.