HDI AND GENDER SENSITIVITY

The **Gender-related Development Index** (GDI) is an indication of the standard of living in a country, developed by the United Nations (UN). It is one of the five indicators used by the United Nations Development Programme in its annual Human Development Report. It aims to show the inequalities between men and women in the following areas: long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living.The United Nations (UN) was previously responsible for a system of national accounts that measured only market activities: the United Nations System of National Accounts (UNSNA). However, the UN now argues that existing measures of poverty place too much emphasis on income. During the 1990s, when the UN had a major focus on poverty, it developed a Human Development Index (HDI). According to this index, poverty is defined as a lack of choices and opportunities for a tolerable life. The UN argues, in the context of this index, that poverty has several dimensions: short life, illiteracy, exclusion and lack of access to public and private resources. Respect and social standing are also part of the HDI (United Nations Development Project 1997:5). Arguably, income is less relevant if someone has access to clean water, land, seeds, housing materials and a close community with a rich cultural life. According to the HDI, poverty exists when these are lacking.

The HDI contains a Human Poverty Index (HPI). The HPI for developing countries uses three indicators of deprivation: mortality (short life span), illiteracy and a composite index of access to health services (including safe water, and malnutrition among children under five). The data within this index is not disaggregated by gender (Fakuda-Parr 1999, Durbin 1999), but Elizabeth Durbin (1999:106-107) argues that the HPI could be made gender-sensitive and thus able to reflect women's poverty. Many of the social statistics that would facilitate such an analysis are already collected in many of the poorer countries. Statistics on maternal mortality rates are one such indicator: the necessary statistics are available in most countries and give an indication of women's health status and access to health care. Other information is available which reflect women's status in society: for example, policies on marriage, divorce, contraception, the prevention of genital mutilation, women's representation in politics; access to credit, land and housing; and the levels of reported domestic violence, rape, murder and suicide of women (Durbin 1999:107).

In short, the HDI has some potential for becoming more gender sensitive and thus capturing dimensions of poverty which are not usually included in studies of poverty, inequality and well-being world-wide. These additional elements are likely to be most useful for measuring the success (or otherwise) of third world nations in improving levels of well-being amongst their female population.

The Human Development Index, whilst potentially useful for research on women's levels of poverty, inequality and well-being in the poorer nations, is less easily used by the richer nations. This also makes comparisons difficult, and disguises the extent to which women may face similar issues in the richer and poorer worlds. Women in the OECD nations are likely to fare well according to many of the indices used in the HPI, such as access to education and clean water; yet poverty, inequality and related problems of poor health still face many women within the richer nations. For example, it has been found that even in the affluent USA, many people living on welfare benefits and low wages, especially women raising children alone, experience hunger (Eisinger 1998, Edin and Lein 1997:48-50). The question therefore is: how do we find ways of conceptualising women's poverty, inequality and well-being that are easily applicable to both richer and poorer nations and permit comparisons to be made?

Gender Empowerment Measure

The **Gender Empowerment Measure** (GEM) is a measure of inequalities between men's and women's opportunities in a country. It combines inequalities in three areas: political participation and decision making, economic participation and decision making, and power over economic resources. It is one of the five indicators used by the United Nations Development Programme in its annual Human Development Report.

Methodology

Calculating the GEM involves several steps. First percentages for females and males are calculated in each area. The first area is the number of parliamentary seats held. The second area is measured by two sub-components: a) legislators, senior officials, and managers, and b) professional and technical positions. The third area is measured by the estimated earned income (at PPP US$).

Second, for each area, the pair of gender percentages, are combined into an Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentage (EDEP) that rewards gender equality and penalizes inequality. It is calculated as the harmonic mean of the two components. The EDEP for economic participation is the unweighted average of the EDEP for each of it's sub-components. The EDEP for income is computed from gender sub-values that are indexed to a scale from 100 to 40,000 (PPP US$).
Finally, the GEM is the unweighted average of the three Equally Distributed Equivalent Percentages.

Source: http://www.msd.govt.nz/documents/publications/msd/journal/issue14/14-gender-sensitive-concepts.doc
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_Empowerment_Measure