



Wikigender: Initiating Dialogue on Gender Equality

by Denis Drechsler

- ◆ Wikigender is the OECD's first website based on "wiki" technology
- ◆ The site spearheads the OECD's new communication strategy to use web 2.0 tools to reach out to new communities
- ◆ Involving the public in the gender debate will inform and support reform

Have you ever wondered how many women are in paid employment compared to men? We know they get unequal wages, but just how unequal is their pay? Meanwhile, who are the managers, and what is their gender makeup? Are women and men entering the higher levels of state in equal numbers?

These are reasonable questions. They are also important, since the answers to them and similar questions determine how policy makers act to improve women's social and economic development. The answers also tell us how successful policies have been in reducing gender disparities, which is not only central from a human rights perspective, but has wide implications for the economic health of a country.

Gender Statistics – The Great Unknown

The surprise is that little is known about gender equality around the world. Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals, which seek gender equality in school enrolment, labour market participation and political representation, is hampered by the paucity of sex-disaggregated data. Where it exists, such data is frequently not comparable across countries and rarely provided on a periodic basis.

Moreover, gender statistics tend to cover only a small range of issues, including selected labour market indicators; information on education and health; and women's empowerment. Statistics on other forms of gender discrimination, for example those based on restrictive social norms and family laws, have largely been ignored by international organisations and national statistical offices.

No reliable international data exists on violence against women, for example, a central concern in the debate on gender equality. The OECD Development Centre's Gender, Institutions and Development (GID) database (www.oecd.org/dev/gender/gid) is a notable exception.

Introducing Wikigender

Creating a comprehensive database like the GID is a huge and valuable step, but it suffers from its very nature: its data comes from official sources. There is a need to go further. This is where *Wikigender* (www.wikigender.org) comes in. More than a web site, the first OECD "wiki" provides an effective means of reaching out to civil society and engaging in dialogue on gender equality at all levels.

Wikigender Logo



Wikigender offers an open forum for sharing and exchanging information on the situation of men and women around the world, encouraging a frank discussion of the elements that prevent gender equality. Wikigender welcomes active participation by users who can contribute to the content of the website by posting comments, editing articles or creating new entries into this knowledge database.

The initiative is the first and most visible expression of the OECD's new ICT strategy built on web 2.0 tools such as "wikis". According to this strategy, the OECD must enhance its role of a knowledge builder in a world where people and institutions are constantly bombarded by information. The Organisation is developing a true knowledge management approach: improving information classification; reducing duplication; and facilitating to find and target information.

Since its launch in March 2008, Wikigender has already become a rich repository of data and statistics, covering topics such as the political representation of women in national governments, the role of men in child upbringing, and the importance of women for economic development. Users have access to more than 350 articles and documents, including detailed country reports on gender equality from many OECD member and non-member countries. During its first months of operation the site received more than 100 000 visitors.

Wikigender follows a two-layer approach, which clearly distinguishes it from other web sites based on "wiki" technology such as the well-known online encyclopaedia Wikipedia. Content from official sources (e.g. the OECD) is highlighted and protected. New information which is posted in the open Wikigender layer is subject to review from the more than 300 specialists who have become registered users, authorised to suggest changes to the content as well as to create or upload new articles and documents. The site is therefore screened from potentially unreliable content, thus ensuring highest levels of quality.

Beyond Data Sharing – Promoting Active Change

In addition to improving knowledge on the situation of men and women around the world, Wikigender helps to raise awareness of the nature and extent of gender discrimination; an important prerequisite to tackle the prejudice and distrust that underpin inequalities. Involving people in this mutual learning experience will create local allies such as workers' unions, business associations and teachers. They can then help build pressure for change, while garnering wider public support and dispelling inevitable fears of reforms among citizens. Only by ensuring the active involvement of the public in the debate on women's social and economic empowerment will we have a better understanding of the elements that prevent gender equality and the policies that will be able to counter them. *Wikigender* is one important initiative in this endeavour.

References:

Wikigender online at www.wikigender.org