



The Gender Equity Index

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Social Watch is a network committed to the eradication of poverty, equitable distribution of wealth and the realisation of human rights. In a way, Social Watch is a “big brother”, making sure Governments comply with internationally agreed upon commitments. The network is made up of more than 400 citizens’ organisations committed to social, economic and gender justice.

According to the Social Watch, the Gender Equity Index (GEI) is in place to position and classify countries according to a selection of indicators relevant to gender inequity, and based on internationally available and comparable information. The index was created in 2004, and broadly speaking is based on economic activity, empowerment and education. The economic dimension of the index measures gaps in women's participation in the labour market and gaps in the salaries earned by women, compared to those of men. From an education perspective, the GEI looks at enrolment gaps between boys and girls. The index measures equity based on a scale ranging from 0 to 100, with lower values indicating greater inequity and higher values indicating greater equity. GEI is said to present information on 90% of the world population: 40 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, 36 in Europe, 28 in Latin America and the Caribbean, 19 in the Middle East and North Africa, 18 in East Asia and the Pacific, 6 in Central Asia, 5 in South Asia and 2 in North America.

FOUR KEY MEASURES

According to the GEI, there are four key measures and areas of action for the promotion of gender equity. These include legislation, finance and budget, education and affirmative action policies. Each area represents a vital aspect in promoting gender equity. It should be noted, however, that measuring the development of gender equity within a country is not easy. There are a number of factors that can make it difficult to accomplish, and measuring gender equity itself is a complicated process.

- Legislation is a sign of will and commitment to gender equity. The law ensures that when gender programmes are in place, they should be monitored and evaluated. However, since gender inequality runs through the mainstream of society, there is a need for the reformation of legislation. Hence, the strategy of gender mainstreaming was established to reform legislation towards being more gender sensitive, so as to acknowledge and address gender issues;
- The promotion of gender equity can only be achieved with financial commitment, meaning that resources must be allocated for efficient gender equality programmes;
- Socialisation within the gender context involves a process whereby men and women are taught about the roles played by both sexes, which are often discriminatory in nature. If gender prejudices are to be eradicated, there is a need for education, which is the third important area in the promotion of gender equity. Through education, men and women are introduced to a gender perspective that is non-discriminatory; and
- Affirmative action policies are a last measure in the effective promotion of gender equity, where women are given preferential treatment in order to promote their empowerment.

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Countries are measured according to the above areas, so as to observe whether there has been commitment and progress in the promotion of gender equity. It is of paramount importance that before these four areas are implemented, gender statistics and data are gathered and assessed, to allocate necessary resources accordingly.

RECENT TRENDS

The most recent trends produced between 2004 and 2007 show Sweden, Finland, Rwanda and Norway reported to occupy the highest positions in the 2007 GEI. These countries register the least inequality between women and men. What seems to have made these countries successful in this regard is the effective application of affirmative action policies, with a focus on the political quota legislation and labour market equity. It is noteworthy, within the African context, that Rwanda was ranked third in these latest rankings.

RWANDA'S COMMITMENT

Rwanda's success in improving the state of gender equity, despite the fact that it is not one of the more developed countries, has been its political will and commitment to the process. It is evident that high economic development does not guarantee an effective gender equity programme. The following were reported as examples of rapid change that took place in Rwanda over recent years:

- 30% of decision-making related positions have been assigned to women;
- Local funds and micro-credits have been provided for production projects led by women;
- In 2003, Article 187 of the new Rwandan Constitution, formalised equity promotion structures such as the National Council of Women; and
- A Gender Issues Monitoring Office was created, to facilitate the participation of women in public life and to ensure that development initiatives are egalitarian in generating benefits for both sexes.

All these areas are evident in the legislation, leadership and the economy of the country. It is reported that in the Chamber of Deputies, seats held by women increased to 48.8%, with a significant increase in the participation of women at ministerial and local government levels. Rwanda should therefore be viewed as a role model to other African countries for bringing about such positive change in the area of gender equity.

AFRICAN DISSAPPOINTMENT

Ten countries were branded with the worst GEI performance over the same time period. These countries included Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Morocco, Benin, the Central African Republic, Togo, Chad, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Yemen. Again, within the African context, it is rather disappointing to see that most of these countries are in Africa. The most inequitable dimension found in these countries was the aspect of empowerment, which is based on the proportion of female professional and technical workers, legislators, high officials and directors, and the number of women in government decision-making positions at the ministerial level.

It will be interesting to see the next GEI standings report, as countries and regions are monitored and thus held responsible for the promotion of gender equity. Hopefully more African countries will have followed the example set down by Rwanda, and will have made some significant progress in this incredibly important area.



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