
Best practices and challenges in monitoring progress towards gender equality: The case of an online university

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Gender indicators as tools for reflecting gender inequalities in society

According to the international literature (Moser, 2007; UN 2001, 2006), **gender indicators** are defined by the following characteristics:

1. They reflect **gender issues**
2. They can be **quantitative** (i.e., presented **by sex** as a primary and overall classification) or **qualitative** (i.e., refer to women's and men's experiences and views, as well as to other forms of qualitative information)¹
3. They adequately reflect the **diversity** of women and men
4. Data collection methods take into account **stereotypes** and social and cultural factors that may induce gender bias in the data

They are produced to reflect **gender roles, relations, and inequalities** in society

The importance of developing gender indicators in academic institutions

For academic institutions, gender indicators can be useful in the processes of:

1. **Gender auditing** the institution
 2. **Identifying** the existing gender inequalities
 3. **Informing the development of evidence-based** gender policies: gender equality plans and institutional measures or strategies such as affirmative action, gender mainstreaming, etc.
 4. **Monitoring and evaluating** the outcomes of gender policies and **identifying** the barriers to achieving gender equality
 5. **Giving visibility** to gender inequalities within the institution
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The importance of developing gender indicators in academic institutions – cont.

6. Raising awareness¹ about the importance of addressing gender inequality and the need to take actions (EC, 2012)

- a) Among **governing bodies** and people occupying **decision-making positions**, including the president, vice-presidents, deans, and executive directors – that is, those responsible of deciding which institutional change strategies should be implemented²
- b) Among **staff** – that is, those responsible of supporting the implementation of these strategies³

7. Promoting a culture of social accountability⁴ and transparency within the institution

The case of the UOC: World's first online university

The UOC is an **online** university, created in 1995, with an educational model based on **e-learning**

The UOC in **figures**:

- a) 54,059 students (54.5% women, 45.5% men) and 58,792 graduates¹
- b) 3,692 teaching staff¹
- c) 306 official and UOC-certified qualifications¹
- d) 6,438 virtual classrooms¹
- e) 2,262,127 virtual campus users (annual data)¹
- f) 157,839 queries²
- g) 2,625 complaints²

A **large volume of quantitative and qualitative data** is generated each academic year, most of which are automatically stored in the university databases

These institutional data are **crucial for monitoring progress towards gender equality**

¹Academic year 2016-2017; ²Academic year 2014-2015

The case of the UOC: The challenge of transforming institutional raw data into gender knowledge

Although having access to institutional data and automatically storing it is a **positive first step** in the analysis of gender indicators, it is not enough

Data is NOT knowledge

Learning analytics challenge: Data alone are not worth; they have to be **contextualised** and **transformed into gender knowledge**



The case of the UOC: Actions with regards to gender indicators

ACTION 1 (*completed*). Develop a **framework of gender indicators** that allows us to operationalise and interpret the quantitative and qualitative data from a gender perspective

Define targets and objectives for the measurement of gender equality

1. Academic
activity

2. Research
activity

3. Human
resources

The case of the UOC: Actions with regards to gender indicators – cont.

Indicators for measuring gender equality in academic activities (examples)

- a) Number of students enrolled (new and renewal)
 - b) Mean of credits taken
 - c) Student performance¹ rate
 - d) Graduation rate
 - e) Dropout rate
 - f) Number of subjects in undergraduate and graduate programs that focus on gender topics and/or that partially address gender topics
 - g) Treatment of gender-related topics in textbooks
 - h) Language-related gender marks in textbooks such as description of people in masculine form (*los alumnos*), in both masculine and feminine form (*los/as alumnos/as*), or in generic form (*el alumnado*)
- DISAGGREGATED BY SEX

¹Credits completed/Credits taken

The case of the UOC: Actions with regards to gender indicators – cont.

Indicators for measuring gender equality in research activities (examples)

- a) Composition of research teams (number and hierarchy)
- b) Composition of the staff responsible of the management of research (number and hierarchy)
- c) Scientific production: peer-reviewed articles, books and book chapters, reports, etc.
- d) Number of research grants obtained
- e) Number of dissertations supervised
- f) Composition of dissertation committees
- g) Number of research teams specialised in gender topics and/or that partially address gender topics

DISAGGREGATED
BY SEX AND AGE

The case of the UOC: Actions with regards to gender indicators – cont.

Indicators for measuring gender equality in human resources (examples)

- a) Composition of governing bodies (number and hierarchy)
- b) Composition of staff (number and hierarchy)
- c) Parental leaves, reduction of working hours, permits for telework
- d) Type of contract: part-time vs. full-time, fixed-term/temporary vs. permanent
- e) Staff training: number of people, number of hours, cost
- f) Staff selection

DISAGGREGATED
BY SEX AND AGE

The case of the UOC: Actions with regards to gender indicators – cont.

ACTION 2 (*completed*). Detect the **main gaps in the available data** on gender indicators, including data which have not been disaggregated by sex to date (scientific production authorship), data which are difficult to process (content and linguistic features of textbooks), and missing data (indicators for which no information is available such as the number of subjects that partially address gender topics)

Address the existing gaps in the data

Improve the current institutional gender information systems

The case of the UOC: Actions with regards to gender indicators – cont.

ACTION 3 (*in progress*). Improve the institution data capacity by establishing **mechanisms** by which data informing gender indicators that are obtained only on demand can be routinely generated and easy accessible

Institutionalise and give sustainability to the gender-related data management procedures

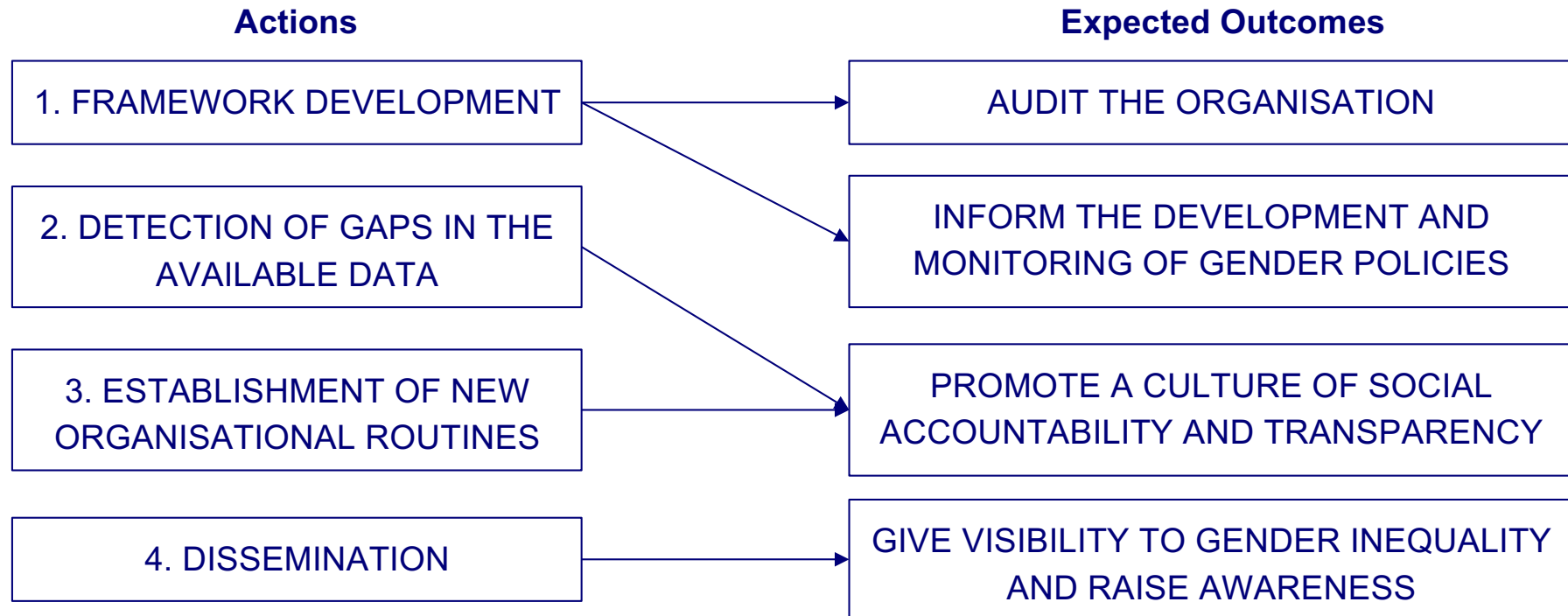
The case of the UOC: Actions with regards to gender indicators – cont.

ACTION 4 (*in progress*). **Disseminate** gender indicators by preparing and distributing thematic factsheets through institutional communication channels (i.e., institutional emails, newsletter, news in the Virtual Campus)

Make gender equality visible and part of the institution's identity and culture

Raise awareness and strengthen commitment on gender-related issues among the governing bodies and staff

The case of the UOC: Actions with regards to gender indicators – cont.



Foster institutional change: remove the obstacles to gender equality that are inherent to the institution itself, and adapt institutional practices (EIGE, 2016; Moser, 2007)




The case of the UOC: Main challenges encountered

CHALLENGE 1. All forms of research activities and outputs registered in the research data repository **are not disaggregated** by sex unless such disaggregation is done manually. **Financial resources** would have to be invested for designing a system which would take the sex variable into account

CHALLENGE 2. Human resources-related indicators are difficult to obtain due to **legal and privacy issues**

CHALLENGE 3. Being an online university, the news channels are very centralised and contained a wide range of topics. This context renders difficult that the news and data dissemination on gender issues **be given a priority**, as **they compete** with other topics

Thank you!
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