

## **Glossary of Terms used in the Equity Scorecard**

Some of the terms that will be used frequently in this workshop are described below:

Variable: a variable is a characteristic that can be measured, and can have different values, or levels.

Using the equity scorecard, will examine relationships between educational variables and sociological variables.

Examples of variables within the education system include:

- admissions to a university
- number of students achieving a BSc degree
- number of students who withdraw from a degree programme during their first year of study

Sociological characteristics that vary amongst students include:

- socio-economic background
- gender
- religion
- age

We will compare patterns of educational attainment for different social groups in the different types of university (public or private). Our research site variables are:

- public university
- private university

Raw datasets provide measurements of variables we have chosen to study.

Absolute number: In some cases, the value of a variable is expressed as an absolute number. For example, the number of applications made to Cape Coast University in 2003/2004 was 16408. Absolute numbers on their own are difficult to interpret. For example, the number of female students entering university may be rising, but the gap between men and women may also be increasing.

Indicator: an indicator is used to measure, or quantify, complex phenomena. Indicators simplify, and 'stand proxy' for complex processes.

An indicator is an aggregate of raw and processed data. It helps us to interpret changes and differences between variables.

In this project, we will identify indicators that can be used to measure three complex processes in higher education, namely

- access
- retention
- achievement.

We will develop indicators based on educational variables that are considered important within a university context and for which raw data is available or can be collected for different social groups.

An *equity* indicator measures an educational outcome among a target group of students in relation to a reference group, such as the student body as a whole. As a result, indicators are often expressed as percentages and ratios.

Equity indicators measure the extent to which a group of students gains access to institutions, programmes and resources in higher education. They can be deliberately designed to measure the distribution of educational outcomes, so that equity or inequity can be determined.

Examples of equity indicators could be:

- the proportion of enrolments who are female
- the proportion of students studying for a B Commerce who came from disadvantaged schools
- the proportion of students who achieve a first class degree who are female students from disadvantaged schools.

*Index*: An index is an aggregated measure that combines indicators. Indices can be used to describe the performance of an institution, region or economic sector<sup>1</sup>.

In the equity scorecard, equity scores may be calculated by combining indicators. For example, an equity index can compare the proportion of the target group with an educational outcome, to the proportion of the target group in a particular reference population. This determines whether educational outcomes are equitably distributed. Mapping indexes across processes can reveal where shifts in equity happen.

For example, if 25% of students at the university are mature students, then, if 25% of first class degrees are attained by mature students, this might be viewed as an equitable outcome (equity index =1). However, this could still hide inequities when comparing different programmes. What percentage of first class degrees in Business management are mature students? So, indexes help us compare indicators, and to compare different groups, or institutions or even countries in ways that are 'relatively' fair.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition used by International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD).