



GENDER EQUALITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Main Messages

GENDER EQUALITY MATTERS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Gender equality is a core development objective in its own right. It is also smart economics. Greater gender equality can enhance productivity, improve development outcomes for the next generation, and make institutions more representative.

- **Productivity gains.** Women now represent 40 percent of the global labor force, 43 percent of the world's agricultural labor force, and more than half the world's university students. Productivity will be raised if their skills and talents are used more fully. For example, if women farmers were to have the same access as men to fertilizers and other inputs, maize yields would increase by almost one-sixth in Malawi and Ghana. And eliminating barriers that discriminate against women working in certain sectors or occupations could increase labor productivity by as much as 25 percent in some countries.
- **Improved outcomes for the next generation.** Greater control over household resources by women can enhance countries' growth prospects by changing spending patterns in ways that benefit children. And improvements in women's education and health have been linked to better outcomes for their children in countries as varied as Brazil, Nepal, Pakistan, and Senegal.
- **More representative decision making.** Gender equality matters for society more broadly.

Empowering women as economic, political, and social actors can change policy choices and make institutions more representative of a range of voices. In India, giving power to women at the local level led to increases in the provision of public goods, such as water and sanitation, which mattered more to women.

DEVELOPMENT HAS CLOSED SOME GENDER GAPS ...

The disadvantages faced by women and girls that have shrunk most rapidly over the past quarter century include:

- **Educational enrollment.** Gender gaps in primary education have closed in almost all countries. In secondary education, these gaps are closing rapidly and have reversed in many countries, especially in Latin America, the Caribbean, and East Asia—but it is now boys and young men who are disadvantaged. Among developing countries, girls now outnumber boys in secondary schools in 45 countries and there are more young women than men in universities in 60 countries.
- **Life expectancy.** Since 1980, women are living longer than men in *all* parts of the world. And, in low-income countries, women now live 20 years longer on average than they did in 1960.
- **Labor force participation.** Over half a billion women have joined the world's labor force



over the last 30 years as women's participation in paid work has risen in most of the developing world. An important reason has been the unprecedented reduction in fertility in developing countries as diverse as Bangladesh, Colombia, and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

... BUT OTHER GAPS PERSIST

Gender disparities still remain in many areas, and even in rich countries. The most persistent and egregious gaps include:

- **Excess deaths of girls and women.** Females are more likely to die, relative to males, in many low- and middle-income countries than their counterparts in rich countries. These deaths are estimated at about 3.9 million women and girls under the age of 60 each year. About two-fifths of them are never born, one-sixth die in early childhood, and over one-third die in their reproductive years. And this number is growing in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially in childhood and the reproductive years and in the countries hardest hit by the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
- **Disparities in girls' schooling.** Despite the overall progress, primary and secondary school enrollments for girls remain much lower than for boys for disadvantaged populations in many Sub-Saharan countries and some parts of South Asia.
- **Unequal access to economic opportunities.** Women are more likely than men to work as unpaid family laborers or in the informal sector. Women farmers tend to farm smaller plots and less profitable crops than men. Women entrepreneurs operate in smaller firms and less profitable sectors. As a result, women everywhere tend to earn less than men.
- **Differences in voice in households and in society.** In many countries, women—especially poor women—have less say over decisions and less control over resources in their households. And in most countries, women participate less in for-

mal politics than men and are under-represented in its upper echelons.

UNDERSTANDING PROGRESS AND PERSISTENCE

Income growth by itself does not deliver greater gender equality on all fronts. Indeed, where gender gaps have closed quickly, it is because of how *markets* and *institutions*—*formal and informal*—have functioned and evolved, how *growth* has played out, and how all these factors have interacted through *household* decisions. For example, in education, income growth (by loosening budget constraints), markets (by opening new employment opportunities for women), and formal institutions (by expanding schools and lowering costs) have all come together to influence household decisions in favor of educating girls and young women across a broad range of countries.

Gender gaps persist where girls and women face other disadvantages. For poor women in poor places, sizable gender gaps remain. And these disparities are even larger when poverty combines with other forms of exclusion, such as remoteness, ethnicity, and disability. For ethnic minority women in Vietnam, for instance, more than 60 percent of childbirths occur without prenatal care—twice as many as for the majority Kinh women.

Markets, institutions, and households can also combine to limit progress. Gender gaps in productivity and earnings, for example, are pervasive. And they are driven by deep-seated gender differences in time use (reflecting social norms about house and care work), in rights of ownership and control over land and assets, and in the workings of markets and formal institutions, which work in ways that disadvantage women.

Globalization can help. In today's globalized world, forces such as trade openness and the spread of cheaper information and communication technologies have the potential to reduce gender disparities by connecting women to markets and

economic opportunities, reshaping attitudes and norms among women and men about gender relations, and encouraging countries to promote gender equality. But their impact will be muted without effective domestic public action.

PRIORITIES FOR DOMESTIC POLICY ACTION

Policy makers in developing countries will need to focus on those gender gaps where the payoffs for development are potentially the largest, higher incomes by themselves do little to reduce these gaps, and a reorientation of policies would yield the greatest benefit. These priorities are:

- Addressing excess deaths of girls and women and eliminating gender disadvantage in education where these remain entrenched.
- Closing differences in access to economic opportunities and the ensuing earnings and productivity gaps between women and men.
- Shrinking gender differences in voice within households and societies.
- Limiting the reproduction of gender inequality across generations.

Focused and sustained domestic public action is essential to bring about gender equality. And to be effective, these policies will need to target the root causes of gender gaps. In some areas, as with maternal mortality, governments will need to address the single binding constraint to progress (weak service delivery institutions). In others, as with differential access to economic opportunities, policies will be needed that tackle the multiple constraints that come from the workings of markets and institutions to limit progress. In these cases, policy makers will need to prioritize these constraints and address them simultaneously or sequentially.

- **To reduce excess deaths of girls and women** in infancy, early childhood, and the reproductive years, policy action to improve the delivery of services (especially

of clean water, sanitation, and maternal care) is of primary importance. Vietnam has been able to reduce excess mortality among young girls by expanding access to clean water and sanitation. And Turkey has reduced maternal mortality through improved health care delivery and a focus on expectant mothers.

- **To shrink persisting educational gaps**, policies need to improve access for girls and young women when poverty, ethnicity, or geography excludes them, and to reach boys where gender disadvantages have reversed. Cash transfers conditioned on school attendance are often effective in reaching these groups. Pakistan has used such transfers to get girls from poor families to school, while Jamaica has relied on them to keep at-risk boys in school.
- **To narrow disparities between women and men in earnings and productivity**, a combination of policies is needed to address the various constraints that disproportionately affect women's access to economic opportunities. Depending on context, these include measures to:
 - Lift women's time constraints, by providing child care as with Colombia's subsidized day-care programs for working mothers, and improving infrastructure as with South Africa's rural electrification program.
 - Improve women's access to productive resources, especially to land as was done in Ethiopia by granting joint land titles to wives and husbands, and to credit as in Bangladesh.
 - Tackle information problems and institutional biases that work against women. These include the use of quotas or job placement programs as is being done in Jordan, or reforming gender biases in service delivery institutions as was done for agricultural extension through women's self-help groups in the Indian state of Orissa.
- **To diminish gender differences in household and societal voice**, policies need to address the combined influence of social norms and beliefs, women's access to eco-

conomic opportunities, the legal framework, and women's education and skills:

- To equalize voice within households, measures that increase women's control over household resources and laws that enhance the ability of women to accumulate assets, especially by strengthening their property rights, are of particular importance. Recent reforms of family law in Morocco that equalized the ownership rights of husbands and wives over property acquired during marriage are an example.
- To increase women's voice in society, policies include quotas on political representation, as has been done by many countries across the world, and measures to foster and train future women leaders and involve women more in groups such as trade unions and professional associations.
- ***To limit the reproduction of gender inequality across generations***, it is important to reach adolescents and young adults because this is the age when they make decisions that determine their acquisition of skills, future health, economic prospects, and aspirations. Interventions, therefore, need to focus on:
 - Building human and social capital as cash transfer programs have done in Malawi, and improving information about returns to education and health education programs, which has kept boys in school in the Dominican Republic;
 - Facilitating the transition from school to work with job and life skills training programs as in Uganda; and
 - Shifting aspirations as with exposure to role models such as woman political leaders in India who challenge prevailing social norms.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

While domestic policy action is crucial, the international community can play a role in complementing these efforts in each of these four priority areas and, more generally, in supporting evidence-based public action through better data, impact evaluation, and learning.

- In some areas, as with educational gender gaps, this will require adjusting current support, such as ensuring that the Education for All Fast Track Initiative reaches disadvantaged girls and boys, or sustaining existing efforts, as with partnerships focused on adolescent girls.
- In other areas, it will demand new or additional action on multiple fronts—some combination of more funding, coordinated efforts to foster innovation and learning, and more effective partnerships.
 - The funding should be directed particularly to supporting the poorest countries in reducing excess deaths of girls and women (through investments in clean water and sanitation and maternal health services) and removing persistent gender gaps in education.
 - More support is needed especially to improve the availability of gender-disaggregated data and to foster more experimentation and systematic evaluation of mechanisms to improve women's access to markets, services, and justice.
 - The partnerships should extend beyond governments and development agencies to include the private sector, civil society organizations, and academic institutions in developing and rich countries.