

# Role of Gender Equality in Development

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## Abstract

To get a sense of the role that gender equality plays in the process of development and growth, diverse literature is reviewed from microeconomics and macroeconomics and developing and developed country perspective. Some global stylized facts are reported and both empirical and theoretical results are surveyed. Women's roles are found to be in a process of a global change. These changes may stem from changes in technology as the industrialization has made the extensive home based production obsolete and reduced the demand for children as an input for this production. Instead of the gendered specialization in autarkic households, the modern specialization in the market place may have led to lower fertility and the changing roles of women in the economies. Adjustment to these changes poses challenges globally as the old hierarchical gender valuations still appear in many different disguises. Overall the literature gives hints as to what the issues in gender inequality are that seem to be associated with the overall level of economic development: values and religion, cultural restrictions and roles, legal and inheritance laws and practices, the marital pattern of resource allocation, monogamy vs. Polygyny, labor market access, education, fertility, gender specific market failures in finance, power in the political decision making.

**Keywords:** Gender equality, development, women, segregation, stylized facts.

## Introduction

How might gender equality affect growth and development? Typically, women have globally less economic opportunities to improve their lives. They are often restricted in terms of education, the ownership of wealth, monetary return for their work, financial opportunities, and opportunities to influence the decision making at the level of the family and the society. Given that women are about half of the population and economic potential, it is likely that this situation shows at the macroeconomic level of the family and the society. Given that women are about half of the population and economic potential, it is likely that this situation shows at the macro economic level as well. Casual observation indicates that countries in which women and men have more equal economic opportunities are also the more affluent countries. There seems to be some association between level of development and the role of women in the society. As women's status is considered one of the top priorities in development research in this field is growing.

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Much less attention is paid to men's issues. Jacobsen points out the importance for development of addressing the specific disadvantages that men face. Much like in Women's case there are global problem areas for men, in both developing and developed countries. she reports data on the destruction of human capital that affects men more than women and points out how the changing roles of men put new demands on them. Even if men's restrictions are perhaps more of a self-imposed nature they should be paid attention to and targeted by policy measures. There may be little hope of ultimately addressing women's issues if the men are ignored. As this paper proceeds to review the literature on gender equality mostly focusing on women, it is useful to keep in mind the issues where gender biases show destructively in men's lives.

### **Stylized Facts on Gender Equality Globally**

When we are talking about women's relatively lower status today, it is useful to remind ourselves of how today's world looks like from the historical perspective. Lager of suggests that the reason why the economic development spurted in Europe had to do with changes in gender equality over the past 2000 years. These changes were possibly initiated by the spread of Christianity. As opposed to the Greco-Roman world, the early Christians improved the status of widows allowing them to keep her husband's estate and extended women's rights to inherit and hold property. Christian women also got married later.

Towards 1000 A.D. the Roman Catholic Church in Europe took an increasingly negative and ambivalent stance towards women. Evil was seen to come to the world through women; women's sexuality was seen as impure and priests were required to leave their wives and stay celibate. The church had already been establishing its hierarchical structures long ago and long with it women's role got more restricted than in the initial centuries after the birth of Christianity. Reformation did not free women either and consequently some of the traditions from those times still carry on even to the church of today since in 1987. However the rise of Protestantism may have indirectly been a crucial catalyst for gender equality. Everyone was expected to read the bible themselves, which lead to increased instruction and literacy for girls as well as boys. This built the basis for women's education and literacy for girls as well as boys.

According to her the historical family structure with male dominion can be understand as based on the women's ability to bear children rather than on man's aggression or physical strength. The uniquely feminine ability made her valuable but at the same time made her dependent and most valued only in this specific household. The husband and his household become in practice her employer. Changing the employers would be very costly if not impossible. Because of her specialization in domestic labour, she also had little time, training or interest in the things that added to the power men had over each other and over women – war, long – distance trade, finance, politics. These women had

little bargaining power, wealth, property or education within the family. The economic and family environment in many developing countries is much like this still today. Ability to make economic choices requires often earnings and resource ownership. Going forward in the time towards the present decades, the feminists of our time have forcefully pursued employment for women. As a consequence, women moved from payless care of children and elderly to do mostly the same work at the marketplace or for the government.

## **Some Stylized Facts of Today**

### **Status of Women**

Globally women's lives more than men's are centered at home. They tend to be more excluded from the society at large. This exclusion can be external as in some developing countries or Arab countries or internal by the women themselves. The societal norms and rules may exclude women from particular type of paid employment or leadership positions. On the other hand men may be excluded from the child care and the home sphere, which is considered the women's territory. Specialization **Ala Becker** can hardly explain the extent of the resulting segregation and exclusion. This section will survey some of the current statistics available on issues relating to the status of women around the globe.

### **Education**

Over the past decades there have been large and successful investments globally to extend primary education to all children including girls. In the countries that the UNDP classifies as countries with low human development, female literacy rate ranges between 10-85% with a typical gender gap being around 20%. Globally, this gap has reduced by more than 5% from 1970 till 1998, with the reduction being more in the low-income countries.

### **Employment**

Over the past 30 years Women have increasingly become part of the labour force. According to the World Bank statistics women's labour force participation as a ratio to men's has increased from about 0.5 to about 0.8 in the high-income countries. In the low-income countries, this ratio has also increased, from 0.6 to 0.7, while staying at about 0.6 in the middle income countries.

Women's pay relative to men's in full time employment is reported in for some of the European countries. This ratio varies between 0.7 and 0.9 with a general increase from 1995 to 1997 in all the reported countries (France, Denmark, UK, Finland and Germany).

The quite extreme gender segregation in the EU labour markets is portrayed in women from about 80% of the total employment in the service sector while their share is less than 20% in the industrial sectors in all of these countries.

Overall women's lesser economic resources naturally follow from these facts. Women participate in paid labor force less to begin with. This financial support that women receive in some countries for countries for some countries for taking care of their children is far less than the financial rewards for working for the pay. For the developing countries it is very difficult to get comparable numbers.

### **What Is Meant by Gender Equality?**

Overall economic welfare and women's welfare are associated. Higher welfare leads to better status for women and visa versa. There is no reason to expect that we would find one way causality between women's relative status and development in either direction. Amartya Sen (1999) argues for understanding development as freedom. He suggests that GDP in itself is not the ultimate goal but rather the freedoms associated with it.

Freedom to exchange goods and labor, Freedom to make choices and influence one's life freedom to live longer, freedom to live labor, freedom to make choices and influence one's life, freedom to live longer, freedom to choose to get education we can easily understand that slavery, restrictions on owing property, saving or borrowing, or making labor contracts would qualify as disincentives to growth while freedom to exercise these activities would be associated with economic growth.

The focus of this review is one of the channels through which the lower relative status of women might be a hindrance to development. To the extent that women's status is lower relative to men, there are typically some restrictions on freedoms that are directly counterproductive for the future development.

### **Decision Making at the Level of the Society**

In the policy circles promoting gender equality and women's voices is often seen as a priority in order to reduce poverty. However, as argued by Kanbur (2002), the main stream economics typically does not consider gender in equalities or decision-making power as an important economic issues.

This has partially to do with the type of models being used where the households is considered as a unit with a single and given set of preferences. The standard unitary model (Becker, 1991) implies that if women were given power to decide at the level of the society, they would make the same decisions as men, since both genders would equality maximize the household income. Kanbur argues for the inequality of power as being the fundamental inequality, which is behind the lower female achievements. He is by no means the only economists who see the lack of women's power to decide for themselves, their family, economy and society as a critical issue in development. Sen (1999) argues that the freedom is not only development themselves but also necessary for economic growth.

In this context, the hindrance to development due to particular property rights is particularly tangible. The UNDP and the World Bank also see Women's empowerment as a

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critical issue. Even when the issue of power is not directly discussed, the inadequacy of the standard models is becoming increasingly acknowledged and alternative models are being developed (Duflo and Udry, 2003).

How the issues of decision making and power at the level of the society affect growth is unclear, but it is evident that the gender valuations affect economic outcomes. **Dollar Fisman and Gatti (1999)** have shown that higher rate of female participation in government is associated with lower levels of corruption in a cross section of countries. If women's presence in decision making bodies is associated with reduced corruption, this would certainly be a factor worth considering if we are pursuing growth and development. In the vain, it is interesting to note the active nationwide policies introduced to increase women's status in the past in china, India and Korea-countries that have moved towards the richer countries over the past fifty years (Gupta 2000).

## **Conclusion**

### **What can be said about the role of gender equality in development based on this survey to various fields of study?**

First. The current situation in many developing countries is strikingly similar to that of Western Europe roughly a hundred years ago. The developing issues of today's developing countries are the same that the now developing countries solved over the past century or two: education for girls, women's political, legal and marital rights, outside the home employment for women and men alike, lower fertility and reduced child mortality.

It can be argued that the immediate push for greater gender equality in the developed countries came through the technological changes that moved the production from autarkic households to the market places. These changes led to a change in the specialization, the function of children and the role of women. Children were no longer needed for production purposes at home nor were women. The organization of household's economies, where women specialized in the home production along with child bearing and rearing, becomes obsolete as more and more of the needed goods were produced outside the home. The economic pressure to have many children disappeared. The required adjustment to these changes has not been quick or easy.

From the reviewed literature, it seems apparent that both matter. In further appears that the values are not exogenous to the economic aspects of life. Establishing economic structure and incentives that encourages equality are likely to affect values and customs and visa versa - both working for economic development and growth. It is evident that the causality runs also from economic development to greater gender equality as the economic constraint become less binding it becomes possible to send both boys and girls to school.

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