Gender, Growth, and Poverty Reduction

Introduction

The 1998 status report on poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) was prepared for the Special Program of Assistance for Africa (SPA), in collaboration with its Poverty and Social Policy Working Group. The report is a thematic examination of the linkages between gender, growth and poverty reduction in SSA. This article focuses on its core findings and recommendations.

Focusing principally on agriculture and the rural sector, this report argues that one of the factors constraining growth and poverty reduction in SSA is gender inequality in access to and control of a diverse range of assets.

Determinants of Growth

Many factors limit growth in Africa, including weak governance, high policy volatility, poor public services, high transport costs, poor soils, disease, climatic risk, export concentration in commodities, and violent conflict. The outlook for SSA in 1998 and beyond is more uncertain than was the case in 1997. Africa's population growth rate of about 2.5 percent per year will require very high economic growth rates—5 to 8 percent—to reduce the number of poor. SSA's population-weighted GDP growth in 1998 is estimated at 2.8 percent, a growth rate which provides little scope to reduce poverty. In this more uncertain environment, giving attention to removing gender-based obstacles to growth is timely.

Interdependence of the Market and Household Economies

Analysis of men's and women's time allocation captures the interdependence between the "market" and the "household" economies. It is well documented that women work longer hours than men throughout SSA (Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Productive Hours/Day by Gender: Selected Countries](chart)
Much of women's productive work is unrecorded and not included in the System of National Accounts (SNA). It is estimated that nearly 60 percent of female activities in Kenya are not captured by the SNA, compared with only 24 percent of male activities.

Children are closely integrated into household production systems, and the patterns that disadvantage girl-children begin very early. Poor households need their children's labor, sometimes in ways that also disadvantage boys. Domestic chores, notably fetching water, limit girls' access to schooling.

Women and Men in African Economies

A distinguishing characteristic of SSA economies is that both men and women play substantial economic roles. Data compiled by the international Food policy Research Institute (IFPRI) indicate that African women perform about 90 percent of the work of processing food crops and providing household water and fuelwood, 80 percent of the work of food storage and transport from farm to village, 90 percent of the work of hoeing and weeding, and 60 percent of the work of harvesting and marketing. There are marked sub-regional variations in men's and women's share of work; in much of the Sahel, men predominate in agriculture, including in the food sector.

The Interface Between Gender and Growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 1: Gender and Growth: Missed Potential</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Burkina Faso:</strong> Shifting existing resources between men's and women's plots within the same household could increase output by 10-20 percent.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Kenya:</strong> Giving women farmers the same level of agricultural inputs and education as men could increase yields obtained by women by more than 20 percent.</td>
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<td><strong>Tanzania:</strong> Reducing time burdens of women could increase household cash incomes for smallholder coffee and banana growers by 10 percent, labor productivity by 15 percent, and capital productivity by 44 percent.</td>
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<td><strong>Zambia:</strong> If women enjoyed the same overall degree of capital investment in agricultural inputs, including land, as their male counterparts, output could increase by up to 15 percent.</td>
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Micro-level analyses portray a consistent picture of gender-based asset inequality acting as a constraint to growth and poverty reduction in SSA. Country case studies throughout SSA point to patterns of disadvantage that women face, compared with men, in accessing the basic assets and resources needed to participate fully in realizing SSA's growth potential. These gender-based differences affect supply response, resource allocation within the household, and labor productivity. They have implications for the flexibility, responsiveness, and dynamism of SSA economies, and directly limit growth (Box 1).

In parallel, macro data on gender differences in education and formal employment provide a basis for assessing the impact of gender inequality on growth. Females in SSA have experienced the lowest average annual growth in total years of schooling between 1960 and 1990 of all regions (an annual increase of 0.04 years, raising the average years of schooling of the adult female population by a mere 1.2 years). Gender inequality in education and employment, comparing SSA with East Asia, is estimated to have reduced SSA's per capita growth in the 1960-92 period by 0.8 percentage points per year. While this is far from the overriding factor, it is an important constituent element in accounting for SSA's poor economic performance.

The interdependence of the market and household economies brings to light: (i) short-term intersectoral and inter-generational trade-offs within poor asset- and labor-constrained households; and (ii) positive externalities, whereby investment in the household economy will benefit the market economy. The trade-offs are compounded by intra-household inequality and the complexities of intra-household relations. Case study evidence points to key short-term trade-offs between different productive activities, between market and household tasks, and between meeting short-term economic and household needs and long-term investment in future capacity and human capital.

Sectoral growth policies and priorities need to consider these short-term trade-offs and externalities explicitly.

Household Diversity

There is a marked variety of household forms, of intra-household relations, and gender divisions of labor in SSA, within an equally diverse range of wider social organizations in climatically and agronomically complex settings.

Gender analysis of household survey data for a group of 19 SSA countries confirms this diversity in household structure and composition, and shows that poverty is related to family systems.
There is no consistent evidence that poverty incidence is necessarily higher among female-headed households (FHH). One cross-country study shows that poverty incidence is statistically higher among FHH in only two of six SSA countries. The gender of the household head is therefore not a particularly useful predictor of household-level poverty status, and is not in itself effective as a criterion for targeting. Patterns of disadvantage for women and girls persist irrespective of the gender of the household head. The situation of women and children in poor, polygamous MHH might be of greater concern. Regional analysis finds the highest incidence of poverty in West Africa among polygamous MHH and in East and Southern Africa among de jure and de facto FHH.

Where women have more control over the resources of the household, the pattern of consumption tends to be more child-focused and oriented to meeting basic needs. There is growing evidence that FHH do give higher priority to essential expenditures and needs. When households with similar resources are compared in seven SSA countries, children in FHH have higher school enrollment and completion rates than children in MHH.

**Asset Inequality**

Evidence in SSA points to gender disparities in access to and control of assets in each of the three principal categories used to define assets in this report.

**Human Capital Assets**

(Figure 2). This improvement has not benefited the poor as much as the nonpoor. Differentials persist at all levels of income, suggesting that social and cultural factors play a stronger role than income in determining female participation in education.

**Health.** African men and women face an array of health problems, though their needs and priorities are quite different. This is seen, for example, in the enormous gender differential in the region's sexual and reproductive burden of disease, as measured by deaths and disability-adjusted life years (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
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<tr>
<td>DALYs</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
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Maternal mortality rates in SSA remain the highest in the world: between 600 and 1,500 maternal deaths for every 100,000 births for most SSA countries. Africa accounts for 20 percent of the world’s births but 40 percent of the world’s maternal deaths.

HIV/AIDS is a significant—and worsening—health, economic, and social issue for SSA. Recent research points to complex interlinkages between poverty, inequality—and in particular, gender inequality—and the AIDS epidemic. Data for Uganda indicate that AIDS infection is early six times greater among young girls aged 15–19 compared with boys of the same age (Figure 3).

**Education.** Over the 1970-94 period, girls have made more rapid strides than boys in completing primary education, thus lowering the gender gap (Figure 2).
Productive Assets

Financial Services. Data on gender differences in access to financial services are scarce. Available estimates suggest that the poor in general have little access to finance, and that women in particular have less access than men. Women's World Banking estimates that fewer than 2 percent of low-income entrepreneurs have access to financial services. In Africa, women receive less than 10 percent of the credit to small farmers and less than 1 percent of the total credit to agriculture.

Social Capital Assets

Voice. Women in Africa are consistently under-represented in institutions at the local and national level and have little say in decision-making. Gender barriers limit women's participation and reinforce power gaps. Women's political participation is generally still low. Women in SSA represent 6 percent of national legislatures, 10 percent at the local level, and 2 percent in national cabinets. Half of the national cabinets in SSA have no women at all.

Gender and Policy

Public policy, and partnerships with civil society, have an important role to play in promoting gender-inclusive growth and poverty reduction. Key actions include:

- pro-active participation of poor women and men in poverty reduction policy through e.g. implementing “women’s budget initiatives” along the lines of the South Africa approach;
- reducing the time burden of domestic work through investment in the household economy by giving much greater priority to investments in water supply and sanitation, labor-saving technology, and intermediate means of transport;
- continue and sustain investment in basic education for all, and in health services, especially reproductive health;
- supporting rural livelihood strategies through prioritizing the food (“non-traded”) sector in agricultural research and extension, facilitating the access of poor women and men to production technology, to appropriate financial services, and to a mix of assets, including land and labor, so as to ensure that women are not “investment poor”; and
- raising the visibility of unpaid and domestic work in national statistics, accounts, and in poverty monitoring and analysis through e.g., gender modules in household surveys, including the household sector in the SNA and developing country-specific time budgets.

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