



Womens empowerment visavis economic development

Dr. Kavita H Kulkarni

Assistant professor in sociology,

GFGC Kittur

Abstract: In recent decades, women have faced significant obstacles in their pursuit of equal opportunities compared to men. Just a quarter-century ago, disparities between women and men were prevalent in various spheres including education, the workplace, and even within households. However, progress has been made, and the lives of women and girls worldwide have markedly improved in many aspects. Across both affluent and developing nations, women now attend school more regularly, live longer lives, secure better employment opportunities, and enjoy increased legal rights and protections.

Introduction: Despite these advancements, substantial gender disparities persist. Women and girls in low- and middle-income countries face higher mortality rates compared to men and boys, a trend not mirrored in wealthier nations. Women also continue to earn less and are less economically productive than men globally. Additionally, women often have fewer opportunities to shape their lives and exercise autonomy compared to men. Recognizing the importance of closing these gender gaps, as highlighted in the World Bank's 2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development, is crucial for fostering economic productivity, improving development outcomes, and ensuring more inclusive policies and institutions.

Objectives:

1. To underscore the significance of gender equality as a concept.
2. To explore the outcomes of women's empowerment.

Method: A comprehensive analytical approach has been employed for this study.

Scope: The study delves into women's studies with a focus on economic analysis.

Blended Progress: Progress toward gender equality in various facets - including access to education and healthcare, economic opportunities, and voice within families and society - has exhibited a mixed pattern over the past 25 years. While strides have been made, particularly in education where gender gaps have narrowed significantly, progress has been slower for marginalized groups such as the poor and those facing identity-related disadvantages. Despite substantial gains, disparities persist, even among well-off women and in rapidly developing nations.

In primary education, gender gaps have closed in nearly all countries, with secondary education following suit albeit at a slower pace. Notably, in almost a third of non-industrialized nations, girls now outnumber boys in secondary schools. Moreover, women represent the majority of university students globally, comprising 51% of enrollment. However, millions of girls in rural areas, particularly from ethnic minorities, still lack access to education compared to boys, highlighting persistent challenges in achieving gender parity.

Since approximately 1980, women have consistently outlived men across all regions of the globe. However, within every emerging nation, a higher number of young women succumb at younger ages compared to men and young men, in contrast to wealthier nations. This phenomenon, known as "excess female mortality," results in approximately 3.9 million young women and women under 60 being "missing" annually in agricultural nations (refer to the table). Nearly two-fifths of these individuals are never born, one-sixth perish in childhood, and over a third die during their reproductive years. Sub-Saharan Africa, particularly regions affected severely by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, witnesses a rise in female mortality (World Bank, 2011, Chapter 3).

Over the past few decades, more than half a billion women have entered the global workforce, constituting over 40% of workers worldwide. One reason for this increased workforce participation is the remarkable decline in fertility rates in emerging nations such as Bangladesh, Colombia, and the Islamic Republic of Iran, coupled with advancements in female education. However, women consistently earn less than men (World Bank, 2011 - particularly Chapter 5). The reasons behind this disparity are diverse. Women are more likely than men to work as unpaid family laborers or in the informal sector. Women farmers cultivate smaller plots and less productive crops compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, women entrepreneurs operate smaller businesses in less lucrative sectors.

Regarding rights and voice, nearly every country worldwide has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Nevertheless, in many nations, women, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, have less influence than men concerning decisions and resources within their families. Women are also significantly more susceptible to domestic violence, both in developing and wealthy nations. Additionally, fewer women engage in formal politics, especially at higher levels, across all countries, regardless of economic status.

Gender equality and development: Gender equality is essential in its own right. Development is a process of expanding opportunities equally for all individuals—both male and female (Sen, 2009). Narrowing the gap in well-being between males and females is as integral to development as reducing income poverty. Greater gender equality also enhances economic efficiency and improves other development outcomes in three main ways:

Firstly, with women now comprising 40% of the global workforce and over half of the world's university students, overall productivity will increase if their skills and talents are utilized more effectively. For instance, if women farmers have equal access to productive resources such as land and fertilizers, agricultural output in emerging nations could rise by as much as 2.5 to 4 percent (FAO, 2011). Eliminating barriers against women working in certain sectors or occupations could increase output by up to 25% in certain countries by better harnessing their skills and expertise (Cuberes and Teignier-Baqué, 2011).

Secondly, greater control over family resources by women, whether through their own earnings or cash transfers, can enhance countries' growth prospects by reallocating spending in ways that benefit children. Evidence from countries including Brazil, China, India, South Africa, and the United Kingdom indicates that when women have more control over household income, either through their own earnings or through cash transfers, children benefit from increased spending on food and education (World Bank, 2011).

Finally, empowering women as economic, political, and social actors can influence policy decisions and make institutions more representative of a range of voices. In India, empowering women at the local level led to greater provision of public goods such as water and sanitation, which mattered more to women (Beaman et al., 2011).

Empowering development: The progression of gender equality as development progresses can best be understood through families' responses to the functioning and structure of markets and institutions—both formal (such as regulations, policies, and delivery of public services) and informal (such as gender roles, norms, and social networks). Markets and institutions help determine the incentives, preferences, and constraints faced by various individuals within a family, as well as their voice and bargaining power. Therefore, family dynamics, markets, and formal and informal institutions interact to determine gender-related outcomes. This framework also illustrates how economic growth (higher incomes) affects gender outcomes by influencing how markets and institutions operate and how families decide. The impact of economic growth is depicted in Chart 2 by the "growth" arrow that turns the gears towards greater gender equality. The "gender equality" arrow demonstrates how closing gender gaps, in turn, can contribute to higher growth.

This framework elucidates why the gender gap in school enrollment has closed so rapidly. In this scenario, income growth (by easing budget constraints on families and public coffers), markets (by creating new job opportunities for women), and formal institutions (by expanding schools and reducing costs) have converged to influence family decisions regarding educating girls across a range of countries.

The framework also elucidates why marginalized women still face substantial gender gaps, particularly those experiencing poverty and other forms of exclusion such as residing in remote areas, belonging to ethnic minorities, or having disabilities. In countries like India and Pakistan, while there's no disparity in school enrollment between boys and girls among the wealthiest fifth of the population, there's a gap of nearly five years for the poorest fifth. The illiteracy rate among indigenous women in Guatemala is twice that among nonindigenous women and 20 percentage points higher than among indigenous men. Market signals, improved service delivery mechanisms, and higher incomes, which have typically favored girls' education, fail to reach these severely disadvantaged populations.

Policy Recommendations: To achieve gender equality, policymakers must focus their efforts on five clear priorities: reducing excess female mortality; eliminating lingering gender barriers in education; increasing women's access to economic opportunity and thereby earnings and productivity; providing women equal voice in families and societies; and curbing the transmission of gender inequality across generations.

To reduce excess female mortality, addressing the root causes at each age is crucial. Given girls' higher vulnerability (compared to boys) in infancy and childhood to waterborne infectious diseases, improving water supply and sanitation, as Vietnam has done, is crucial to reducing excess female mortality in this age group (World Bank, 2011). Improving healthcare delivery to expectant mothers, as Sri Lanka did early in its development trajectory and Turkey has done more recently, is critical. In the sub-Saharan African region most affected by the HIV/AIDS pandemic, broader access to antiretroviral drugs and reducing the incidence of new infections should be the focus. To counter gender-specific abortions that lead to fewer female births, notably in China and northern India, the societal value of girls must be enhanced, as Korea has done.

To narrow education gaps in persisting countries, barriers to access due to poverty, ethnicity, or geography must be dismantled. For instance, where distance is the primary issue (as in rural areas of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan), establishing more schools in remote areas can reduce the gender gap. When supply-side interventions are difficult to implement or too costly, demand-side interventions such as conditional cash transfers linked to school attendance can help get girls from poor families into school. Such conditional cash transfers have succeeded in increasing girls' enrollment rates in countries as diverse as Mexico, Turkey, and Pakistan (World Bank, 2011).

To broaden women's access to economic opportunity, thereby reducing male-female disparity in earnings and economic productivity, a mix of policies is required. Policies include saving women's time so they can work outside the home - for example, through subsidized childcare, as in Colombia; improving women's access to credit, as in Bangladesh; and ensuring access to productive resources - especially land - as in Ethiopia, where joint land titles are now granted to wives and husbands. Addressing lack of information about women's productivity in the workplace and eliminating institutional biases against women, for example by introducing quotas favoring women or job placement programs as in Jordan, will also open up economic opportunity for women.

To reduce differences in gender in family and societal voice, policies need to address the combined impact of customary practices and beliefs, women's access to economic opportunities, the legal framework, and women's education. Measures that increase women's control over family resources and regulations that enhance their ability to accumulate assets, especially by strengthening their property rights, are crucial. Morocco's recent family law reforms strengthened women's property rights by aligning married couples' ownership rights over property acquired during marriage. Means of giving women greater voice in society include political representation quotas, training of future women leaders, and expanding women's involvement in unions and professional associations.

To limit gender inequality over the long term, reaching adolescents and young adults is crucial. Decisions made during this stage of life determine skills, health, economic opportunities, and aspirations in adulthood. To ensure that gender gaps do not persist over the long term, policies should emphasize building human and social capital (as in Malawi with cash transfers provided directly to girls to either stay in or return to school); easing the transition from school to work (also with employment and basic skills training programs for girls in Uganda); and shifting expectations (by introducing girls to such role models as women political leaders in India).

Conclusion: While domestic policy action is crucial, the international community can complement efforts in each of these priority areas. This will require new or additional action on many fronts - a combination of increased funding, coordinated efforts to facilitate innovation and learning, and more effective partnerships. Funding should be directed particularly to the poorest countries' efforts to reduce excess deaths of girls and women (through investment in clean water and sanitation and maternal services) and to reduce persistent education gender gaps. Partnerships should also extend beyond those among states and development agencies to include the private sector, civil society organizations, and academic institutions in both developing and wealthy countries.

And while much still needs to be done, in many ways, the world has proactively changed by recognizing that gender equality is truly beneficial for all individuals. More and more, we are realizing that there are numerous benefits - economic and otherwise - that will result from closing gender gaps. A man from Hanoi, Vietnam, one of thousands surveyed for the World Development Report, remarked, "I think women these days increasingly enjoy greater equality with men. They can accomplish anything they like. They are pillars of strength for their families. In some families, the wife is the most powerful individual. In general, men still dominate, but women's situation has greatly improved. Equal cooperation between husband and wife is happiness. I think happiness is when equality exists between husband and wife."

References

1. Alessandrini, Michele. 2009. "Jobless Growth in Indian Manufacturing : A Kaldorian Approach" (November): 1–32.
2. Dutta, Mousumi, and S. Satyabhama. 2010. "Regional Variations in Occupational Segregation in India: Some Evidence." In Agriculture Industry Interactions: An Approach to Developing Economies, ed. Debnarayan Sarker, 143. Gyan Publishing House.
3. Kannan, K P, and G Raveendran. 2012. "Counting and Profiling the Missing Labour Force." Economic and Political Weekly VOL XLVII (No 6).
4. Luci, Angela. 2009. "Female Labour Market Participation and Economic Growth." International Journal of Innovation and Sustainable Development 4 (23/2009): 97–108. NSSO. 2011. Employment and Unemployment Situation in India. Vol. 537. Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation, Government of India.
5. Rangarajan, C, and Padma Iyer Kaul. 2011. "Where Is the Missing Labour Force ?" Economic and Political Weekly XLVI NO 39: 68–72.

