



Patterns of Gender Inequality within Regions and Countries

January 30, 2003

Introduction

- Highlighting differences among regions can mask diversity within regions and countries
- Recognizing this diversity is critical to deeper understanding of the gender dimensions of development and to better informed policy making
- Examples:
 - In sub-saharan Africa genders gaps in enrollment rates for 6-14 yr olds, and the proportion of 15-19 yr olds, who have completed 5th grade tend to be substantially larger in Central and West Africa than the rest of the region
 - Gender inequalities in education and health vary more among states in India and provinces in Pakistan than among countries in the rest of the world

Gender and Poverty

- To what extent are gender inequalities associated with poverty?
- Are gender inequalities more severe among the poor than the non-poor?
- Do persistent inequalities in rights, resources, and participation translate into gender differences in poverty?
- Are particular groups of women (or men) more likely to be poor?

Gender inequalities tend to be greater among the poor

- This is particularly true for household investments in education and health
 - Gender disparities in school enrollment rates tend to be greater among the poor than among the rich
 - Also true for mortality of children under five
 - The tendency to favor boys is stronger among the poor than the rich
- Higher income does not always imply greater equality. In some countries, gender disparity confers status on the family.
 - For example: higher a family's socioeconomic status, the greater the investment in female modesty and seclusion - symbols of status

Are Women Poorer than Men?

- Little is known about the relative numbers of women and men in poverty (as measured by income or consumption).
- An estimate, widely quoted, is that 70 percent of the world's poor are now women
 - This implies a ratio of 2.3 poor females to every poor male - a sex imbalance among the world's poor of 900 million women and girls to 400 million men and boys. (Population data does not support this.)
- Why is estimating difficult?
 - Most data is based on household data
 - So compare female-headed households to male-headed households - evidence mixed

Are women “time poor” relative to men?

- Worldwide women perform bulk of child care and household maintenance
- Women in most settings combine household work with market or non-market work to generate income or raise household consumption -work often not captured in traditional labor force statistics
- Gender differences in time spent working vary across developing countries
 - Women commonly work an hour or more a day than men
 - In rural Kenya women work nearly three hours more a day than men
 - Some evidence this is more true in poorer households

Groups at Risk

- Widows and women living alone
 - At the bottom of the income distribution
 - Lower levels of consumption
 - Why?
 - Poorer access to education and other productive assets, weaker property rights, fewer savings than men
 - Older women less likely to have marriage support or a pension
 - Some societies widows face cultural constraints that limit their ability to ensure a basic standard of living in an old age (restrictions on remarriage, place of residence, inheritance, etc.)

Widows

- Can make up an important sub-group
 - By mid-1990s more than half of all women over 65 in Asia and Africa were widows, while only 10-20 percent of men were widowers.
 - As the population ages, this will have a greater impact, if widows tend to be associated with poverty.
- Demographics shifts can have implications:
 - Women's life expectancy relative to men's improve
 - Potential support ratios expected to decline

Summary

- Gender disparities have narrowed in the past several decades, but they have done so unevenly over time and across geographic regions and socio-economic divides
- Still gender challenges: Systematic disadvantages in rights, resources, and voice in almost all parts of the developing world
- Gender is also a development issue - examples:
 - When low investment in female education translates into poorer health and nutritional practices by mothers, all children will be impacted
 - Limits on participation means a large part of the country's talent, skill, and energy remains untapped