

RETHINKING IMPACT

Applying the

gender

LENS



THE IMPACT INITIATIVE

For International Development Research



Photo: [Small-scale fisheries, Bangladesh](#).
Credit: CBFM-Fem Com Bangladesh, 2006 via [WorldFish/Flickr](#) (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

FOREWORD

To accomplish the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development we must recognise women's potential and work to overcome the broader gender challenges facing societies at all levels. Lip service is often given to gender issues and all too often research is pigeonholed and categorised in ways that fail to identify the broader reality of a world that is fundamentally underpinned by inequality.

Rather than categorise research as gender specific, The Impact Initiative programme took the decision to slice through the broad portfolio of research grants, revealing the hidden realities of inequalities at all levels. We have worked to deliver a range of products that highlight a nuanced understanding of poverty and inequality. Ranging from sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence, social protection, economic development, climate change and education, we have created outputs, worked with the global media and held events to better share gender knowledge and experience.

This booklet brings together examples of our crosscutting work. What is important to recognise, and the very reason we have decided to produce this booklet, is that even where gender inequality is not the focus of the research, the gender lens clearly came into view. The research that we have highlighted represents the diversity of evidence and shows how factors such as age, disability, socio-economic status and sexuality might intersect with gender to make some groups more vulnerable.

While this selection only shows a snapshot of the Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research and the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research portfolios, the examples demonstrate how applying a gendered lens can help to better understand the lived realities of people around the world. It is our hope that in creating an exchange of relevant, accessible and diverse information we can extend the reach of research, bring about transformation in attitudes and inspire change in development policy and practice.

- Kelly Shephard
Head of Knowledge, Impact and Policy,
Institute of Development Studies

The **ESRC-DFID Strategic Partnership** is at the forefront of commissioning research with the specific aim of tying research with pathways to achieving impact. Through the Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research and Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme, the partnership aims to provide a robust conceptual and empirical basis for development, delivering economic and societal impact in developing countries.

ESRC define impact as "the demonstrable contribution that excellent social and economic research makes to society and the economy, of benefit to individuals, organisations and nations."

The Impact Initiative for international development research aims to increase the uptake and impact of research from these two research programmes.



Research jointly supported by the ESRC and DFID

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A GUIDE TO THE RESOURCES

This gender pack profiles the wide array of resources that serve different audiences and purposes. While this pack is solely highlighting how projects have in some way 'applied the gender lens', The Impact Initiative produces resources across many themes:

IMPACT STORIES provide 'easy access' to impact within the projects funded by the ESRC-DFID Strategic Partnerships, along with insights into how the research contributes to wider development issues.

RESEARCH FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE PAPERS provide a mechanism for presenting findings to development policymakers and practitioners from several projects with a shared theme. These papers inform discussion and influence debate on issues high on the development policy agenda.

RAPID RESPONSE BRIEFINGS aim to make research widely available and accessible to a range of non-academic audiences, and ensure its relevance is recognised by policy actors and practitioners.

The **GENDER EVIDENCE SYNTHESIS RESEARCH AWARD** was funded by the ESRC-DFID Strategic Partnership to provide a review of the contribution to understandings of gendered poverty made by awards financed under the ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research.

The **SPECIAL COLLECTION** of articles published by The Impact Initiative and The Institute of Development Studies, 'The Social Realities of Knowledge for Development', provides an analysis of the critical challenges faced by organisations and individuals involved in evidence-informed development through a diverse set of case studies and think pieces.

The **KEY ISSUES GUIDES** are online, and presented in partnership with Eldis, offer a concise and accessible introduction to key development issues and aim to introduce research evidence to a broad global audience of development practitioners, decision-makers and researchers.

OPINION PIECES (AKA PRESS CUTTINGS) are editorials written by researchers, often in partnership with NGOs and/or policymakers and published in media outlets to reach a policy and public audience. These pieces are opportunities to contribute and engage in broader and topical debate that is connected to the research projects.

Look out for the handy **guide to the resources** at the top of the page.

- IMPACT STORIES** ●○○○○○○○
- RESEARCH FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE** ●●○○○○○
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COMMUNITIES IMPROVE WATER MANAGEMENT IN BURKINO FASO

Globally, water scarcity and poor water quality have a major impact on food security and livelihoods. While there has been significant progress in the past decade, and over 90 per cent of the world’s population now has access to clean drinking water, there is still a long way to go to reach the most marginalised and ensure that water is protected from degradation. The set-up of ‘Innovation Platforms’ in Burkina Faso around two small water reservoirs meant that diverse members of rural communities, agricultural agents, and NGOs could reconcile differences and manage their most precious resource in harmony.

THE CHALLENGE

Burkina Faso is one of the world’s poorest countries, with a high dependence on agriculture for its economy. Natural disasters and adverse weather conditions mean that sustaining a livelihood in rural areas beyond a single season is difficult and often incredibly contentious.

In Boulgou, a province in the Centre-East region of Burkina Faso, 16 villages rely on two water reservoirs for their livelihoods. This is especially true in the dry season when there is little water. But with many people using it for different purposes, including herders, fishers and horticulturalists, conflicts and misunderstandings undermined the governance of the water.

Water Management Committees were set up by the state, including local and state actors such as village chiefs and deputies to oversee the management of the reservoirs. Yet in reality, the elder men farmers representing the local communities could not represent the views and lives of the whole community, including poor women, herders, and fishermen from a different ethnicity.

THE RESEARCH

The ESRC-DFID-funded project ‘Pathways out of poverty for Burkina Faso’s reservoir-dependent communities’ created *Innovation Platforms* (IPs) – spaces for face-to-face learning, exchange, and negotiation.



Cover photo: Youths watch over their cattle at a reservoir, often the last water point during the hottest and driest months of the year, Burkina Faso. Credit: Olivier Girard/CIFOR/Flickr licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

The project supported communities, state and non-state actors (NGOs) to participate in several meetings and discussions to enhance management of water and make it more equitable.

Communities came together during 2018 to discuss the problems and prioritise solutions around managing small water reservoirs. Participants worked within peer groups, i.e. elder men, younger men, women, and state and NGO actors, and then came together in plenary. This process showed many of the root causes for the drop in water quality and quantity and for tensions, which included the application of fertilisers by some, overfishing, and herders trampling farmers’ crops when bringing their animals to drink.

Together they set out a clear action plan to create an inclusive community governance committee to manage the reservoir, to increase the height of the dykes and rehabilitate the reservoir channels, and to train the communities around a sustainable action plan.

THE IMPACT

Women are now much more involved in the reservoir management process than they had been before. For example, as a mainstay of women’s livelihoods, growing vegetables adjacent to the reservoir was very contentious as there was not enough land for everyone and residents were concerned that it caused a drop in the reservoir’s water level. Despite the high stake that vegetable growers had in managing the reservoir, women were not included in discussions or in decision-making committees. Through the platforms, the importance of women’s participation in reservoir management has been recognised, and they have created a sub-group to advise a new water users’ committee.

It has also been recognised that young people have an important role to play to bring about change in the future. As a result of the project, young men have taken up roles as president and vice president in one of the committees. Furthermore, a Fishermen’s Association has been created, and 2018 was the first year that the fishermen have respected ‘fishing blackouts’ and not used small meshed nets that capture immature fish. Herders are now using livestock corridors to avoid damaging farmers’ crops.

The communities have also rallied and raised funds to realise some of the solutions that they have identified. For example, they hired professionals to unblock a main channel to improve flow into the reservoir and invited state water technicians to provide guidance throughout the process.

As a regional agricultural extension agent, Kyelem Richard, explained, ‘There is a good collaboration with communities. We understand each other better and they are coming to me to involve me in their activities and ask for advice’. This is a change from communities viewing state actors as policing a situation to seeing them as a supportive voice.

In striving to achieve Goal 6 of the Sustainable Development Goals – Ensure access to water and sanitation for all – this project clearly recognises the need to ‘support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management’.

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Policy Support in Water, Environment and Conservation Management (2018) ‘Using WaterWorld and Co\$ting Nature to Understand Current and Future Ecosystem Services in the Volta Basin’, 28 February, <http://blog.policysupport.org/2018/02/using-waterworld-and-coting-nature-to.html> (accessed 13 February 2019)

Pathways out of poverty for Burkina Faso’s reservoir-dependent communities

The research team was funded by ESRC-DFID’s Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research and included Bioversity International, SNV World, King’s College London, and the University of Ouagadougou.

TACKLING EXTREME POVERTY THROUGH PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT IN BANGLADESH

In the last 20 years, remarkable progress has been made in tackling extreme poverty. Yet, while the number of people living on less than US\$1.90 per day in 2015 was 736 million (10 per cent of the global population, down from 11 per cent in 2013), the rate of poverty reduction has started to decline. Reaching and keeping the most vulnerable and marginalised people out of poverty is harder than ever. A novel initiative in Bangladesh, led by the international non-governmental organisation BRAC, to provide material and psychological support to the poorest individuals and households has proved to be a sustainable and lasting way to prevent them from falling back into poverty.

THE CHALLENGE

Microfinance initiatives (MFIs) are widely used by governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to help the poor to their way out of desperate poverty and to provide a reliable and safe source of income. Yet, in the early 1990s, the global NGO BRAC recognised that MFIs are not always an appropriate way to support the extreme poor as they fail to take into account the psychological, cultural, and physical barriers that prevent people from setting up and maintaining their own small businesses. Women in particular can often be excluded and isolated in a male-dominated society, and lack the networks and connections required for support and to effectively use the loan successfully.

THE RESEARCH

Through BRAC's Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction: Targeting the Ultra-Poor (CFPR-TUP) programme, over 650,000 ultra-poor families have graduated from poverty since 2002. This programme worked on the logic that those living in extreme poverty needed some kind of 'asset transfer'. Since most were illiterate they required training to take care of their 'business' assets – i.e. a cow, a flock of chickens, or a small grocery shop. That logic extended to the understanding that in order to benefit from having these assets the families have to be well looked after. Each family was provided with a case worker who gave not only practical guidance but also emotional support.



Photo: [Measuring vegetables while selling in the market at Khagrachari, Bangladesh.](#)
Credit: [IFPRI/Farha Khan/Flickr](#) licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#).

The ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research funded the Graduation as Resilience programme through two stages from 2013 to 2018 to understand what aspects of BRAC's already successful CFPR-TUP programme could be replicated. In the first stage, researchers adopted a model of psychological wellbeing and used it on a sample of women from the CFPR-TUP to find out how well they could manage specific tasks, such as looking after their assets, and the level and type of support they had received to enable them to do so.

The second phase of the programme tested the new 'psychosocial' model in three programmes in Bangladesh to see if it worked on a broader scale – it included one BRAC programme (CFPR-TUP) and two government-supported programmes carried out by Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF). The research asked 1,800 households across the programmes about what aspects helped people get out of poverty and showed overwhelmingly that the case-by-case support was pivotal in achieving that.

THE IMPACT

The assessment of the CFPR-TUP and roll-out of the model showed that the success of the CFPR-TUP was not an isolated example. Ninety-five per cent of participants in phase 2 of the research graduated from poverty in Bangladesh. The UK government's Department for International Development (DFID), Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and others continue to fund this programme.

Based on the evidence, DFID encouraged other organisations to take up the approach and funded other major programmes in Bangladesh based on the same model. The model was copied globally with support from the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP), the Ford Foundation, and other donors.

A major research study, published in Science Magazine, produced compelling evidence of the success of 'Graduation' pilot projects in Ethiopia, Ghana, Honduras, India, Pakistan and Peru, and the approach is now being promoted globally by the World Bank and other major international development actors. As the evaluator of the CGAP and Ford Foundation-funded six-country programmes concluded, 'a multifaceted approach to increasing income and wellbeing for the ultra-poor [the BRAC programme] is sustainable and cost-effective.'

The Graduation as Resilience research has shown overwhelmingly the success of incorporating a more holistic approach to addressing extreme poverty. As the global community strives to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, it is those in extreme poverty who remain the hardest to reach and support. By evaluating the successful BRAC programme, and working closely with the Bangladeshi government, it is evident that there are components that can be replicated elsewhere, within the country and further afield.

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[Graduation as resilience](#)
[Graduation as resilience stage two](#)

The research team was funded by ESRC-DFID's Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research, led by Mushtaque Chowdhury, BRAC, Bangladesh, in collaboration with the Institute of Development Studies, UK.

HELPING TO MAKE SAFE ABORTION A REALITY IN ZAMBIA

Zambia has one of the most liberal abortion laws in sub-Saharan Africa. However, in spite of this, unsafe abortion continues to contribute to high rates of maternal mortality. Stigma, poverty, conscientious objectors, and lack of knowledge all contribute to why many adolescent girls and women do not and cannot access safe abortions in Zambia. Through ground-breaking research led by the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), political, media, and charitable organisations are now making changes to raise awareness and shape their frameworks to ensure women can take up their right to access safe abortion services.

THE CHALLENGE

Under the Termination of Pregnancy Act of 1972, Zambian law asserts that women have the right to safe and legal abortion services. But very few people know about the law, or the services available, and there is still an enormous amount of stigma associated with abortion.

Worldwide, approximately 25 million unsafe abortions are carried out each year and death from unsafe abortion disproportionately affects women in Africa (WHO 2018). In Zambia, the government estimates that 30 per cent of maternal deaths are attributable to unsafe abortion.

THE RESEARCH

The researchers wanted to understand the roles that the health system, poverty, and stigma can play in seeking abortion-related care in Zambia; estimate and compare the implications of safe abortion and post-abortion care for women and their households; and ultimately better understand how and why safe abortion services are not used more fully.

Based at a Zambian Government Health Facility in Lusaka, the researchers interviewed over 100 girls and women coming either for an abortion or for post-abortion care after an unsafe abortion. The research team worked closely with midwives to gain informed and considered consent from all the participants.



Photo: Medical abortion consultation in Zambia. Credit: Dr Ernestina Coast

In addition to the dangerous and often life-threatening impact of unsafe abortion, the research identified a significant public health cost. The first national estimates showed that treating the consequences of unsafe abortion costs the Zambian health system up to US\$0.4 million more than if the pregnancies had been terminated safely and legally.

The study found that younger and poorer women are more likely to have an unsafe abortion, even though the costs of unsafe abortion for individual women are 27 per cent higher than the costs associated with a safe abortion. It also revealed that women often have to make 'unofficial payments' to doctors for services that should be free.

'Luck' or 'chance' plays a primary role in determining whether a woman can have a safe and legal abortion. Quite often, where a woman feels she can disclose to someone that she is pregnant or if she knows someone in the health sector she may get the services she needs. Otherwise, women may not know these services exist, and if they need to hide their pregnancy or abortion they take great risks in order to terminate an unsustainable pregnancy.

Raising awareness of these services – targeting not just the general population, but also health professionals – is vital if the Zambian Government is to reap the rewards of their investment in the provision of safe and legal abortion services.

THE IMPACT

The research team have been – and continue to be – proactive in engaging key people, organisations, and institutes to support progress to successfully implement and deliver safe and legal abortion services. Through working with government, media, and non-governmental organisation (NGO) actors, this research has gone beyond Zambia solely as a country study, and is shining a spotlight on the complex and challenging process of how to provide abortion care.

Media engagement has included the researchers being involved in training Zambian radio producers who work on programmes for young adults. In-country partners also gave interviews on BBC World News, and programmes on the Zambian National Broadcasting Corporation (ZNBC), commercial radio, and a radio station for young adults.

The Zambian lead for the project presented the findings to the Resident Doctors Association of Zambia (RDAZ) in 2015, during which he found that newly graduated doctors were unaware of the laws around abortion in Zambia. The guest of honour was the Deputy Minister of Health, who subsequently invited the partner to present at the Senior Management meeting of the Ministry of Health. The research has also been incorporated in the latest Standards and Guidelines for Comprehensive Abortion Care in Zambia.

FURTHER READING

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Pregnancy Termination Trajectories in Zambia: The Socio-Economic Costs

The research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research. The study 'Pregnancy Termination Trajectories in Zambia' was carried out by Dr Ernestina Coast, Dr Tiziana Leone, Dr Emily Freeman, and Dr Eleanor Hukin (London School of Economics); Dr Bellington Vwalika (University Teaching Hospital, Zambia); Dr Bornwell Sikateyo (University of Zambia); Dr Susan Murray (Kings College London); and Dr Divya Parmar (City, University of London).

KEEPING AFRICAN GIRLS IN SCHOOL WITH BETTER SANITARY CARE

For young girls in developing countries, not knowing how to manage their periods can hinder access to education. Research from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London demonstrates that in rural Uganda, providing free sanitary products and lessons about puberty to girls may increase their attendance at school.

THE CHALLENGE

In many poor communities, menstruation is still often seen as an embarrassing, shameful, and dirty process. Such taboos around the topic mean many adolescent girls are often unprepared for their periods and how to manage them. Less than half of girls in lower- and middle-income countries have access to basics such as sanitary towels or tampons, soap and water, or facilities to change, clean, or dispose of hygiene products.

In Uganda, only 22 per cent of girls are enrolled in secondary schools compared with 91 per cent in primary schools, with those living in rural areas being the least likely group to go to school. Researchers believe that the cost of hygiene products and the difficulties in managing periods play a key role in keeping girls out of school.

THE RESEARCH

Over 24 months, a trial was conducted in partnership with Plan International Uganda across eight schools, involving 1,008 girls, in Uganda's Kamuli District, an area that had been observed as having low learning levels as well as gender disparity in health and education.

The research tested whether school attendance improved when girls were given (a) reusable sanitary pads, (b) adolescent reproductive health education, (c) neither, or (d) a combination of both. Girls were provided with AFRIPads, a washable, reusable cloth pad produced in Uganda, and locally trained community health nurses held sessions that covered changes which occur during puberty, menstruation, and early pregnancy, and on the prevention of HIV.

Researchers found that better sanitary care and reproductive health education for poor schoolgirls, delivered over two years, did appear to improve attendance. On average, girls increased their attendance by 17 per cent, which equates to 3.4 days out of every 20 days.

Many girls don't know about periods before they encounter their first one. They are totally unprepared because they receive no information or training on how to manage them. Simple interventions like these can have major long-term economic implications for women in low- and middle-income countries.

Catherine Dolan, SOAS, University of London



Photo: Uganda, Kitengeesa. A worker trims and stacks sanitary pads before they are lined and sewn at the AFRIPads factory. Started by volunteers in 2009, AFRIPads manufactures reusable fibre sanitary pads. Credit: © Nyani Quarmyne/Panos Pictures.

THE IMPACT

The research project has significantly strengthened awareness that sanitary pad provision and puberty education are both vital in improving attendance. Even in the absence of resources to provide sanitary pads, the research recommends that inclusion of adequate and gender-sensitive puberty education in the school curriculum can improve attendance.

Organisations such as UNICEF and the NGO CARE have used the evidence to identify solutions to barriers to girls' schooling associated with puberty.

These findings will make an important contribution to CARE's efforts to fight poverty by removing the barriers that keep girls out of school. All over civil society, in fact, bigger funding will now be available for large-scale rollouts because of the hard evidence provided by the study in Uganda.

Joan Garvey Lundgren, Executive Director, Strategic Partnerships, CARE USA

The project collaborated with Save the Children, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), WaterAid, and AFRIPads to lobby for menstrual hygiene management to be included as an indicator in post-2015 sustainability goals. Further collaborations building on the evidence have included working with Save the Children on how to link the distribution of sanitary care to their West African programmes, and with UNESCO on effective programming in puberty education and menstrual hygiene management.

Ghana's Deputy Minister of Education referenced the research when defending the decision to allocate part of the country's 2014 World Bank loan to providing sanitary pads for female students in need. Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa stated that when adolescent girls are unable to take proper care of themselves during the menstruation period, it affects their confidence, which eventually keeps them out of school.

The research team continues to use the results as part of a push to promote female hygiene onto the global development agenda. The findings featured in preparatory documents for the World Health Organization (WHO)/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme indicators for menstrual hygiene management, and have been cited in the UNESCO *Puberty Education & Menstrual Hygiene Management* report, which aims to promote sexuality education as part of skills-based health education for young people.

The impact of the research has the potential for addressing psychosocial wellbeing, dignity, comfort, and ability to manage menstruation without shame, which are all essential for girls responding to the challenges presented by menstruation in low-income contexts.

Studies such as this are too few and far between. They are critical to give context to the impact of hygiene and sanitation during puberty, which in turn helps us work towards solutions to improve girls' life chances.

Brooke Yamakoshi, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Specialist (Sanitation and Hygiene), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

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Menstruation and the Cycle of Poverty: Does the provision of sanitary pads improve the attendance and educational outcomes of girls in school?

The research team was funded by ESRC-DFID's **Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research**, led by Catherine Dolan, SOAS, University of London; Paul Montgomery, University of Birmingham; and Linda Scott, Chatham House. The research was carried out in partnership with Plan International Uganda, with the assistance of Julie Hennegan, Johns Hopkins University; Maryalice Wu, University of Illinois; and Laurel Steinfield, Bentley University.

Women, work and social protection

March 2019

Foreword

To accomplish the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development it is absolutely mission-critical to unlock and properly account for women's untapped economic potential and their wider contributions to society. This must go hand in hand with promoting dignity and self-reliance. Doing so is of direct and urgent relevance to the ambitions that underpin the Sustainable Development Goals related to: *ending poverty; achieving gender equality; achieving full employment and decent work for all; and reducing inequality.*

When Ela Bhatt founded the Self-Employed Women's Association of India (SEWA) in 1972, she spoke passionately about the need to reframe poverty alleviation. She said, *'What we really are looking for is self-reliance and that is how we should measure success.'*

By adopting a holistic approach to social protection we move beyond an outdated framing of poverty alleviation as being primarily about access to the traditional labour market and cash transfers. To meaningfully tackle persistent poverty – particularly how it manifests for women – social protection *must* encompass a much broader range of considerations. The selection of ESRC-DFID-funded research that follows presents pertinent examples of how this applies in practice.

A study in Bangladesh shows that home-based self-employment, which is overwhelmingly preferred by women, offers considerable advantages despite being excluded from official data and largely overlooked by policymakers. In Rwanda, we see how a national public works programme provides opportunities for significant numbers of women (and by extension their households) to benefit from diversifying their income thus reducing vulnerability to shocks and exposure to risk. A study in Malawi and Lesotho demonstrates that while cash transfers have a role to play in shoring up

the living standards of some of the poorest women, they have limited utility with regard to enabling them to contribute in a full and satisfying way to their communities. A study from South Africa demonstrates that basic employment alone is not enough to tackle the lack of dignity that characterises the experience of so many women living in or on the margins of poverty.

While undeniable strides have been made towards gender equality in recent decades, more often than not this has happened in spite of rather than because of the prevailing approaches to economic policy and social protection. Typically, traditional modes of thinking result in missed opportunities and suboptimal outcomes for women because they fail to recognise and address the complexity and nuances of women's experiences, needs and contributions to the economy. Until these things are routinely addressed, Ela Bhatt's vision of self-reliance for *all* women and the ambitions of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will remain elusive.

Mandu Reid
National Spokesperson for the UK Women's Equality Party

Key messages

- Policymakers should use frameworks that recognise and capture the economic impact of all relevant activities undertaken by both genders, including unpaid work and caring obligations, the lion's share of which falls to women.
- Social protection strategies for women surviving on very low incomes must go beyond cash transfers and include measures that uphold dignity and promote self-reliance, such as income-generating schemes.
- Where policy is focussed on providing women with access to the traditional labour market, the quality of employment opportunities must be considered alongside measures that support women juggling household and caring responsibilities for children and other family members.



A single mother, with her three children and one of their friends, South Africa.

Find out more:

<https://www.theimpactinitiative.net/resources/esrc-dfid-research-policy-and-practice-women-work-and-social-protection>

Public works in Rwanda led to increased female non-farm labour supply

Almost all adults work in Rwanda: females work predominantly in farming while non-farm work opportunities are mostly undertaken by men. Research shows that the public works component of a major social protection programme, Rwanda's Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP), resulted in significant increases in non-farm wage opportunities for both men and women.

The VUP targets the poorest geographic areas (sectors) within each of Rwanda's 30 districts, and within these sectors, the poorest households. The programme has three components: public works, direct support, and financial inclusion.

This research focused on the labour supply impact of the public works component, which mostly involved community-level infrastructure projects and aimed to provide 71 days of work, equally for males and females, paying workers close to the market wage. However, in many sectors a lack of available work meant that substantially fewer days were supplied. The study was a collaboration between researchers at the University of Sussex and the Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR) in Rwanda.

The researchers used data from two waves of a large-scale multipurpose household survey from 2010/11 to 2013/14 and studied the changes in non-VUP labour supply outcomes for men and women, comparing individuals in sectors where the VUP was highly active with other sectors where the programme was not implemented.

The raw data confirms that almost all adult women and men work, and most have more than one activity. Women work almost exclusively in agriculture, mainly on their family farms, but also as wage labourers. The majority of men also work in farming but many more of them have non-farm wage jobs or non-farm self-employment positions, predominantly in wholesale and retail trades.

In comparing locations that had public works with those that did not, the researchers also controlled for sector fixed effects and household characteristics. The analysis shows no significant impact of the VUP on the overall labour supply of women or men and no impact on the numbers undertaking agricultural work, both of which were already very high. But it does show a significant and quite sizeable increase in the numbers of those undertaking paid non-farm jobs, by 6–13 percentage points for women and 11–20 percentage points for men. While the size of the increase is higher for men, so few women were doing these activities at the baseline that this remains a notable change. There are no significant increases in the number of jobs people undertook, nor in hours worked as a result of the sector's participation in the public works scheme.

Disaggregating the sample by education, these effects are observed for individuals who are more highly educated or come from households with a

SEE ALSO:

- Kindness, H. (2011) Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme, Rwanda. Local Development Support Fund Annual Report 2009/10, January
- Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) (2009) Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP) Public Works Operational Framework and Procedure Manual, Revised version, 2 January
- Pavanello, S.; Pozarny, P.; De la O Campos, A.P. and Warring, N. (2016) Research on Rural



Women harvesting maize, Nyarusazi, Karongi District, Rwanda.

higher overall education level, but are not observed at all for those with low or no education. The availability of public works projects at sector level seems to lead better educated women to opportunities to do non-farm wage work. This may be skilled work in education, health or administrative roles, but many more women are employees in construction and domestic work as well as in wholesale and retail trade. In some cases education may enable access to work even if the job does not really require it.

Although the quality of these non-farm jobs is not necessarily or consistently good, it does allow some diversification of economic activities for females and may enable households to cope better with shocks. The work opportunities outside the household for females may be preferable to the agricultural wage labour jobs they did before, but it may also increase the time burden which women face.

These seem to be positive impacts of the VUP public works programme, even if the exact mechanism by which the VUP enables this increase in non-farm wage jobs is less clear. Other aspects of the VUP, notably the financial inclusion component, may also have had beneficial effects though these are not assessed here.

 [Project title: Female labour supply and the escape from poverty: New evidence from household data.](#)

Professor Andy McKay

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University of Sussex, UK

This study took place in partnership with researchers including Amalavoyal Chari, Mehtap Hisarciklilar, Iftikhar Hussain and Dr Dickson Malunda at IPAR.

Women's Economic Empowerment and Social Protection: The Impacts of Rwanda's Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP), Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

World Bank (2016) International Development Association Program Document for a Proposed Development Policy Credit to the Republic of Rwanda for the Third Social Protection System (SPS-3), World Bank Report 108935-RW, 3 October, Washington DC: World Bank

Protecting dignity with jobs and social security

Dignity is a foundational value in the South African Constitution. However, research involving lone mothers revealed that although some participants viewed employment as conferring dignity, others had experienced it as erosive of dignity. Social security can play an important role in supporting caregivers whether they are in or out of work.

Low-income lone mothers in South Africa are expected to be both the breadwinner of the family, and to provide care for their children. These dual and often competing expectations occur in the context of high levels of poverty and unemployment, amid pejorative discourses around lone motherhood and social security receipt.

A study was conducted in 2011–13 by researchers at the University of Oxford (UK), the University of the Western Cape, and the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa to explore the lived experiences of lone mothers with reference to the role of social security in protecting their dignity. The South African Constitution commits to protecting and respecting dignity and to the progressive realisation of access to social security. Currently, in South Africa there is no social assistance for adults of working age unless they are disabled. However, there is a means-tested benefit for children of low-income caregivers – the Child Support Grant (CSG) – which is payable for children of caregivers with an income below a specific level. Low-income mothers feel especially pressured to work, not only because the CSG is too small to meet the needs of the child (and does not include a component for their own material needs), but because of the dependency culture discourse in communities and the country in general.

Sixteen in-depth interviews were undertaken in the Eastern Cape and Western Cape provinces with low-income female caregivers together with 36 focus groups comprising nearly 200 lone mothers. Interviews were also held with senior policymakers, and social attitudes were explored more broadly in relation to dignity, poverty and social security. Results were widely disseminated to different stakeholder audiences.

The participants gave examples of dignity 'in practice' that included being valued and respected, and able to fulfil important roles in life – particularly that of caregiver – and provide for themselves and others. Poverty was described as erosive of dignity.

The CSG helped to protect dignity insofar as it contributed to the cost of raising a child. However, participants raised issues about the burdensome application process, negative attitudes, and its small size.

Some lone mothers with older children said they experienced a modicum of respect from family members with whom they lived because of the CSG income, explaining that they were able to share the food purchased.

Many strategies to survive poverty were described as being detrimental to their sense of dignity, particularly begging, demeaning work for family and neighbours, tolerating precarious employment, and transactional sex: 'We endure and persevere, what can we do.'

SEE ALSO:

- Ntshongwana, P.; Wright, G.; Barnes, H. and Noble, M. (2015) 'Lone Motherhood in South Africa: Some Methodological Challenges and Policy Imperatives', *South African Review of Sociology* 46.4: 80–99
- Wright, G.; Noble, M.; Ntshongwana, P.; Neves, D. and Barnes, H. (2014) *The Role of Social Security in Respecting and Protecting Dignity of Lone Mothers in South Africa:*



Woman and child outside their home in a new housing development, South Africa.

Participants stressed the need for jobs in order to support themselves and their children. They also supported the introduction of social security for caregivers due to high unemployment rates.

The research team argues that comprehensive social security, if implemented in a way that promotes redistribution of wealth in order to protect the dignity of applicants, could play an important role in helping to respect people's dignity. In parallel with job creation schemes and affordable (or free) high-quality childcare, social security should be provided to low-income adults of working age – the policies are not mutually exclusive. Extending social security would be advantageous from a gender perspective given the plight of many female caregivers, as well as positive from a child rights perspective by reducing the extent to which the CSG is of necessity diluted across other family members.

The team stresses that social security provision for impoverished caregivers with young children should not be linked to an obligation to seek work as they ought to be entitled to choose whether to undertake paid work or do the unpaid work of looking after their child, or a combination of the two. The false dichotomy of independent self-fulfilment through paid work versus passive social grant receipt also needs to be challenged: raising a family in a state of poverty – whether unemployed or in precarious employment – is itself extremely hard work, and an expanded system of social security could provide vital support for struggling families.



[Project title: Lone Mothers in South Africa: The role of social security in respecting and protecting dignity.](#)

Michael Noble

Emeritus Professor of Social Policy, *University of Oxford, UK*

Gemma Wright

Research Director, *Southern African Social Policy Research Insights, UK*

Phakama Ntshongwana

Campus Director, *Missionvale Campus of Nelson Mandela University, South Africa*

The study took place in partnership with researchers based in South Africa: David Neves (Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies at the University of the Western Cape) and Temba Masilela and Benjamin Roberts (Human Sciences Research Council).

Final Report, Oxford: Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy, University of Oxford

Wright, G. et al. (forthcoming) 'Lone Mothers' Accounts of the Impact of Poverty on their Dignity: A South African Perspective', in B. Roberts and Z. Mokomane (eds) *Family Matters*, Cape Town: HSRC

Choice, constraints and the gender dynamics of labour markets in Bangladesh

Despite steady rates of economic growth across South Asia, female labour force participation rates remain among the lowest in the world. In Bangladesh, official statistics suggest that they went from 24% in 1999 to just 36% in 2010 while male rates remained at 80% or above (Mahmud and Bidisha, 2016). Research led by the London School of Economics set out to explore this puzzle.

Since this is a region of powerful patriarchal constraints that restrict women's activities to the domestic domain, cultural norms clearly had a role to play in the explanation. We wanted to investigate whether economic motivations might interact with these norms to differentiate how different groups of women engaged with market forces. We followed a mixed methods approach, using previously collected quantitative data from a DFID-funded research programme, Pathways of Women's Empowerment (2006–2011), to support new rounds of quantitative and qualitative data collection (2014–2017).

Our survey showed that far more women were economically active than recorded by official statistics which failed to capture market-oriented and subsistence work done by women within the home. We also found that women in paid activity were more 'empowered' according to a range of indicators than those in subsistence work or the economically inactive. This result was most consistent for women in formal employment. Yet most women were not only concentrated in home-based economic activities but also expressed a preference for such work. At the same time, we found that patterns of labour market participation are changing – and that the change has been partly driven by policy. Our research suggests different strands of explanation.

- **Home-based self-employment** has important advantages for women. It is not only considered a more 'respectable' form of work than work outside the home, but it is also more compatible with their unpaid domestic responsibilities. But this generalization has to be nuanced. Women expressed a strong preference for home-based work which earned them an income they could control rather than working as unpaid family labour for male-controlled farms and enterprises. Furthermore, concerns with social status meant that those who were willing to take up outside work could face considerable opposition from their families.
- **Formal employment**, preferably in the public sector, is perceived as a respectable option for educated women from higher status families. It is more secure and more likely to be regulated by government rules offering some protection from the exploitation and harassment they could face in other forms of work. Moreover, the fact that women in formal employment mainly work in teaching, health and community work allows it to be constructed as a service to the community,

justifying their presence in the public domain. But there are not enough of these jobs to satisfy demand and bribes were routinely demanded for them.

- Employment by NGOs provide a less preferred, but nevertheless 'respectable' **semi-formal alternative**. They do not require bribes, but offer less job security. Jobs in export garment factories can be done by women with less education but is only available to those willing to migrate to urban areas and to work long hours subject to harsh discipline. Moreover, women who do these jobs are seen as disreputable because they work alongside men.
- The least preferred jobs are in **informal daily wage labour** – in agriculture, in people's homes or on building sites. These are the only options available to women without education, assets or, in many cases, male support. Wages are low and arbitrarily determined, working conditions are harsh and employers' behaviour can be demeaning. In addition, working in the public domain with no option of veiling themselves leaves these women open to accusations of immoral character and sexual harassment.

While poverty drives many women to work, policy measures have helped to expand the overall demand for female labour. The spread of microfinance has made it possible for many more women to be engaged in income-generating activity at home than had been possible in the past. New economic opportunities are drawing others into less traditional forms of work. NGO work is one such opportunity, garment factory work is another. For poorer women, asset transfer programs are allowing them to withdraw from demeaning forms of wage labour into home-based enterprise while government public works offers them a preferred form of wage labour. More recently, the government has made it easier for women to migrate overseas on short-term contracts, which are a step up from casual wage labour. Increases in women's educational attainment, the spread of electricity and infrastructure, opportunities to migrate within and outside the country, access to television and mobile phone technology are among the broader factors leading to changes in attitudes to women's work. And while the increasing adoption of various forms of veiling is seen by many as an indicator of rising religiosity in the country, it is also an important means by which many women are able to work outside the home while still claiming to be observing cultural norms.



Project title: [Choice, constraints and the gender dynamics of labour markets in Bangladesh](https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2016.1205730).

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Kabeer, N. (2017) 'Economic Pathways to Women's Empowerment and Active Citizenship: What Does the Evidence from Bangladesh Tell Us?', *Journal of Development Studies* 53.5: 649-663. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00220388.2016.1205730?needAccess=true&instName=University+of+Sussex>

Mahmud, S. and Bidisha, S. H. (2016) 'Female Labor Market Participation in Bangladesh: Structural Changes and Determinants of Labor Supply in Selim Raihan (ed.) Structural Change and Dynamics of Labour Markets in Bangladesh: Studies on Labour and Employment, Dhaka: South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM). <http://sanemnet.org/sanemafeefcontainer/uploads/2016/02/SANEM-labor-book.pdf>

SEE ALSO:

Heintz, J.; Kabeer, N. and Mahmud, S. (2018) 'Cultural Norms, Economic Incentives and Women's Labour Market Behaviour: Empirical Insights from Bangladesh', *Oxford Development Studies* 46.2: 266-289. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13600818.2017.1382464?needAccess=true>

Kabeer, N.; Mahmud, S. and Tasneem, S. (2018) 'The Contested Relationship Between Paid Work and Women's Empowerment: Empirical Analysis from Bangladesh', *The European Journal of Development Research* 30.2: 235-251. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057%2F%41287-017-0119-y>

Young women and cash transfers in rural Africa

Young adult women from households and communities that receive poverty-targeted social cash transfers in rural Malawi and Lesotho really want to work. They are grateful to receive cash, but uncomfortable with receiving 'free money' and keen to make a productive contribution to their families and communities.

Since 2006, Malawi has introduced a social cash transfer targeting ultra-poor labour-constrained households and Lesotho introduced the Child Grants Programme for poor households with children. A team of researchers from Brunel University London and other institutions in the UK, Sweden, Lesotho and Malawi undertook qualitative research over a three-year period (2016–18) in rural communities that are receiving these payments. In two case study villages, researchers interviewed all members of households that receive social cash transfers, and also undertook individual interviews and participatory group activities with young people (aged 18–34) from both recipient and non-recipient households. The participatory groups were differentiated by gender.

Of the young women in recipient households, some of those in Lesotho received child grants to support their own children while a small number in Malawi had been targeted as single mothers supporting children. The young people in households receiving cash transfers universally welcomed the additional cash, which enabled them to feel more food secure and buy school essentials for their children. Above all, it meant they were able to feel that they did not stand out in the villages due to their poverty – they could purchase clothes for themselves and their children and soap to keep them clean.

However, young families in receipt of grants almost invariably talked of being resented by those who did not receive money. Often there was little appreciable difference between recipient and non-recipient households, and the situation was exacerbated because the young people were not being expected to work for the money. In Lesotho, the child grants were referred to as *seoa holimo*, meaning 'money falling from the sky', because they appeared to be random allocations of cash that came with no explanation.

Many of the recipients said they would have preferred to work for the money. Some indicated it would have been better directed specifically at productive investment, enabling them to build income-generating businesses, either individually or collectively. They also pointed to the development needs of their communities – for example, having better roads and bridges to enable their children to walk safely to school, and reforestation projects to stop rocks falling onto and damaging houses from the hillsides above. Employment locally was in very short supply but aspired to by all, and there was work that clearly needed doing.

Both cash transfer schemes envisage the ultimate beneficiaries to be children. Money is given to adult household members – generally parents or grandparents – for this purpose.

SEE ALSO:

Brown, C., Ravallion, M., & van de Walle, D. (2018). A poor means test? Econometric targeting in Africa. *Journal of Development Economics*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdeveco.2018.05.004>

Ellis, F. (2012). 'We Are All Poor Here': Economic Difference, Social Divisiveness and Targeting Cash Transfers in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Development Studies*, 48(2), 201–214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2011.625408>



Women participating in the research, Malawi.

The money paid to parents is undoubtedly spent on children, but neither community viewed children as the principal beneficiaries of the grants. Rather, the money was seen to go to parents (male and female) and to entrench their responsibilities for their offspring, representing a shift of caring responsibilities away from extended families toward nuclear households. The parenting role of women, in particular, is reinforced. Yet these households do not conform to the stereotypical Western image of male provider and female caregiver. While young men may have felt greater shame that they (as strong young adults) were receiving unearned income, young women also viewed themselves as providers and not simply nurturers of their children. Both young men and young women were keen to work.

Ultimately, cash transfers are a useful means of supporting impoverished young women materially to fulfil their expectations as parents, and enabling them to experience some level of dignity. But young women also want to play a productive role in their families and communities. Culturally, income earned through work is much more respected, and motherhood is associated with providing for the household and not simply day-to-day childcare. Moreover, young women have ambitions of their own, beyond being able to supply the material needs of their offspring. Rural employment opportunities are sparse, and young women often have fewer prospects than young men of migrating for work, particularly if they have young children. It is important, then, that social protection policies include support for young rural women to access meaningful work or income-generating opportunities, rather than simply providing small amounts of cash in substitution for absent earned income.



Project title: [Social cash transfers, generational relations and youth poverty trajectories in rural Lesotho and Malawi](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2006.00497.x).

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Molyneux, M. (2006). Mothers at the service of the New Poverty Agenda: the PROGRESA/Oportunidades programme in Mexico. *Gender and Social Policy in a Global Context: Uncovering the Gendered Structure of "The Social"*, 43–67. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9515.2006.00497.x>
<http://www.cashtransfers-youth.net/>

ESRC-DFID Research for Policy and Practice: Women's life choices

Foreword

Women contribute enormously to economies, whether by doing unpaid domestic work, agricultural work, or participating in businesses. Yet they often face tremendous challenges in their daily lives, such as difficulty in even having their voices heard or gaining a foothold in job markets. They are subject to violence and discrimination, lack of access to health-care services, and inequalities in education, which in turn impede them from accessing economic opportunities.

According to the Global Education Monitoring Report 2016 produced by UNESCO, 63 per cent of women who have not attained even minimal literacy skills live in rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. In 2015, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Report noted that the large majority of Africa's high rate of maternal deaths occur in the rural areas where only 56 per cent of births are attended by skilled personnel. These statistics alone paint a startling picture, showing that women, especially those in rural areas, are still disadvantaged despite decades of efforts and progress made to improve their lives.

This collection of ESRC-DFID-funded research identifies critical elements that are important to address if women's and girls' lives are to change for the better. The research looks at the mobility constraints experienced by girls and how a lack of access to means of transport hampers their access to paid work, health services, and schooling. It also identifies the barriers that women face when it comes to attending lifesaving diagnostic treatment or accessing maternal health-care services. Furthermore, it emphasises the significant role of education systems in not only enhancing women's economic opportunities but also in helping to bridge the gender gap by shaping young people's aspirations in their future career choices.

On the basis of this evidence, several key interventions have been identified that will transform the lives of women and girls, especially those in poor, rural, and marginalised populations. For instance, it is vital to find a way to increase the accessibility of disease diagnostic treatment. The research also highlights the value of using existing spatial data to tackle exclusion from health-care services. In addition, the research identifies the need to strengthen the relationships between school and community, teachers and learners, if we are to increase young women's life choices.

To achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls (Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), there has to be investment in research. However, for research to have an impact, it is critical that it is linked to policymaking. Research provides much needed evidence for policymakers to design policies and programmes as well as influence the allocation of the requisite resources.

This collective research supported by ESRC-DFID will no doubt contribute to the knowledge and evidence that policymakers need to address gender disparities and improve the lives of women and girls.

Adequate policies, programmes, and investments in women's health and education not only lift women's living standards but also pave a way towards gender equality. Unless women are equipped to reach their full potential and are empowered to make their own life choices, the 2030 Agenda Goals will be missed.

Thokozile Ruzvidzo

Director of Social Development Policy Division
United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

Key messages

- Stronger consideration of gendered mobility needs is essential;
- Combine different types of evidence, for example spatial maps and interviews, to improve programme design with an understanding of local realities;
- Work with a range of actors, including being clear about their role as this often results in more meaningful and sustained networks and interventions;
- If education systems are to encourage young people to aspire to alternative futures, governments, donors and development agencies should focus on more than just providing educational resources, but should seek to bring together communities, teachers, and children to better understand the challenges faced by women and girls.

Photo: Richard Volk, EGAT/Water team for USAID FAB Photo Contest 2010 (CC BY-NC 2.0)



Bweleo village, Zanzibar- August 2008: The photo shows one of the women involved in community-based conservation. She is demonstrating the back-breaking position women must use for hours on end while collecting cockles, which are boiled and consumed locally.

Find out more:

<https://www.theimpactinitiative.net/resources/esrc-dfid-research-policy-and-practice-womens-life-choices>

Access to transport is instrumental in shaping girls' lives

Girls have much less access to means of transport than boys, which greatly limits their opportunities to go to school, receive health care, or get a paid job. Yet the mobility of girls is not an issue that figures often in development debates. Research led by young girls in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) demonstrates the far-reaching implications of this for girls' lives and life-chances.

Far fewer girls ride bicycles than boys in SSA, mostly because of the lack of resources to buy a bicycle, household work demands, sexual innuendo, and community disapproval. Girls have less resources to pay transport fares, which is in part because household work limits their opportunities for wage employment, and they may suffer harassment if they do travel by taxi or minibus. There is a need to understand the context and constraints for the lack of access to transport for girls in SSA, as it remains one of the biggest barriers for girls to meaningfully participate outside of the home.

The *Children, Transport and Mobility in Sub-Saharan Africa* project (2006–10), led by Durham University, conducted studies across 24 sites in rural and urban Ghana, Malawi, and South Africa, in collaboration with Ghana's University of Cape Coast, the University of Malawi, and South Africa's Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). The project's aim was to discover how boys' and girls' daily physical mobility affects their access to goods, services and life-chances, and to inform policymakers and practitioners, especially those working in the transport sector. Schoolchildren between 11 and 19 years old made key inputs, not only as respondents but as co-investigators. They held interviews with their peers aged 9–18, while walking to school, at water points and markets, during firewood collection, and at play. They provided insights that we simply would not have uncovered otherwise.

Comparison of girls' and boys' movement patterns helped the researchers to identify constraints experienced by girls, and focus on interventions that may mitigate them. The project identified that mobility is more than a technical issue, it is a cultural one as well. Girls are regularly considered as vulnerable and too incompetent and naive to be allowed to travel alone. This significantly affects their access to paid work, health services, education, social networks, leisure, and wider wellbeing. There are several 'life' implications that come from the lack of mobility and access to transport for girls in SSA:

- **Domestic labour:** The shortage of cheap, reliable, regular transport in Africa and common absence of water pipes and electricity puts a particular burden on girls as they inevitably bear the brunt of carrying water and firewood for domestic use. Cultural expectation to participate in domestic work also means that girls are less likely to continue in schooling or to do paid work.
- **Schooling:** Parental concerns around girls' travel safety and vulnerability mean they may start school later than boys and are far less likely to attend secondary school, which generally requires longer journeys.

SEE ALSO:

Porter, G. (2011) 'I Think a Woman Who Travels a Lot is Befriending Other Men and That's Why She Travels': Mobility Constraints and their Implications for Rural Women and Girls in Sub-Saharan Africa', *Gender, Place & Culture* 18.1: 65–81

Porter, G. et al. (2017) *Young People's Daily Mobilities in Sub-Saharan Africa: Moving Young Lives*, London: Palgrave Macmillan

Porter, G. et al. (2012) 'Child Portage and Africa's Transport Gap: Evidence from

- **Paid work:** Concerns regarding girls' independent travel (sometimes including perceptions that they are potentially promiscuous) reduce their access to paid work opportunities beyond the home settlement.
- **Health:** Girls report more need for access to health services than boys, especially in the context of teen pregnancy. Their lack of resources to pay for transport can have serious implications, especially when obstetric emergencies occur.

Based on this evidence, the researchers have worked with government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the private sector to help address these issues in-country.



Illustration designed by: [Krishan Jayatunge](#)

This included working with the Ghana Education Service to bring gendered mobility issues into teacher training and the school curriculum. The team also informed transport training manuals produced by the African Community Access

Programme for policymakers and practitioners across the continent as well as training sessions and draft guidelines for gender mainstreaming prepared for the African Development Bank's transport division.

The evidence demonstrates how constraints on girls' and women's mobility and access to services are pervasive and have far-reaching implications. There are many interventions that could improve girls' mobility and access to key services, such as improved school boarding provision for girls, reduction of domestic load-carrying (through improved water supply, solar energy uptake, and fuel-efficient stoves), and a stronger consideration of gendered mobility needs by the transport sector. However, most fundamental of all is the need for a reduction of gender-based violence and improvements in female status. In many parts of Africa, NGOs are now leading efforts, but increased training and community dialogue are essential to bring about this change. This research highlights the enormity of this task and reinforces the need for more to be done if significant change is to be possible.

 **Project title:** [Children, transport and mobility in sub-Saharan Africa: developing a child-centred evidence base to improve policy and change thinking across Africa.](#)

Gina Porter

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The study took place in partnership with collaborators in Ghana (Albert Abane), Malawi (Alister Munthali and Elsbeth Robson) and South Africa (Mac Mashiri); Kate Hampshire (Durham University) worked across all contexts.

Ghana, Malawi and South Africa', *World Development* 40.10: 2136–54

Porter, G. et al. (2011) 'Mobility, Education and Livelihood Trajectories for Young People in Rural Ghana: A Gender Perspective', *Children's Geographies* 9.3–4: 395–410

A list of published papers and other documents from the project is available on the project website: www.dur.ac.uk/child.mobility/

Maternal health in Ghana: Why geography matters

Improving maternal health is an agreed international development goal. Ghana is a country with a high level of maternal mortality but where rapid enhancement of services is underway. Exclusion from maternity care is a matter of geographical inaccessibility and low status/poverty. Research carried out by the University of Southampton from 2008 to 2011 provided policymakers and women themselves with spatial data to tackle exclusion through maps and other evidence that promoted accountability, as well as information and insight.

Despite maternal health being high on the agenda of the government and international community, Ghana was struggling to make progress on improving maternal health under Millennium Development Goal 5. The *Poverty and Maternal Health in Ghana* project used existing geodata to spatially analyse the relationship between poverty and poorly utilised maternal health services in Ghana, and informed the government, funders, development agencies, and civil society of issues associated with accessing maternal health care and where services and interventions should be targeted to improve maternal health.

It was a collaboration between Northern and Southern-based researchers, government analysts, local and international civil society, and non-governmental organisations working in the fields of demography, health, and geography.

The research highlighted that distance from health-care services is a key exclusionary factor in rural Ghana, regardless of women's education, ethnicity, and their household wealth status.

Furthermore, at the community level, the research found that encouraging women to attend antenatal care and empowering them with information about available services can be as important for access to health care as the poverty level in the community itself.

The project used geographic information systems (GIS) in two case study regions. This use of high-precision data enabled them to quantify 'access to services' much more accurately than before. The model took into account the effect of the local road and footpath network; natural barriers to access such as rivers, swamps, and enclosed areas; and local gradient and topography.

The project had an impact on the GIS research capacity in Ghana through the training of local researchers in both academia and government. This was particularly useful in the government sector, where geodata has since helped to prioritise resources.

The researchers, from the disciplines of public health, social policy, geography, and demography worked in participatory ways from the start of the project.

SEE ALSO:

Gething, P. (2010) 'Too Far to Walk: Callibrating Distances to Maternity Health Facilities for Women Delivering in Ghana Using GIS', *Conference Proceeding Abstract*

Johnson, F.A. and Madise, N.J. (2010) 'Targeting Women at Risk of Unintended Pregnancy in Ghana: Should Geography Matter?', *Sexual & Reproductive Healthcare*

Working together they built strong links between women and their health-care services; they also promoted close collaboration with the Government of Ghana to exert direct influence on diverse stakeholders interested in maternal wellbeing and survival.



Photo: © Nyani Quarmyne/Panos Pictures

Ghana, Nyologu, Northern Region: Sanatu Issahaku, heavily pregnant, on the back of her husband's bicycle in the village of Nyologu. Poor road infrastructure and long distances make it difficult for women like Sanatu to access healthcare.

Key Ghanaian academics working in the field of maternal health have also been engaged in research dissemination efforts. In particular, the work has been taken up by colleagues in the School of Public Health, University of Ghana. Methodologically, the work has been influential in the Ghana Statistical Service.

Following the experience of working more closely with geographers on GIS in maternal health, some members of the research team are now working in national positions in Ghana as well as in international agencies. The dissemination of materials linked to the *Atlas of Birth* has also been influential, a project which has launched a live website with information on maternal and newborn health for every country in the world, including the launch of a specific Ghanaian atlas.

The research team continues to actively engage with key policy actors in the region, impacting on the reform agenda in Ghana in terms of public health policy, and also accountability, campaigning, and advocacy actions that are empowering women to access health care.

 **Project title:** [Poverty and maternal health in Ghana: a spatial analysis of exclusion from care.](#)

Zoe Matthews

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2.1: 29–35

Kehoe, S.; Neilson, J.P. and Norman, J.E. (eds) (2010) *Maternal and Infant Deaths: Chasing Millennium Development Goals 4 and 5*, London: RCOG Press

Schools, society, and rural girls' aspirations

Schooling plays a core role in shaping the life-choices of many young women worldwide. Education systems are focused on the future – both national and individual – and going to school is often understood by teachers, parents, and students alike as preparation for a future life. Many aspects of schooling explicitly encourage young people to aspire to certain sorts of (gendered) future, yet the links between schooling and aspiration are not well understood.

In 2017, researchers from Brunel University London and the International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, worked with rural primary schools and their surrounding communities in Lesotho, India, and Laos. They wanted to know what role education systems play in shaping young people's aspirations in remote rural areas.

Nine months of ethnographic research was undertaken in two communities in each setting: Korba District in Chhattisgarh, India; Oudomxay Province, Laos; and rural Lesotho. Here the team sought to develop a robust understanding of the mechanisms that connect schooling, aspirations and learning outcomes, and to develop ways to better capture these approaches and learn from them. They examined curricula and textbooks, but also the ways these are used in the classroom; messages conveyed through other aspects of schooling; and the ways in which children respond.

In Lesotho and Laos, the researchers found that texts used in the classroom explicitly address the gendered career opportunities that face young people, encouraging them to aspire to futures not traditionally associated with their own gender. They do not, however, tell a consistent story. In Laos, textbooks tend to represent girls and boys, men and women, in equal numbers to suggest balance, and sometimes challenge stereotypical expectations when it comes to careers. However, teachers are usually depicted as female and the 'naughty' child is almost invariably male.

In Lesotho, the example of Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani activist for female education and the youngest Nobel Prize laureate, is used to suggest the need to struggle for gender equality. However, a few pages later in the same book, adolescence is discussed in terms that suggest gender differences are biologically determined, while depictions of careers seldom challenge expectations.

The Indian primary school textbooks do even less to confront gender inequalities. Rather, they depict and describe the life stories of (male) nationalist leaders, emphasising their role in addressing class or caste inequalities as opposed to reforming gender attitudes.

It is important to recognise the differences in representation and how they are constructed, as these have an impact on children's life-choices and motivations. The representations of possible futures that children encounter in the classroom are produced through the interaction of national and international actors and reflect aspirations of governments and agencies. But teachers also play an important role in shaping aspirations, and children themselves do not passively absorb what is presented to them. Rather, they interpret what they see and hear in light of their wider social and economic lives.

SEE ALSO:

Ansell, N. et al. (2018) 'Education Systems, Aspiration and Learning in Remote Rural Setting', Lesotho Policy Brief (Draft)

Notably, Lesotho has introduced a new integrated primary curriculum which is radically different from those in India or Laos. It pays much greater attention to non-formal rural livelihoods, life skills, and planning for the future – areas that might be expected to widen the choices available to rural girls. Lesotho's textbooks, however, give emphasis to (and illustrate) limited parts of the curriculum, and teachers are selective in what they teach, focusing on topics and pedagogies they are most familiar with. Children, in turn, attend to only limited parts of what is presented to them.

Irrespective of different curricula, most children in all three settings saw education as a pathway only to a small range of gender-stereotyped formal sector careers (nurse, teacher, police, soldier). Yet, these expressed aspirations were often held superficially: the children were not consistent over time. Moreover, lacking significant exposure to adults in these occupations, they had little idea about how to achieve them or what life would be like were they successful.

This research is providing an important evidence-based contribution to show how aspirations are produced relationally, between school and community and between teachers and learners. While aspiration may play a role in social change, including the transformation of gender relations, efforts to promote 'gender-neutral' or transformative aspirations are reinterpreted through numerous iterations within the school system. Changes in the formal curriculum alone have limited impact, given the powerful roles played by teachers (particularly in rural areas) in determining what and how to teach, as well as children's own expectations, shaped by their families and communities.

The research identifies that if education systems are to encourage young people to aspire to alternative futures, and to view school as a route to achieve alternative (rural) livelihoods, interventions should target the relationships between school and community, and between teachers and learners. The research team continues to work with policymakers, curriculum developers, and teacher educators in the three countries to consider possible interventions. Discussions of the findings with students, teachers, and parents have been fed into policy workshops at a mix of district, state, and national levels in each setting.

 [Project title: Education systems, aspiration and learning in remote rural settings.](#)

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Improving women's access to tuberculosis diagnosis services

Since 2000, access to tuberculosis (TB) diagnosis has saved over 53 million lives (WHO 2018), but it still remains one of the world's biggest killers. TB diagnosis relies on patients attending diagnostic centres, which requires travel and staying several days. This presents a challenge for women in poor areas who, as the main caregivers, may not be able to leave children or elderly relatives for the duration, or who cannot get transport on their own to the clinic due to cultural constraints.

In 2009, the World Health Organization (WHO) adopted policies that supported approaches to reduce the time to make a TB diagnosis. The ESRC-DFID-funded research looked specifically at the barriers to diagnosis and treatment in Ethiopia, Yemen, and Nigeria, with a specific focus on women's and men's different experiences. In these countries, patients often abandon the diagnostic process and fail to initiate treatment.

Through surveys, interviews, and group discussions the research team tried to understand the participants' personal perceptions of diagnostic and treatment processes, the barriers they faced, and how services could be modified to improve access. There were significant costs involved, especially for clinic fees and transport, and among accompanied adults and those from rural areas.

While many participants explained that women had the same access to health care as men, in reality women faced additional difficulties to attend the services. These barriers included having to request permission from their husband, being unable to travel alone or to access household funds, and holding caring responsibilities.

The participants of this research, particularly women, attended the diagnostic services with companions and were often unprepared for the duration of the process. There were numerous reasons why many patients did not complete the diagnosis, including:

- The cost of the process
- Receiving negative but incomplete smear results
- Having a clear chest X-ray on the first day and then receiving misleading, or misinterpreting, information from staff.

These reasons were exacerbated in some settings where some patients had to pay additional unofficial fees and were often referred to private services. Patients found non-TB medication and additional tests in the private sector prohibitive. Many patients highlighted opportunity costs for diagnosis and treatment as an important obstacle. In response, the researchers developed models to identify populations at risk of high expenditure and ways to support those that are the most marginalised to access the services.

As a follow-on from the findings of the ESRC-DFID-funded research, TB REACH grants in Ethiopia, Yemen, and Nigeria have tested-out strategies to address the barriers that both men and women face through bringing diagnosis closer to households and communities. In Ethiopia, the TB REACH process trains village-based health extension workers (HEWs) to facilitate access to diagnosis, reducing travel and time taken to seek diagnosis and

SEE ALSO:

Anderson de Cuevas, R.M. et al. (2014) 'Barriers to Completing TB Diagnosis in Yemen: Services Should Respond to Patients' Needs', PLoS ONE 9.9: e105194

Datiko, D.G. et al. (2015) 'Exploring Providers' Perspectives of a Community Based TB Approach in Southern Ethiopia: Implication for Community Based Approaches', BMC Health Services Research 15.1: 501

Tulloch, O. et al. (2015) 'Patient and Community Experiences of Tuberculosis Diagnosis

opportunity costs. This approach has doubled TB diagnosis, with significant increases amongst women.

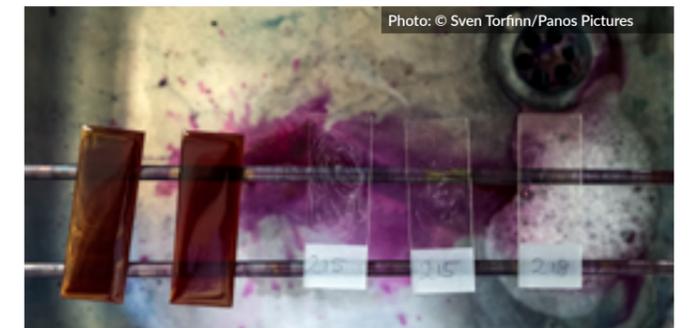


Photo: © Sven Torfinn/Panos Pictures
Blood and sputum samples are placed on glass slides over a sink before being tested for tuberculosis.

In Yemen, the TB REACH project followed-up with contacts of TB patients by visiting households to identify those close to them who had not accessed diagnostic services. These included the elderly, women, and children. The project identified that one in ten households had a second person with TB who had not accessed the services. In the Nigerian TB REACH process, HEWs identified adults with symptoms of TB in the congested informal settlements of Abuja and provided diagnostics for TB and HIV where they lived.

Patients in poor communities still face many barriers when it comes to attending and completing TB diagnosis. These barriers disproportionately affect women and are mediated by traditional and cultural norms including, for example, who is able to travel on their own. New approaches to TB diagnosis can help patients by reducing costs; the research shows how vital it is to find ways to complete the diagnosis process in one day and/or bring the treatment closer to where patients live.

Partnership with community health workers has made TB diagnostic and treatment services more accessible to the poor, women, the elderly, and children. Not only was placing TB services within communities much more hospitable and acceptable to families with poor access to health facilities, but all providers were also motivated by the clear use of the services so close to home.

 [Project title: Identifying barriers to TB diagnosis and treatment under a new rapid diagnostic scheme.](#)

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The study took place in partnership with researchers in Ethiopia (Mohammed Yassin and Daniel Gemechu Datiko), Yemen (Najla Al-Sonboli and Nasher Al-Aghbari) and Nigeria (Lovett Lawson); Rachel Anderson de Cuevas worked across all contexts.

and Care Within a Community-Based Intervention in Ethiopia: A Qualitative Study', BMC Public Health 15: 187

Yassin, M.A. et al. (2013) 'Innovative Community-Based Approaches Doubled Tuberculosis Case Notification and Improve Treatment Outcome in Southern Ethiopia', PLoS ONE 8.5: e63174

WHO (2018) [Tuberculosis](#). World Health Organization

Automation, Women, and the Future of Work

Will women benefit from the rapid automation and digitisation that is set to change the world of work as we know it? How can we ensure that women's economic interests are brought into focus, and that debates on the future of work are not about the changing relationship between man and machine, but between people and machine? This briefing explores the impact of automation on women and work in developing countries, considering global targets on valuing unpaid care, rights to economic resources, and access and use of information and communication technologies.

Decent work for all in an age of automation

The eighth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), adopted by the global community in 2015, calls for productive employment and decent work for all by 2030. But how will this Goal be achieved in a rapidly digitising world, where the majority of jobs are likely to be lost to automation? Recent research predicts that 47 per cent of jobs in the United States, 85 per cent of jobs in Ethiopia and 77 per cent of

jobs in China are at risk of automation in the coming years. [Research from the Institute of Development Studies for the 2017 Digital Development Summit](#) found that governments, businesses and global institutions are not prepared for such large-scale, rapid change, and are failing to put in place anticipatory and adaptive measures to cope with its impact.

Gender, work, and automation

Research shows that men and women will not equally experience job losses due to automation. Overall, men stand to gain one job for every three jobs lost to technological advances, while women are expected to gain one job for every five or more jobs lost. On the other hand, as social skills are particularly important in high-paying jobs that are difficult to automate, the shift in women's employment towards social skill-intensive occupations may mean women actually benefit from automation. Research from the United States shows that the three occupations expected to grow the most between 2014 and 2024 are personal care aides, registered nurses and home health aides.

Much of the debate on the future of jobs has focused on the formal sector, with little attention paid to the impacts of automation on the two billion

working-age adults classified as being outside of the workforce – many of whom are women.

The broader framing of debates on automation inevitably reflects deeply embedded sexism in society. For example, why is Amazon's virtual artificial intelligence assistant, Alexa, female? What will be the impact of such sexualised robots on the objectification of real women and girls? Research has shown that sexism is 'hard-wired' into the online systems we use every day. For example, gender stereotypes are encoded into algorithms by associating certain professions with particular genders: receptionists and nannies are female, while architects and philosophers are male. Overall, these issues reflect broader structural inequalities experienced by women in employment.

How will automation impact on decent work for all?

Against this backdrop, it is clear that the achievement of SDG 8 by 2030 will be impossible without considering the risks and benefits of digital technology and automation. But this in turn will be unachievable without paying attention to gender in line with SDG 5: 'achieve gender equality and empower all women

and girls'. This briefing explores the impact of automation on three of the targets under SDG 5, recommending how governments, businesses, civil society and others can ensure gender is properly considered in debates on the future of work.

1. Value unpaid care work

SDG Target 5.4: Recognise and value unpaid care and domestic work

Care work is a key contributor to women's lack of economic empowerment. Women endure the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work at home, and also experience low wages for paid employment in the care economy. [IDS research by Deepta Chopra](#) has demonstrated a strong inverse link between the amount of time that women and girls spend on unpaid care work and their economic empowerment. Many women face a double burden of time poverty – through discrimination in the labour market and also in the drudgery that is found in domestic responsibilities. Women also face significant barriers in accessing formal employment, such as the high transport and time costs associated with travelling to formal sector jobs that are often only found in large cities.

to look after elderly people – taking on work that is currently typically performed by poorly remunerated women – is this what society wants? Robotic systems cannot offer empathy or shared experiences. The [Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council's \(EPSRC\) Principles of Robotics](#) warns that robots must be regulated in a way that ensures they do not exploit vulnerable users. As automation develops, social science researchers must engage with these principles and consider ways to quantify and explain the impacts of these changes to a broader population.

Care work often appears in debates about automation in terms of the potential for humanoid robots to be used as personal assistants and companions. Yet is it desirable or even ethical for care to be automated? Caring labour is typically devalued, but it also offers its own emotional rewards as people derive pleasure from the wellbeing of others. While robots may soon be able

Rather than seeking to automate the burden of care, policymakers and governments should instead be looking to redistribute the burden of unpaid care work from poor families to the state through provision of public services, infrastructure and care-sensitive social protection. In recognition of this, the International Labour Organization (ILO) calls for decent work for care professionals, including domestic and migrant workers (see Box 1).

2. Work towards equal access to economic resources

SDG Target 5.7: Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources

The International Monetary Fund estimates that 865 million women worldwide have the potential to contribute more to their economies, and 94 per cent of these women live in developing countries. In many countries, distortions and discrimination in the labour market restrict women's options for paid work. Research shows that when women try to overcome these barriers by starting their own businesses, many face obstacles: The obstacles to women starting and growing a business include discriminatory property,

matrimonial and inheritance laws and/or cultural practices, lack of access to formal financial mechanisms, and limited mobility and access to networks. However, when the right enabling environment and policy frameworks are in place women entrepreneurs become an important source of economic growth and employment. (International Labour Office: 2015: 3)

Box 1: Gender inequalities in employment

- **Income:** Globally, women's earnings are 77 per cent of men's, with the gap widening for higher-earning women ([International Labour Organization 2017](#))
- **Pay equity:** Without targeted action, pay equity between women and men will not be achieved before 2086 ([International Labour Organization 2015](#))
- **Participation:** The global labour force participation rate for women stands at 49 per cent, nearly 27 percentage points lower than the rate for men ([International Labour Organization 2017](#))
- **Geography:** The largest gender gap in participation rates (31 percentage points) is faced by women in emerging economies such as Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa and Turkey ([International Labour Organization 2017](#))
- **Quality:** In emerging economies, female workers are typically employed in less-productive and lower-paid sectors, their jobs are more insecure and they are at higher risk of extreme low pay than men ([Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2016](#))

The concept of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) – a flat rate salary distributed to all citizens – has become increasingly popular as a means to mitigate the impacts of automation on employment. UBI proponents suggest income security could lead to people spending more time on things they actually care about and improving society, and thus see an increase in creativity and innovation. How to make UBI work is likely to vary in different contexts, but a recent study on the impact of a UBI trial in India showed that such a scheme had a positive impact on women’s economic citizenship. Women were not only able to increase and diversify their economic roles and acquire assets, but they also experienced an increase in critical consciousness and empowerment.

Without forms of social protection such as the UBI, it is likely that women in developing countries will suffer more from the impacts of automation as their jobs come under threat and they are less likely to be able to find alternative sources of employment. In recent years, for example, in countries such as the Philippines, the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry has flourished, delivering services such as back-office support, animation, software development and data transcription. This sector has been an area where women have had an opportunity for economic advancement, accounting for 59 per cent of the workforce. But research has shown that many of these jobs are at risk from automation – for example, 89 per cent of salaried call centre staff in the Philippines BPO

3. Promote women’s empowerment through digital skills

SDG Target 5.8: Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women

The examples above powerfully illustrate the potential negative impact of digitisation on women’s economic status in developing countries. Without digital skills women are unlikely to benefit from the more senior technological jobs that will remain available when the bulk of BPO jobs are automated. But while research shows there has been a rapid increase in women working in the IT industry in India and other BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries, these women progress more slowly than their male colleagues.

There is a significant gender gap in terms of women’s access to digital tools. Globally, women are on average 14 per cent less likely to own a mobile phone than men, and poor urban women are about 50 per cent less likely to have access to the internet than men. The Web Foundation has called for a range of policy interventions including prioritising investment in digitising the information and services that low-income women will find most valuable and ensuring a public fund for technology development (such as subsidies or incentives for technological entrepreneurs) is specifically set aside for projects led by women. Policy outputs on the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in developing countries often promise a causal link between internet connectivity and economic growth, which is arguably implicit in this SDG target. These claims are scrutinised in [ESRC-funded research on economic development and broadband in East Africa](#), finding that the current evidence base is mixed and inconclusive. It is therefore essential that the organisations who make these promises are asked to justify their claims, rather than assuming it is self-evident that ICTs will automatically bring about development.

sector are at high risk of job losses. A recent ILO report on the workforce in Cambodia, the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand and Indonesia found that workers in the garment manufacturing industry are especially vulnerable to displacement by robots. Many businesses hope automation will deliver the same work at a higher standard, without the human cost. In some Southeast Asian countries, more than 70 per cent of workers in the textile, clothing and footwear industries are women. [ESRC-DFID-funded research on sweatshop regimes in the garment industry](#) shows the degrading conditions in which women work:

Supervisors are generally men, and many women workers report gender-based harassment as a key problem. Male supervisors often deploy abusive comments to discipline workers and remind them of production targets. Many may also engage in physical touching or degrading practices, such as appealing to sexual visual imagery when talking to their ‘subordinates’ on the shop floor. Indeed, the factory reproduces the same structures of oppression women often face in their private sphere.

In this instance, it might be possible to argue that women could benefit from automation – if many garment manufacturing jobs are replaced by robots, women will no longer have to work in these poor conditions. But this will only be the case if the right mitigation strategies are put in place to protect women’s livelihoods.

The researchers found that all policies assume, without explicit evidence, that through ICTs women are able to access information and participate in the economy, society, and politics.

Further [ESRC-funded research on the impact of mobile phones on young people’s lives and life chances in sub-Saharan Africa](#), highlighted how mobile phones contributed to youth livelihood strategies, such as through job search, micro-enterprise and providing a safety net. The research finds that while many young people use mobile phones in their search for work, they are not enough to overcome structural inequalities. Low levels of education, increasing competition for jobs and little opportunities for work experience exacerbate unemployment. According to lead researcher Gina Porter: ‘unless the overall basket of opportunities grows, mobile phones are not going to be the answer.’ In a similar way, structural inequalities faced by women and girls must be overcome if mobile technology is to promote women’s empowerment.

The research also found that girls experienced bullying from boys or older men on their mobile phones. Women’s experiences of using ICTs might be compromised by digital harassment. Advocacy organisation Take Back the Tech argues that violence against women in the material world is replicated in the virtual one. Institutional responses to this issue are still poor: in 74 per cent of countries surveyed for the 2015 Web Index, law enforcement agencies and the courts were found to be failing to take appropriate actions in situations where web-enabled ICTs are used to commit acts of gender-based violence.

Recommendations

This briefing shows that the impact of automation on women is critically important in the achievement of the global goal of decent work for all by 2030. It has demonstrated that this goal is interlinked with other SDG targets on gender equality in employment, economic opportunity, care work and access to technology. With such a rapid pace of anticipated technological change, tackling these issues is all the more urgent.

To promote decent work for all – including women – by 2030, the following recommendations must be implemented:

Researchers and analysts

- Researchers must urgently create cross-cutting partnerships across disciplines, geographies and sectors, which address automation’s impact on women in developing countries.
- The research community can help broker coordinated, multi-stakeholder responses to the future potential impacts of automation.
- Researchers must ensure that future research agendas take account of women’s experiences and voices.

Civil society and advocacy organisations

- Gender-focused advocacy on digital issues must expand, ensuring women can enjoy their right to use digital tools for economic and social empowerment without fear of harassment.
- Global advocacy is needed on automation as a critical global development challenge, making links with issues such as unpaid care work.
- NGOs can provide a frontline ‘early warning’ function to explore the diverse impacts of automation on different groups in developing countries.

Policymakers

- Policy shifts are needed at a national, regional and global level to ensure digital education opportunities are available to girls, with a focus on lifelong learning.
- Donors and other policymakers must address digital inequalities in their activities to promote women’s economic advancement.
- Serious consideration needs to be given to shifts in working practices (such as shorter working weeks) which have the potential to not only address automation-related job losses, but also benefit women with caring responsibilities.

Further reading

Faith, B.; Hernandez, K. and Ramalingam, B. (2017) Background Paper for the Digital Development Summit 2017

Friederici, N.; Ojanperä, S. and Graham, M. (2016) The Impact of Connectivity in Africa: Grand Visions and the Mirage of Inclusive Digital Development, SSRN Scholarly Paper 2855398, Rochester NY: Social Science Research Network

International Labour Office (2015) Women and the Future of Work: Beijing + 20 and Beyond, Geneva: Gender, Equality and Diversity Branch, ILO

Mezzadri, A. (2016) ‘Class, Gender and the Sweatshop: On the Nexus between Labour Commodification and Exploitation’, *Third World Quarterly* 37: 1877–1900

Porter, G.; Hampshire, K.; Milner, J.; Munthali, A.; Robson, E. et al. (2016) ‘Mobile Phones and Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: From Youth Practice to Public Policy’, *Journal of International Development* 28: 22–39

Credits

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Gender Evidence Synthesis

The gender evidence synthesis is an assessment of 122 research grants awarded by the ESRC-DFID Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research covering research in Central Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, South Asia, South East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. It found that 28 per cent of all awards had an explicit gender focus and a further 32% per cent included women as part of the study or disaggregated findings by sex.

A gendered understanding of poverty is crucial for exploring its differing impacts. Women, in particular, may be vulnerable to the effects of poverty and the causes of women's poverty, and how poverty is experienced, may differ from men. Neither women nor men, however, are a homogenous group and how poverty is experienced depends on other intersecting issues such as age, class, ethnicity, disability etc. These issues need to be considered in order to get a more nuanced picture of people's lived experiences to help shape policy responses that are relevant and appropriate.

“ The studies that did have an explicit gender focus provided important new insights into the lived experiences of women's poverty and wider wellbeing. They also demonstrate how a gender analysis can be applied to a 'mainstream' topic such as education to provide insights into wider societal concerns such as violence, and how a gender lens can provide additional interesting insights into how social norms impact on the wellbeing of women and men and girls and boys. ”



Doorway Smile in Ahmedabad's Old City.

There were some **specific key findings** to report from the synthesis of the studies.

- The starting point for creating change in the gendered experience of work is not about highlighting women's participation in paid work, but rather understanding the social conditions that confine women to the private sphere.
- Whilst women are moving into 'traditional male' areas of work, they still face social stigma for transgressing gender norms, so it is important to explore how employment does, and does not, have the potential to change lives and livelihoods over time. More exploration is also needed on male attitudes to women's income generating activities and the power issues entailed.
- Women suffer more and deal with more diverse forms of shame than men and the studies highlight how shame can compromise women's very sense of humanity. Shame and loss of dignity can be an unintended outcome of social protection programmes and can potentially limit the effectiveness of donor or government responses to poverty.
- While schools and universities can offer opportunities for transforming gender inequalities, sexual harassment and sexual violence may be prevalent in education institutions. To understand this and to capture the ways in which gender norms are shifting over time in these settings, more funding for longitudinal studies would be useful.
- Health providers must do more to ensure women's access to services, recognising how social norms and carer responsibilities may limit women's mobility. The stigma associated with disease may also be gendered; limiting

women's appetite to seek medical attention in the first place. A more thorough understanding of the role of male relatives in women's decision-making processes would also lead to better health outcomes.

- Little is still known about how economic and environmental crises impact on women and men but the studies question the idea that women will be most vulnerable and point to how household crises can negatively impact boys as they are expected to take up the breadwinner role. What emerged from a number of studies was the importance of transactional sex as a livelihood strategy for many women.
- Many women and girls face violence or the threat of violence on a daily basis and this limits their life chances. Establishing legal frameworks to address gender based violence is an important first step to addressing this issue, however, on its own it is not enough, and changing attitudes is key to bringing change.
- Women should not be seen only as victims. So called 'at risk' groups such as sex workers demonstrate levels of agency and power that should be supported and promoted via collective actions and organisation.

Reports:

Gender Evidence Synthesis Research Award - Bradshaw, S., Linnekar, B., Nussey, C., Sanders-McDonagh, E., Middlesex University 2015

New Knowledge on the Gendered Nature of Poverty and Wellbeing - Bradshaw, S., Linnekar, B., Nussey, C., Sanders-McDonagh, E., Middlesex University 2015

Insights:

- On social norms – the unwritten rules of societies – and how these impede or dictate women's mobility and employment access. Studies also point, however, to how gender relations are complex and shifting in the face of new crises.
- Challenging the assumption that gender equitable access to higher education is enough in the process of women's empowerment.
- The impacts of disease and ill-health on men and women and what hinders their access to services.
- Differing experiences of poverty and well-being, in particular introducing the important, but often overlooked, concepts of shame and dignity.

Find out more:

www.theimpactinitiative.net/new-knowledge-gendered-nature-poverty-and-wellbeing-synthesis-evidence-ten-years-research

Special Collection

Social Realities of Knowledge for Development is a special collection of papers which explore critical challenges faced by organisations and individuals involved in evidence-informed development through a diverse set of case studies and think-pieces. While the dominant themes emerging from the contributions include: building networks and partnerships; contextualisation of knowledge and power dynamics; and modes of knowledge brokerage there are three chapters that particularly highlight the impact on women and gender dynamics that play out within poverty and development.



Chapter 3. Translating Health Research to Policy: Breaking Through the Impermeability Barrier

Gita Sen, Altaf Virani, Aditi Iyer, Bhayya Reddy, S. Selvakumar

This chapter analyses an experience of addressing the barriers between health research and policymaking in India. Typically, researchers located within government institutions struggle for autonomy, while those outside face difficulties in getting heard, generating unhealthy competition among researchers. Between 2010 and 2012, the authors were part of the Fostering Knowledge Implementation Links Project, which brought together health researchers in the state of Karnataka (India) and senior to mid-level health programme managers and implementers on a range of issues linked to maternal health.

“The briefs on maternal death reviews and the competence of health-care providers served as a way to raise issues, problematise areas of the programme and policy that were otherwise getting little attention, and provide recommendations for action.”



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Chapter 4. Engaging the Middle: Using Research To Support Progress On Gender, Education And Poverty Reduction Initiatives In Kenya And South Africa

Amy North, Elaine Sara Unterhalter, Herbert Makinda

“The project documented many different meanings of gender across the different research sites and highlighted some of the challenges in developing and supporting meanings that stressed equality, human rights and social justice, rather than entailing distancing and blame or a knee-jerk gesture towards noticing girls, often in some essentialised ways that focused on vulnerability and embodiment.”



Photo credit: © Tommy Trenchard/Panos Pictures

This chapter reflects on the project Gender, Education and Global Policy Reduction Initiatives (GEGPRI), drawing out how the research process catalysed impact among groups who engaged with policy in what was

termed the middle space that lies between centres of global or national-level policy formulations and sites of enactment. The research revealed some of the conditions that might limit the impact of reform initiatives.

Chapter 5. How Collaboration, Early Engagement And Collective Ownership Increase Research Impact: Strengthening Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms In Sierra Leone

Michael Wessells, David Lamin, Marie Manyeh, Dora King, Lindsay Stark, Sarah Lilley, Kathleen Kostelny



Photo credit: Marco Di Lauro/Edit by Getty Image

“Teenage girls reported that because of the intervention, they said ‘No’ more frequently to unwanted sex. Both girls and boys said that they had learned how to discuss and negotiate with their partners about sex, and also how to plan their sexual activities in light of wider life goals. In addition, boys said openly that they had a responsibility to prevent teenage pregnancy, which contrasted sharply with the boys’ previous behaviour.”

This chapter describes how the inter-agency research facilitated a community-driven approach to addressing teenage pregnancy in Sierra Leone. The results obtained before the Ebola crisis helped shape a new Child and

Family Welfare Policy that featured the role of families and communities rather than formal structures. Then it examines how the social process of the research enabled it to have a national impact.

Key Issues Guide

This collection of research published by knowledge platform, ELDIS, highlights the collection of research funded by ESRC-DFID on understanding the social norms that restrict women's access to paid work.

The guide provides further reading from research funded by ESRC-DFID on cultural and social barriers, flexible working and shifting norms to demonstrate the breadth of evidence on this subject:

Labouring for global markets: Conceptualising labour agency in global production networks

The article draws on material from South India to examine how people enter garment work as well as the multiple and everyday forms of agency they engage in. We follow a 'horizontal' approach that accounts for gender, age, caste and regional connections in the making and constraining of agency.

Dalits and local labour markets in rural India: experiences from the Tiruppur textile region in Tamil Nadu

For the women in Tiruppur the flexible working model, despite lower pay and limited job security, was often seen as advantageous. It meant a more social, less stressful working environment, based at home or in smaller factories that often involved working within kinship networks.'

Social protection and wellbeing: Food security in Adivasi communities, Chhattisgarh, India

A gendered view of efforts to support labour market participation is needed that recognises the barriers women face because of society's, and their own, different expectations of work opportunities and their needs at different stages in their lives. The role of men, and addressing the stigma that they might face, should be a part of this approach.

“ What the ESRC-DFID funded research makes clear is that flexible working conditions for women, while they are still expected to undertake the bulk of unpaid work in the home, offers them some opportunity to engage in paid labour. Ultimately the hope is that this might translate into more power and agency for women within the household although, for now, this remains to be seen. ”



Find out more:

<https://www.eldis.org/keyissues/women-work>



Photo: At [Koonthaikulam, a village in Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu](#), Swarnam Nayanar (left), and Pappa S. take part in road widening as part of the central government's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

Credit: Kalvi Kendra/Cordaid Flickr via [Climatalk.in](#) (CC-BY-NC 2.0)

Press Cuttings

The process of organising and communicating information can involve a wide range of intermediaries and outlets. In the Impact Initiative programme we have worked with the global media to produce several targeted articles. Often as part of an event, and in collaboration with NGOs and other researchers these pieces have been opportunities to engage in a larger conversation relevant to public audiences. Issues that have been addressed include: Period poverty; child marriage and supporting mothers.

Devex: Child marriage campaigns are missing the point

11 October 2017

Nicola Ansell (Brunel University) draws on research funded by ESRC-DFID in Malawi and Lesotho to highlight the fact that applying a universal age limit to marriage fails to acknowledge the context and unique scenarios in countries and communities.

“ My many interviews with young women about marriage reflect a diversity of experiences. Mapoka, in Lesotho, talked about her marriage as the saddest moment in her life. She had to leave school. She struggled hard to find food for her young family and had to cope without the support of her mother in her new home. Neither her in-laws, nor even her husband offered her any help. This picture corroborates what I learned from other young women in Lesotho, who told of having to move to live with their in-laws, often in a village they'd never visited, and sharing their lives with unemployed husbands, struggling to provide for themselves and their families. ”

Read more:

www.devex.com/news/opinion-child-marriage-campaigns-are-missing-the-point-91262

Project Syndicate: Demystifying menstruation

17 April 2018

In collaboration with Gabby Edlin, founder of Bloody Good Period, Catherine Dolan (SOAS, University of London) Julie Hennegan (Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health) shared the findings from their study with adolescent girls in Uganda, on menstruation.

“ We need solutions that are based on facts. Too often, biased assumptions guide policymaking. When programs are developed in conjunction with rigorous research, the effect can be dramatic. For example, a joint SOAS-Oxford study on menstruation in Uganda found that adolescent girls often missed school because they didn't have access to clean sanitary products. But when reusable sanitary pads and education about menstruation were provided to girls in eight schools, attendance rose by an average of 17%. ”

Read more:

www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/female-empowerment-managing-menstrual-sanitation-by-catherine-dolan-et-al-2018-04

New Statesman: Why tackling period poverty is an issue for everyone

7 February 2017

Following on from an engaged roundtable discussion as part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science in November 2018 on demystifying menstruation UK – Uganda, the panellists, Catherine Dolan, Mandu Reid (The Cup Effect and UK Women's Equality Party) and Emily Wilson-Smith (Irise International) wrote a piece building on their discussion on the universal nature of 'period poverty' and the need for multiple approaches and understandings in addressing it.

“ The failure to support women to manage their periods is a loss for society at large. Assumptions that women are less efficient while menstruating, the stigmatisation of a natural life process and the relative underdevelopment of the reusable menstrual product market must all be addressed. Politicians and policymakers need to be a driving force behind making a change. This is not just a feminist issue. This is a human issue. ”

Read more:

www.newstatesman.com/spotlight/healthcare/2019/02/why-tackling-period-poverty-issue-everyone

Project Syndicate: How social protection can empower women

2 May 2019

After participation in the UN Women's 63rd Commission for the Status of Women, which asked: 'Does Poverty End at Employment?' the Phakama Ntshongwana (Nelson Mandela University), Nicola Ansell (Brunel University) and Keetie Roelen (Institute of Development Studies) wrote a timely piece that argued the need to provide women not only with job opportunities, but also social support that accounts for the true extent of their responsibilities.

“ Evidence from around the world demonstrates the urgent need for social-protection policies and initiatives that enable women not just to survive, but to thrive. This means giving women the support they need to participate in the labour force – including education and training – while taking into account the true extent of their responsibilities. Above all, it means empowering women to choose the balance between employment and caregiving that works best for them. ”

Read more:

www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/rethinking-social-protection-for-women-by-phakama-ntshongwana-et-al-2019-05

THE IMPACT INITIATIVE

For International Development Research

THIS BOOKLET PROFILES THE RESEARCH AND IMPACT FUNDED BY THE ESRC-DFID STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP WHICH EXPLICITLY FOCUSES ON GENDER INEQUALITY, BUT ALSO PROJECTS WHERE THE GENDER DYNAMICS EMERGED DURING THE COURSE OF THE WORK. THIS COLLECTION OF RESOURCES HIGHLIGHTS THE MANY DIFFERENT OPPORTUNITIES AND COLLABORATIONS THAT SHOW HOW A GENDERED LENS CAN TRULY HELP UNDERSTAND THE REALITIES OF PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD.

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