

Examining Gender Difference in Socio-economic Development: Implications for Developing Countries

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Abstract:

The study of how gender difference impacts an economy is one of the increasing talked about issues in the developing world. In the developing countries, gender gap is still a big issue that has a direct impact on the socio-economic development of a country. However, it is also important to examine how the differences are associated with the well being of a particular gender. A body of literature shows that in the context of developing world, gender inequalities are also important in shaping the outcomes of the same gender. Following a case study method, this paper addresses the issue of gender difference in the context of developing world and highlights how women's access to power and wages may contribute to the socio-economic development of the emerging countries.

Key Word: Gender Difference, Women's access to power, women's access to wage, socio-economic development.

1. Introduction

This paper aims at exploring how gender difference in political access and wage in developing countries may affect the well-being of females and children. In so doing, first of all, section two focuses on the gender differences that prevail in the developing countries. Then section three examines why these differences are important in the context of developing world. After that, section four investigates the roles that gender differences in labour market play in determining the outcomes of females and children. Finally, in section five some policy implications are studied in relation the wellbeing of females and children.

2. Gender difference in developing world

In the developing world gender difference in the labour market is a common issue. Labour market in the developing world is not the same as that in the developed world. According to Unni (2001), the labour market in developing countries is typically unlike from that in the developed world. The most remarkable characteristic of labour market in the emerging countries is its 'non-homo-geneous character' (ibid).

Gender difference in the developing world needs to be studied in relation to the social customs in those countries. It is not that the difference only exists in the labour market; rather differences in the labour market may be a reflection of other established differences that prevail between men and women in the developing countries. In South Asia, for example, parents are more willing to invest in their male offspring's education than in their female offspring's education (Correl 2001). It may be due to the cultural influence in South Asian countries, where still now masculine power mostly dominates the society and most of the activities in it. As an instance, it may be noted here that in most parts of the present researcher's country, Bangladesh usually men preserve the authority over the women and children.

Rahman, et al. (2008), show an interesting finding relating to gender inequality in marriage in the context of Bangladesh. The analysis of the demographic characteristics of the respondents in their research project shows that most elderly men (41.25%) were at their age of 70 while most elderly women (43.1%) were between 60 and 64. And maximum elderly men (91.5%) were married whereas maximum elderly women (63.9%) were widow. Again, to state the cultural influence on gender gap in two developing countries: Bangladesh and Pakistan, Dale, shaheen, Fieldhouse, Kalra (2002, p.6)

remark, 'Pakistani and Bangladeshi women are often treated as a unified group and their low levels of labour market participation is attributed to cultural and religious beliefs.

Apart from the gender disparity in education, we may also refer to the gap that exists between men and women's profession (See, Correl 2001). Again, this issue in the developing world labour market may be examined in relation to the present researcher's country, Bangladesh. The author's country, being an emerging one, is now experiencing a growth in industrialization. The country has a reputation for garments and it earns a huge amount of money by exporting ready garments. However, even in the garments sector as well there is a big gap between the male and the female workers' wages. Paul-Majumder and Begum (2000, p.24) claim that 'women are employed in this industry (export-oriented garments industry) mainly to exploit the comparative advantages of their disadvantages, like the low price of their labour, their lower bargaining power, and their docility...'. The 1990 and the 1993 surveys in Bangladesh show a mismatch between male and female workers' wage in garment sector. The surveys represent that a female garment employee earned merely 58 percent of a man employee's wage (ibid).

3. Importance of gender difference in developing countries

Different societies have different customs. Every society fosters its own norms and customs which determine the roles that women and men are to play respectively (Rahman, et al. 2008). Again, these customs and rules are different in different societies and these customs and norms are stimulated by 'social and economic institutions' in those societies (ibid). For example, in the rural areas of the author's country, Bangladesh, women are expected to work in the households and look after the children and other family issues such as cooking food and serving the other family members. On the other, men are expected to work outside the households and earn money for maintaining the households (also see Rahman, et al. 2008). In Chinese society also a similar scenario is seen as Choi and Chen (2006) state 'household work such as child rearing and day-to-day life chores is generally regarded as women's work. In contrast, men assume the role of a breadwinner working outside the household to deliver income to the family...'

In their research Rahman, et al. (2008) show that in a rural area of Bangladesh most male people are involved in farming activities whereas most women are involved in taking care of their households. In respect to this finding, they claim that this distinction 'reflects societal differences in gender roles and cultural definition of work'. In case of the rural and agricultural societies, Rahman, et al. (2008) think that 'in the less well off and/or predominantly agricultural societies, women's labour may be needed to continue to the household economy or assist with the farming'.

Melamed (1995, p.36) posit that female workers' way to 'career success' is distinguished from males' ones and that these two different genders should not be considered as a single group while interpreting their 'career success'. He further claims that females might get teaching job much easier and enjoyable to them than a job as a mechanical engineer, even though the salary rate in mechanical engineering may be higher than that in a teaching profession. Thus, 'division of labour' in a society is 'largely gender based' (see for example, Choi & Chen, 2006).

From the above discussion it may be observed that gender difference is important in the context of developing world. Next section will examine how gender inequalities contribute to the well being of females and children.

4. Role that gender difference plays in shaping the outcomes of females and children in the developing countries

It has been discussed above in section 3 that the social customs and norms in the developing world expect different genders play different roles. As in the developing world the cultural definition of women's role is different from that of men, it is important to see how gender difference in wage and power impacts the way different genders plays their role. Specifically, it is important here to examine how women's access to wage and power affects the well being of the females and children. Duflo (2003, p.2) claims that 'families in which women work or own more assets could differ in many respects from families in which women have no access to resources and thus make different decisions'.

According to Kanter (1979) women should be given an access to power so that they are not restricted to lower-level assignments and thus, they are not excluded from the social chains. This access can bring about a positive impact on the children's health and nutrition because 'income and assets in the hands of women are associated with larger improvements in child health and larger shares of household spending on nutrients, health, and housing than are resources in the hands of men' (Duflo 2003, p. 2). Goldstein and Urdy (2008) also shows that access to power is important because '...powerful positions in a local political hierarchy have more secure tenure rights, and that as a consequence they invest more in land fertility and have substantially higher output' (p.1).

In a research, Goldstein and Urdy (2008) investigate into the impacts of individual's social and political positions in following choices on a land. The finding of the project shows a 'strong gender discrimination' in that females are less likely in following their plot and thus get less yields because in the context of Ghana women are hardly in any powerful social and political positions. On the other hand, as men are in the powerful social and political positions, they choose to follow their land more than women do, and thus, they achieve much more yields (Goldstein & Urdy 2008). The findings in Goldstein and Urdy (2008) are important and can also be referred to the present author's country, Bangladesh where on an average; women are hardly in any powerful social and political positions. As a consequence, most women rely on their husbands' income (see for example Rahman, et.al. 2008).

Based on the aforesaid findings by Goldstein and Urdy (2008), it can be argued that lack of access to social and political power is one of the major reasons why women may lag behind in economic development process. It should be noted here that this lack of access to power may bring about wage discrimination when it applies to women; as an example we may refer to the case of the Bangladeshi female garments workers (cf section 2).

So far we have examined how lack of access to power may hinder women's contribution to the economic growth. Now we will examine how women's access to power and wage may affect in shaping the outcomes of females and children. In so doing we will study two cases: one related to women's access to power in India (Chattopadhyay & Duflo 2004), and the other is related to women's access to pension, that is wage in South Africa (see, Duflo, 2003). First of all, India's case is examined in section 4.1, which is then followed by a study of South Africa's case in section 4.2.

4.1 Women's access to power and well being of females: India's case

Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) report a research that they carried out in West Bengal and Rajasthan of India in order to examine 'the impact of women's leadership on policy decisions'. Using the data from 265 villages in the mentioned two areas of India, the researchers show that 'reservation of a council seat' affects the policy choices by the two different genders as 'leaders invest more in infrastructure that is directly relevant to the needs of their own genders' (p. 1409).

As for the results of the study, first of all, it shows that the reservation has an impact on women's participation in politics. In West Bengal, women's participation in local council is exponentially high because the head in the council is a woman. However, in Rajasthan, woman's being a head in the council has no impact on women's participation in the local council. Yet, most women participated, may be, because of the local leaders who could stimulate women for the public gathering.

The results also present a difference in men and women's requests. For example, in West Bengal, women complain mostly about drinking water, roads, welfare programs, housing and electricity while men's complained more about roads, irrigation, drinking water and education. Chi-square tests confirm the difference between male and female's complains.

Again, the findings illustrate that women's participation as head of council has an impact on public goods investment. Both in West Bengal and Rajasthan, female heads are more likely to invest in drinking water as it was seen earlier that women complain more about drinking water. Although men complain request about education, female heads are rarely observed to set up informal schools.

From the findings of Chattopadhyay & Duflo's (2004) project in India, it can be suggested that gender difference in political access through reservation has an impact on the well being of females. Women's participation in the council as head encourages more and more women to participate in the village council. It has also been noted in the research findings that women have different policy decisions and requests from those of men. So, when women have a chance to participate the council, they also have an opportunity to execute their choices; thus contributing to the well being of women as a whole.

4.2 Women's access to wage and well being of children and females: South Africa's case

Duflo (2003) documents a research in which he investigates the 'impact of the South African old-age pension program and compare its effects by gender of the pension recipient...' The data in this research stem from South African 1993 household survey in which 9000 randomly chosen households, covering all races in all areas had been interviewed. He uses the data from 1993 survey as they seemed to be more reliable than the earlier recorded data which are racially biased. Here Duflo's chief research objective is to examine the impact of male and female's pension on the nutrition of household children in relation to two indicators: 'weight for height and height for age'.

As for the results relating to weight for height, it is observed that a female pension recipient's income has a positive impact on children's weight for height. However, a male pension recipient's income has little impact on children's weight for height. The findings here suggest that effectiveness of the old-age pension on children's nutrition relies on whether the pension is received by men or women. From the findings, an 'all-female link' is also noted in that the pension is useful if it is received by the mother of the girl's mother.

Again, the results of the investigation of the children's height for the age, show that female recipient's pension significantly help in increasing girls' height (1.16 standard deviation), compared to the insignificant increase in the boys' height (0.28 standard deviation). However, male recipient's pension does not seem to have any impact on the height of either boys or girls.

Overall, the research findings in Duflo (2003) suggest that effectiveness of old-age pension on children's nutrition is gender based. From the project it can be observed that pensions received by women are largely associated with the improvement in child's nutrition whereas pensions received by men have no impact on a child's health. Again, pension recipient's identity appears as an important factor as it is noticed in the results that pensions received by women has far more positive impact on the well being of girls than that of boys. Thus, based on the findings in this research, it may be suggested that women's access to wage can have a positive impact in shaping the outcome of children, especially women.

5. Policy Implication

Based on the research findings of the two cases (see, 4.1 & 4.2), some policy implications may also be studied. From India's case, it is observed that women's access to power has a positive impact on the well being of females. Importantly, the study shows that reservation of women seats in political power is significant as 'mandated representation of women has important effects on policy decisions...' (p.1440). One important implication from India's case is that policy makers' identity is an important issue in policy making. It has been observed that women have different choices and complains from those of men, and women's complains and policy choices are implemented when the chief in the council is a woman.

Therefore, it may be suggested that different genders' access to political power and policy decision making is important as different genders have different policy choices. *In a nut shell, women's inclusion in power is necessary if the question of women's well being is to be addressed.*

As for South Africa's case also, some policy implications may be examined in relation to gender difference. The project suggests significant implications for public policy in that rendering pensions to female recipients rather than male ones may have significant impact on the improvement in children's nutrition. The project shows that pensions in the hands of women have a more positive impact on the

health and nutrition of girls than those of boys. Thus, it indicates that pension recipient's identity is a vital issue as female recipients' pensions have an affect mainly on the improvement of girls.

Hence, it may be suggested that any public program targeting the improvement of children's health and nutrition, especially the improvement of girls ought to give preference in the inclusion of women than that of men.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has exposed that in developing countries different gender has different roles to play in relation to the customs of the society they live in. However, in doing so, women should be given access to power so that they can participate in policy decisions. Their access will contribute to the implementation of their choices that may be different from those of men. It will also help in preventing the manipulation of women's labour.

In addition, women's access to wage is also important for the well being of children and females as a whole as women's income has an impact on the well being of children, especially females. Finally, we conclude by suggesting that women's access to power and wage may help them more in playing their own role in the society and that will eventually contribute more to the socio-economic condition of developing world.

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