

Professional Development Reading Pack

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Gender in development

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Gender inequality matters to development for two reasons. First, it is a justice problem. Ideologies of women's inferiority are used to justify serious human rights abuses including female infanticide, child marriage, female genital mutilation, sexual violence, and deprivation of equal access to health care, education, property, employment and pay. Second, gender inequality is developmentally inefficient. Women's limited access to and control of material resources and limited decision-making power within the household can produce high fertility rates, under-investment in aspects of family welfare such as child nutrition and education, and sub-optimal allocations of human capital in the economy. Constraints on women's and girls' education, access to health care (especially in relation to pregnancy and childbirth), independent livelihoods, and control of property and income contribute to underdevelopment and state fragility.

Gender is an important foundation of structural inequality. Almost everywhere, gender ideologies, through which unequal value is assigned to 'female' and 'male' anatomical sex, sustain economic, social and political inequalities. Although a hierarchy among women exists and produces competing interests, gender stratification is found across class, race, ethnicity and other markers of socio-economic status, creating common experience of disprivilege because of women's sexual and economic subordination to men. Socialisation, gender stereotyping, reference to a 'natural' or divinely ordained gender order, and a constant threat of violence, ensure women's acquiescence to this structural inequality.

The 'Gender in Development' field has struggled to identify effective routes to women's empowerment. Gender equality policies can threaten traditional interest groups and established patterns in state-society relations including a determination – often enshrined in unequal family laws – to keep gender relations out of the purview of public justice.



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Policies to improve women's education levels and paid work do not mean they control their own income or are safe from domestic violence. Increasing numbers of women in public decision-making do not necessarily produce gender-equality policies. Given the complexity of women's empowerment, the MDG 3 target (gender parity in school) and indicators (proportion of students who are girls, proportion of women in national representative politics, and in waged non-agricultural employment) are significantly off-mark.

Researchers of policy effectiveness agree that women's collective action holds the key to women's empowerment. This underlines the fact that women's empowerment is a political achievement, not something that can be achieved by fiat. However, women's collective action is hindered by constraints on their time (because of their responsibilities for care work), mobility (because of threats of violence) and resources (because of their weak market position). The effectiveness of women's collective action also depends on democratic conditions – on guarantees of free speech and association, and on an electoral incentive for policy-makers to respond to women's interests.

The readings selected for this pack illustrate core elements of the gender in development challenge:

Reading 1: Malhotra, A., Schuler, S. R., and Boender, C. (2002) *Measuring Women's Empowerment as a Variable in International Development*, Background Paper Prepared for the World Bank Workshop on Poverty and Gender: New Perspectives, Washington DC: World Bank.
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/MalhotraSchulerBoender.pdf>

Malhotra *et al* show how hard it is to measure women's empowerment and illustrate how empowerment achievements in one context (like access to contraceptives) are not significant in others. This is an accessible introduction to the complexities of pinpointing changes that add up to empowerment.

Reading 2: Kabeer, N. (2012) *Women's economic empowerment and inclusive growth: Labour markets and enterprise development*, Discussion Paper 29/12, London: Centre for Development Policy and Research, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.
<https://www.soas.ac.uk/cdpr/publications/papers/file80432.pdf>

Kabeer provides a comprehensive overview of economic empowerment strategies and the relationship between women's engagement in labour markets and overall growth. This is a clearly written summary of a wide range of studies of the impact of women's formal and informal market engagement, as well as of dominant approaches to economic empowerment including micro-finance, cash transfers, and employment guarantees.

Reading 3: Htun, M., and Weldon, S. L. (2010) *When and Why do Governments Promote Sex Equality? Violence Against Women, Reproductive Rights, and Parental Leave in Cross-National Perspective*, Work in Progress, mimeo.
http://government.arts.cornell.edu/assets/psac/sp10/Htun_PSAC_Feb12.pdf

Htun and Weldon show that gender equality is not one policy type but many. The authors differentiate between policies that change women's position as a status group in relation to men (decisions about sexual relations, fertility, and property ownership) and policies that improve women's class position in terms of access to income and services. They show that these policies can encounter different types of resistance. Some are 'doctrinal', challenging religious or customary precepts, while the non-doctrinal policies (for instance public funding for childcare) can encounter pushback in contexts of austerity. They show that the most powerful determinant of effective gender policy is women's collective action and sometimes a strong national gender mechanism (e.g.

commission on the status of women). The most significant constraint on gender equality policy is state-sanctioned religion. This is a helpful way of understanding how different types of gender policy trigger resistance from different vested interests.

Reading 4: Duflo, E., and Topalova, P. (2004) *Unappreciated Service: Performance, Perceptions, and Women Leaders in India*, Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology
<http://economics.mit.edu/files/793>

Duflo and Topalova show that women local government leaders deliver better services (and therefore better-managed public fund allocations) to communities. Even so, their performance is disparaged and they are not re-elected because of voter bias against women. This shows limitations of efforts to increase numbers of women in politics and illustrates how they are blocked from the conventional routes into politics.

Reading 5: UN Women (2013) *A Transformative Stand-Alone Goal on Achieving Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Women's Empowerment: Imperatives and Key Components*. New York: UN Women. <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/News/Stories/post-2015-case-for-standalone-gender-goal%20pdf.pdf/>

UN Women makes a strong case for a stand-alone gender equality goal in the post-2015 sustainable development framework. The report shows how key aspects of women's empowerment, namely the need to eliminate sexual and gender-based violence, to redistribute domestic and care work responsibilities, and to build a strong civil society constituency base for gender equality politics, must be included in the post-2015 framework as target areas that address the power imbalances between women and men more effectively than did MDG3.

Reading 6: Wood, E. J. (2004) 'Armed Groups and Sexual Violence: When is Wartime Rape Rare?', *Politics and Society*, 37, 131-161
<http://pas.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/37/1/131> (Subscription required)

Wood examines cases when sexual violence is not used as a war tactic and therefore shows that widespread and systematic sexual violence during conflict might be preventable. She shows how it (or its prevention) is the result of a conscious command strategy, proving that it is not inevitable.

Questions to guide readings

1. What are good indicators of women's empowerment in contexts with which you are familiar? Are these measureable?
2. What are good measures of changes in levels of violence experienced by women?
3. Women's collective action is apparently crucial to the social acceptance and sustainability of gender equality policies. What kind of collective action makes a difference and how? How can women's collective action to advance women's rights be assessed, evaluated, measured? How can it best be supported by international development actors?
4. Women were at the forefront of the 'Arab Spring' democratisation movements in North Africa and the Middle East. Political transitions have not brought women into public decision-making. Some contexts have seen explicitly misogynistic backlash mobilisations aiming to push women out of public space. Why is this?
5. What economic policies would help build women-friendly labour markets?
6. What would be useful gender-related targets and indicators in the post-2015 framework in the areas of governance, poverty reduction, and peaceful societies?