

Modeling the impacts on food security and poverty of gender gaps in sub-Saharan-Africa

1. Extended abstract:

How might gender equality and women empowerment interact with growth, poverty reduction, and food security? The economic literature suggests that economic development is strongly associated to women's status and role. The question is therefore: what are the possible mechanisms that could explain these linkages? Several channels have been explored in the literature.

This chapter sheds light on this issue in the specific context of sub-Saharan Africa. This is of particular interest as African countries seek to trigger a strongly virtuous cycle of growth, which translates into genuine poverty reduction and human development. Understanding these linkages is thus crucial to unleashing the full potential of Africa's workforce, and to promoting shared prosperity in the region.

Already in 2000, a report - entitled *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?*¹ - noted that gender inequality acts as a constraint to growth and poverty reduction in Africa. This report reveals that Africa *has unexploited hidden growth reserves residing in potential partnerships between governments and households, particularly the women in these households*. It concludes that gender inequality is both an economic and a social issue, and that greater gender equality could be a potent force for accelerated poverty reduction in Africa. In the same way, the third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) specifically emphasizes the need to advance gender equality and empower women as ingredients of development.

Across Africa, women assume critical roles in supporting household livelihoods, in labor markets and in the wider economy. In rural Africa, women contribute to the agricultural sector in many ways. Their role is vital as workers, home-based producers, and consumers throughout the agricultural value chain. In particular, in the food system, women's actions are crucial from production on family plots, to food processing, food preparation, and food consumption and distribution within the household. However, despite such a prominent role, they remain largely disadvantaged. Yet even today, an imbalance persists between men and women in terms of ownership rights, division of labor, and income. In particular, rural women remain constrained in their access to productive resources (land, credit, and inputs), services expansion (sophisticated and appropriate agricultural technologies), and labor market opportunities. In addition, their roles and contributions remain largely undervalued and neglected because these are often underreported and unrecognized in various dimensions. Then, a large number of rural women's productive activities (paid or unpaid) are completely or inadequately included in the official statistics in the national systems accounts. Hence, as a consequence of this, there is a substantial lack of appreciation and understanding of the crucial contribution of rural women to agriculture and food production in the region.

This chapter analyzes how gender equality and the empowering of women can strengthen women's roles in agriculture production and food system, and allow ensuring food security in Africa. It is structured as follows. The first section explores the economic cost of gender gaps and inequality on growth and poverty reduction, particularly women's poverty. Section 2 looks at the impact of socio-economic indicators of gender equality and women's empowerment. The last section examines the role of gender equality and women's empowerment in creating a food secure future.

¹ World Bank (2000) *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century?* Washington, DC. This report is a joint study with the Africa by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the African Development Bank (ADB).

2. References

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Figure 3: Framework for understanding the linkages between gender equality, economic growth, and poverty

