OUR WORK ON THE NATURE, CAUSES, AND CONSEQUENCES OF GENDER GAPS

The Challenge: Can we build knowledge on how women participate in – and why they are excluded from – economic opportunities in lower-income countries, and what this costs economies and societies?

Many low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) show demographic trends such as declining fertility and rising female education, which economists usually predict will lead to women's empowerment and increased participation in the economy. Why, then, are outcomes such as women's labor force participation so widely divergent across LMICs? Answering this and other questions related to women's economic well-being may require bridging macro- and micro-economic analyses to form a new perspective.

Our Approach: The Gender and Growth Gaps project

In a new project, the Economic Growth Center is employing diverse methods to advance the evidence base on the linkages and consequences of gender inequality. The Gender and Growth Gaps team brings together affiliates focused on structural and macroeconomic questions – such as Pinelopi Goldberg, Michael Peters, and Fabrizio Zilibotti – with micro-economists like Orazio Attanasio, Rohini Pande, and Charity Troyer Moore, who have been analyzing the micro-foundations of inequality including norms and discrimination, and policy-focused staff like Aishwarya Lakshmi Ratan who link synthesized research insights with ongoing policy dialogue.

The project will adopt a four-pronged approach over two years.

> At the macro-level, we will work to understand structural economic transformation processes in the age of service-led and digitally enabled growth and analyzing implications for gender gaps in labor market outcomes in LMIC economies.

> At the micro-level, we will pilot new indicators and measurement tools for primary data collection that show-case how surveys can be made more gender-intentional and accurate, especially in capturing social norms around factors such as women's work, intra-household bargaining, informal employment, and unpaid labor.

> We will critically examine existing metrics and composite indices used to track gender gaps in the economy and propose methodological improvements to better reflect women's economic well-being. This work will be in collaboration with the producers and standard-setting agencies for such metrics (including the World Bank, WEF, ILO, IMF and others).

> We will engage with in-country policy partners in focal LMICs to inform the questions, methods, results, and policy guidance developed through this project's research activities, and work with them on research transla-tion and policy application.

This ongoing engagement will enable the research insights developed in this effort to match policy needs around reducing gender inequities in the labor market (ranging from labor force participation and labor supply, to occupational segregation, vulnerability/quality of work, care work, and economic well-being), improving talent allocation and productivity, and increasing women's well-being and gender equality, in specific national and socio-economic contexts. We anticipate a cross-cutting focus on climate change issues throughout, as well as a focus on questions around the future of work in the face of automation, as they relate to labor market dynamics.

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