

Gender Inequalities in Asia-Pacific Overview

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Presenters

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Overview of Gender Inequality

Kohli

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Kohli: I'm very glad it's right up front on your agenda because I think this is the kind of inequality that what we would call a horizontal inequality, which means that it's -- income inequality, consumption inequality, are certain aspects of this kind of inequality but there are other aspects which are equally important – what we call the non-income dimensions. And that is why some of the research we'll see is based on a report that we did called "Power, Voice and Rice". It's on many different dimensions of inequality. And we just put this graphic up there to see mathematically what are the different kinds of inequalities that you can actually symbolize.

This report was done three years ago but I did look at the data since then and sadly, or regretfully, much of the trends have remained -- there have been some improvements but there hasn't been as much change. So what I'm going to do is give you a quick snapshot of the trends in the region and then we'll take it from there.

I think one of the things I'd like to say is when it comes to gender inequality the human development report looks at several issues. The first is that it's not really just a developing country issue. Whether it's a high income country or a lower income country or middle income country, gender inequality cuts across all income levels.

The second thing is we look at gender equality as both issues of basic capabilities -- which are things like health, hunger, income -- and higher capabilities, which are aspects of empowerment. So if you look at the big picture in Asia what we have is that the region has been at a crossroads, and one thing we look at Asia Pacific as a group of countries starting from Iran in West Asia up to the Pacific. So we are looking at the big regional

picture. And there are sub-regional differences and we go into those.

But overall, Asia Pacific is at a crossroads because there are enormous opportunities. There's information technology, there is media education, better health, longer life expectancies for women, new opportunities. But there are also opposing forces, the use of the old and the new, customs and traditions holding women back, technology to make women disappear, terrorism, conflicts, resistance.

So the region has some of the world's worst gender gaps, and we go to those in the next slides. More women than ever are disappearing. Few countries have laws prohibiting violence against women. And this is another thing which cuts across income levels: the rates of gender-based violence consistently, whether it's developed countries in Asia or developing countries, they're very high.

So the arguments for gender equality. When we were looking and doing this report we were wondering what's the one argument you can send to policymakers. And then one argument everyone wanted us to make is that gender equality is good economics. But in fact we saw that there were several arguments.

Firstly it's a normative argument, it is gender equality is a right, its moral. It is good economics in some cases, but often societies have to pay some costs in the shorter run to get longer run benefits, so you can't always make that argument unilaterally. And it _____ democracy because of greater representation.

Conceptually it's quite a complex -- there is no one definition of gender equality. It does not mean sameness of genders. What this report does is it looks at the issue in terms of fairness of -- in fairness in freedoms and choices and opportunities for all. It means both genders have equal access to capabilities, and the freedom to choose opportunities. And it also means that women have equal access to resources, and

rights as men. It recognizes that there are historical disadvantages and they need to be taken into account in policy and programs.

Since we don't have much time I just want to go to the extreme forms of inequality. Asia exhibits some extreme forms of gender-based discrimination. The sex ratio at birth, male to female, is adverse to growth. There's a lot of son preference in Asia, and it again cuts across income levels. If we look at the trends I think in most countries in the two largest and rapidly-growing countries of the region, China and India, the sex ratio is quite adverse, and the figure on the right is some of the latest figures where you see that the sex ratio is still very adverse. What this means is that gender inequality begins even before birth. It basically means that the old, which is the son preference, is combined with new technologies for sex selection and shows a strong preference for male children.

I tried to look at some of the new figures but there are all estimations about the number of women missing. In 2007 the estimated number of women who were missing, who died as a result of health and nutrition neglect, or were never born in the first place was close to 100 million in just 7 Asian countries, which is a staggering figure.

So what this does is it looks at three strategic windows, areas where public policy has a role, and where change can happen. If we don't actually work on these changes, not because we cannot but because we will not. And each is quite strategic because they're interconnected institutional changes and they will have much progress as _____ on some dimensions. The resulting momentum can slow rapid advancement.

In terms of economic power this is the region with the largest agricultural sector, and yet -- and it has the largest number of female laborers and the lowest female farm ownership. Around two-thirds of women's employment in Southeast Asia is in agriculture, and in East Asia the proportion is around 40

percent, yet women held only 7 percent of farms compared with 20 percent in other global regions.

If you look at the figures they're rather old. It's figures from 1989 to 1999 and I checked the latest figures: we don't have -- one of the issues of tracking is that the definitions are different. Now we're looking at landholdings, which is not the same as farmland owned. But still the figures are very poor, even the latest one.

Women are disadvantaged in paid work. Labor is substantially undervalued in the Asia Pacific, even countries which have very small gaps between female and male estimated income, such as Mongolia. The time-use data shows that working men earn 38 percent more than working women on average. Again, it cuts across income levels and when we look at even say in higher paid occupations; look at _____ staffs for example. There are huge wage gaps between male and female actors. So it cuts across all different levels.

In terms of political voice these are the figures in 2009. Asia Pacific was second from the bottom; all the Arab states were in terms of female participation in parliament. Looking at the latest figures income improved marginally, but Asia and the Pacific still continues to be quite low in participation in national parliament, although things are different at the local level. And actually developed countries -- I mean none of them have met the one-third kind of minimum female participation in parliament. So there's a lot of -- and this hasn't changed so much since Beijing, so the tracking is important.

On the third window, legal rights, laws are lagging. I think a measurement here is an interesting point because most of it is qualitative. I mean you look at whether countries have certain laws on the book and then you look at access to justice. So essentially the main challenges to legal equality are because of the complex level of laws -- some of them are absent or contradictory. There are discriminatory rules for trial, procedures and evidence. There's constitutional equality but

then there's traditional roles, so there is conflict between those.

Often there are equitable laws on economic property rights, for example women have equal rights to inheritance. But then often sisters are encouraged to sign over property to brothers, in South Asia, for example. So that needs separate tracking. So there is unequal access to justice systems for women. We have many more details in the report but I can't go into them because of time constraints.

So what can we do? And is India measuring tracking -- what exactly are we measuring and tracking? Well insure equal rights for property and earnings through laws, policies, and political backing. I go back to inheritance law, for example. I think that most countries have amended their inheritance laws, and this means that women have the same rights. But whether they can claim those rights is another issue.

Reforming labor markets to ensure that male/female wage gaps are narrowed, improving access and quality of education, and prioritizing of public investments in health. Because if you look at the south --regional differences I think in terms of basic capability East Asia is very far ahead. In South Asia some of the deprivations for women are absolute. So the investment in health cannot be underemphasized.

In terms of bringing equality within reach, harnessing democratic dividends. I think there's been a lot of discussion about the changes that are taking place, the changes in local governance, there have been conflicts and peace-building movements where women have been more involved. So governments and political parties need to support special actions to boost the number and quality of female representation. It's not just quotas it's political party reform, electoral funding, encouraging women's development to broaden political support and strengthening capacity. And building gender-friendly budgets on the political agenda.

Actually, all of these policy areas we emphasize the issue of assessing change and monitoring. On each of these, there are whole areas of monitoring and tracking which need to be taken into account. And one of the reasons why it's difficult to do so is most national statistical systems don't have data or effective tracking on most of these issues. So which is the reason why we often fall back on our improvement presumption but often there is not enough disaggregated data on other issues of political voice or violence or the changes which are very fundamental to show women's choices.

And in terms of bringing equality within reach -- fixing the laws, supporting legal reforms, synchronizing contradictory legal roles for real justice, including access to justice, using international norms as benchmarks for gender equality, supporting judicial activism. Because one of the cases where things change fastest in judicial activism is laws take many years to change, whether it's precedence by courts, for example, can overturn a lot of discriminatory practices. And they have shortened the whole process of lawmaking. That's another important area for tracking change.

So essentially what we are looking at is changes in institutions. If we look at just some examples what do we actually mean here and how relevant it is, especially for tracking. So it's not that under the first one, making international commitment a reality. There are a high number of reservations to the CEDO in this region. And these reservations need to be removed. I think this is a critical area for tracking. So it's making international commitments a reality by actually advocating and supporting changes of that kind.

Under the second heading: proper economic policies, I think particularly looking at fiscal and monetary policies which help unleash women's leadership and entrepreneurship. So looking at lending to poor women for productive purposes, graduating more women from microfinance to mainstream financial institutions and gender-based budgeting.

In terms of political participation, introducing incentives for compliance with quotas and sanctions for lack of compliance, and these are all areas which do not actually have comparable data across countries, so it's quite difficult, running regional analysis on some of these. But at the country level there is a lot of data and we can go country by country and see the progress they've made.

In terms of pursuing better roles these include in the personal sphere, marriage, divorce and maintenance laws to insure parents but also economic laws, gender-friendly employment standards, equal pay for equal work, accessible complaint systems, and freedom from sexual harassment. Closing gaps between laws and legal practices, ensuring that legal practices are consistent with laws on the books.

And then collecting better data actually cuts across all of these because capacity for gender disaggregated data is overlooked in many areas, particularly areas like gender-based violence, male/female gaps in asset ownership. I mean this is critical data: command and control of assets is an area where I think you get a lot more information about gender gaps and economic empowerment from that kind of data, rather than other kinds of data. So these are neglected areas and they need to be looked at.

Measuring women's unpaid work and better understanding patterns of female migration. There's a whole area of time-view study which is being discussed but measuring women's unpaid work and the work in the ___ economy is an old issue but it is a particular issue for tracking gender inequality.

So assessments cut across all. I mean we've got the heading of attitudes but this is probably the hardest one to change. So we normally focus on the issue that public policy can change, which is why we focus on economic policy, political policy and data policy. So I'll just stop there and take some time for questions.

Moderator: A lot of excellent information. People have some questions, comments that you'd like to pose on the speaker or the presentation, the work that's done?

Steven Chan: Thank you. My name is Steven Chan, I'm the executive director of the Asia Pacific Communications Center based in Bangkok. You mentioned about changed attitudes and mindsets; that's very important. But I'm also interested in terms of looking at gender analysis -- because UNDP are looking at it more overall separate country and not any particular country specifically. But I haven't heard you say -- what about if you're looking at analysis, what about the matriarchal society where women, if I understand correctly, also inherit, you're talking about laws of formal center in terms of laws, but what about informal traditional law, how does that play out in the gender analysis here in terms of gender inequality? It would be interesting to get some of that.

We keep hearing that yes, there is a lot of problem on the formal sector, there laws are not working. But yet at the same time, like in India _____ -- thinking of South Asia, the rest of South Asia, in terms of India, it's very biased against women in that sense. But what about _____ matriarchal society? How do you compare? Can we take good examples -- are there examples to use that to change mindsets and to change the attitudes of the society?

Kohli: We didn't actually look at a comparison of matriarchal society but _____ India also has matriarchal communities. We were looking at what could sort of reduce gender-based violence and actually the link between asset ownership, not just ownership but command and control of assets there are studies which show that women have command and control over assets which is often matriarchal system. They have fallback

options, and they kind of -- they're much more empowered when dealing with gender-based violence, for example.

So there is evidence to show that asset -- command over assets and control of assets reduces incidents of gender-based violence. It's not a cross-country study but this is a kind of intervention. It may be coming from the traditional setup of the matriarchal inheritance, but even amendment of inheritance laws and giving women the fallback option where they have command and control of assets is supposed to be a way of reducing gender inequality in terms of their exposure to gender-based violence.

So I'm sure there are other studies that show that. But that is the kind of evidence we were looking at because we realize this whole discussion about income inequality at least in South Asia, asset inequality was more important than income inequality so I'm sure there are more studies but I'm not aware of cross country studies on that.

Hyun H. Son:

Thanks for very informative presentation. Whenever I see reports dealing with gender issues they tend to focus on domestic violence laws and how many women make parliament and those issues. They are important, so I don't think any of these layers we talk about; we're talking about. But I think the real issue is the labor market reform; that's where we have to focus on. When women have economic power it increases the bargaining power within households. So they control the resource allocations within households. That's where the empowerment of women comes. It's not about domestic violence and all -- this issues are important. But I think we need to look at more of these labor market reforms. What are the specific labor market reforms this report is trying to address to reduce the gap, the wage gap between male and female.

I have done some analysis. After controlling for all other factors: experience, education, everything. Still, males tend to earn much more. I wonder why? So -- is it because of culture issues? Is it because of maybe female preference for this art or this communication or this subset? Males tend to prefer science or economics and things like that; they tend to earn much more because the returns are much higher for those subsets.

Then we need to look at what are the causes of that? So I think we need to look at more hardcore issues, rather than politically correct issues. And I want to see more of this analysis in gender-related issues.

Kohli:

I agree with you but I also believe in the value of the hardcore analysis. But what we found in this report was, when you trace back a lot of the inequalities, different kind of inequalities. The issue of culture -- it's not discussed as much in this report because it's very difficult for public policy to change culture directly. But these differences or wage gaps, they are a symptom of, in the entire life cycle of the women, there are gender inequalities, discrimination at birth in Asia. And I think we can't ignore that. So labor market reform and closing the wage gap I think will go a long way in reducing inequality.

But the fact is that there is a lot of gender discrimination in Asia at birth. It is very difficult for women for that to be corrected totally by labor market reform. That is one of the ways of doing it, but when you begin with unequal -- where even the survival of a child is patterned before birth then you have to really go into the root of it. And a lot of the differences are cultural.

I think you can see that because South Asia there are similar kind of data. East Asia there is different kind of data. So I think that in East Asia, perhaps I'm making a kind of general statement, that cultural issues are very

different from South Asia. In South Asia, for example, the culture and the discrimination at birth, I think you have to look maybe in the long run, labor market reform will sort those things out; I don't know. But there is a very strong-rooted cultural discrimination against girls and I think you need to focus on several different angles in terms of looking at change. Reducing wage gaps is one but we would argue strongly for also reducing the gap in terms of asset inequality because at least in many parts of Asia, your starting point is very important and inheritance is one of your sort of talking points where you have to close those certain gaps.

So I mean I don't think that labor market reform is not important; it is central to the long run change but the culture of discrimination against girls which begins before birth that needs legal changes. And it's a huge issue.

Moderator: I was about to say -- that's a day in itself. Other comments? Questions?

Female Speaker 3: If I may, my name is _____. I'm from UN _____ regional Office of Asia Pacific.. Just want to respond to her comment on labor force, labor market and discrimination. I'm not expert on the issue but to what I heard is some kind of information that has average age of women _____ tend to be lower than men. So that's probably one of the causes when you _____ that you're 40, 50, and another 5 years in Vietnam or in China that you have to retire. So from the perspective of employers investing in you is probably not worth as much as investing in males because of this.

Moderator: Did you want to say something? Other comments?

Steven Chan: One final clarification. You mentioned that technology, to make women disappear -- can you clarify that?

Kohli: Yeah, I'm talking about the practice of sex selection where ultrasound is used to determine the gender of the baby. That's the use of technology.

Moderator: Any other comments, questions?

Female Speaker 4: My name is Lena Maniema, I'm from _____ Asia based in Jakarta. One of the constraints for female head of household, problem in Indonesia, is when they want to access the legal system or access to microfinance, is the awareness to have the certificates – such as their birth certificates. So I just want to know whether from your study, it's different, one of the constraints that's faced by other countries or is it only for Indonesia?

Kohli: Actually some other countries face that issue but they have sort of changed it maybe Vietnam and also Nepal, they've changed. I think the land user certificates can be the name of the woman also. Many countries have changed that. On the book, it doesn't mean in reality that they will use those land use certificate; often it is _____ over. Certain countries have amended their roles on these and I think Vietnam and Nepal is a case of this; I think they've had a lot of change in terms of women's involvement.

Moderator: Let me thank you very, very much. It was an excellent presentation.

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