Conversation on gender disparities in human development
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- Appreciate the focus of this conversation on separating the different dimensions of human development (as opposed to the aggregations of composite indices)

- Also importance of disaggregating ‘women’ and taking seriously other inequalities that intersect with gender (women not a homogeneous group)

Capabilities

Education – overall positive story if we look at 1990-2012 period
Primary enrolment Gender Parity Index (GPI) increased from 0.86 to 0.97 (esp. in South Asia)
Secondary enrolment GPI, also progress from 0.77 to 0.96 (large regional disparities)
Tertiary education; women’s share gone from 48% in 1990 to 51% in 2012 (women outnumbering men in some regions)

See first DIAGRAM. BUT also important to look at inequalities within countries; net secondary attendance rates for top wealth quintile compared to bottom quintile (DHS data) has reduced over the 2000s for nearly all countries BUT still large inequalities remain in place between net secondary attendance of girls in poor households compared to those in rich households. In Mozambique, for example, rich girls are still 27 times more likely than poor girls to be attending secondary school in 2011, down from 47 times in 2003.

And these attendance rates say very little about QUALITY of education which is an important part of human capabilities – teacher/student ratios, content of education, infrastructure (e.g. sanitary facilities for girls), safety from sexual harassment etc.

Health – not as positive a story.
Maternal Mortality Rate has been one of the ‘off track MDGs’
BUT there are also serious data deficiencies: the figure of 289,000 maternal deaths in 2013 is questionable; estimates vary depending on modeling methodologies. According to the inter-agency monitoring group (WHO, UNPOP, UNICEF, World Bank) the real value of maternal deaths in 2013 could be anywhere between 170,000 (40% less) to 500,000 (75% more).

If we look at skilled attendance at birth, we do more reliable data, and here we see that there are significant inequalities among women within most countries.
See second and third DIAGRAMS. Based on DHS data, we find that over the past decade the gaps between richest and poorest women have narrowed in 14 out of 25 countries for which we had data. But in 11 countries the gap between rich and poor either did not change or is larger than it was in the early 2000s, indicating that the poorest women were being left behind. …

Is progress in capabilities translating into economic opportunities?

Short answer is that the remarkable progress in closing gender gaps in education has contributed to advances for women at work, but education has not been the great equalizer.

One indicator that is commonly used to capture economic opportunities is the headline indicator of female labour force participation (FLFP) compared to male labour force participation.

FLFP -- widely available BUT AMBIGUOUS indicator on its own.

A rise in women’s labour force participation is not always a sign of ‘progress for women’. It may reflect the ‘distress sale of labour’, whereby poverty and lack of social protection drive women into the labour market to meet survival needs (crisis related bursts in FLFP, Argentina and Mexico).

Still – as we see in the fourth DIAGRAM, what we can see is relative stagnation in FLFP ... with only some regions showing increases (LA, Developed regions).

BUT if we are interested in real opportunities provided through work then we need a number of complementary measures.

First, QUALITY We need reliable and timely data on the quality of paid work and the rights associated with it (such as the right to a contract, social protection, paid leave, collective bargaining and so forth).

Establishing trends for the quality of paid work is extremely challenging because the concept of informality itself has evolved to capture all types of employment in unprotected or unregulated jobs (regardless of the nature of the enterprise). Yet this new definition is not being systematically used for purposes of data collection at the country level. Over the last decade, only 47 countries have produced reliable estimates of informal employment by sex (ILO/WIEGO study) and only for a subset of these countries we have trend analysis.

Second, we need to pay attention to total workload. The other question of interest from a human development perspective is whether a rise in women’s labour force participation is changing the division of unpaid domestic and care work that largely falls on women. Are men taking on more of the work and/or are public services being put in place to reduce it, or is paid work merely being added to a largely unchanged burden of unpaid reproductive work that women carry (the ‘double shift’)?
Why do we want this fuller picture?
Unpaid domestic and care work is a critical input into human development of others (children, elderly, etc.); but also providing large doses of paid and unpaid work can erode the human capabilities of the care provider/worker. And constraints in combining the two can lead to too little ‘reproductive/care work’ or constraints for particular groups of women in taking up income earning opportunities, as well as other types of activities (political participation, education and training, etc.) and little time for rest and self-care which erodes their own human capabilities.

Do we have the data we need? While an increasing number of developing countries are carrying out time use surveys, and there are internationally agreed classifications and methodologies for data collection, only around 70 countries (in total) have carried out at least one time use survey. For developing countries a single survey is the norm. It is thus difficult to track changes in women’s and men’s time use over time, in order to ascertain if increases in women’s paid work are having an impact on the division of unpaid reproductive work within the home.

Perhaps in response to the limitations of data on income/poverty and simple labour force participation rates, attention has been increasingly directed to the gender pay gap, which is seen as a stronger indicator of gender inequality in the economic sphere.

The interest in pay gaps is warranted given its close association with occupational segregation, which by all accounts is pervasive across the world, regardless of the structure of the economy, and very difficult to dislodge (Anker et al. 2003).

The gender pay gap is a useful indicator of structural or systemic biases in labour markets, reflecting the undervaluation of the work that women do, amply manifested in the ‘pay penalty’ associated with care work.

Data requirements, however, are not as straightforward as they may seem at first sight.

- gender pay gaps can only be estimated reliably for workers in waged or salaried employment. But in many developing countries where self-employment is the norm, such data only covers a relatively small share of the work force, and gender pay gap estimates are likely to understate the real extent of earnings differentials.

- Another concern is the need for reliable trend data in order to understand why and how gender pay gaps may be narrowing: is wage convergence taking place in a context of overall wage growth, where women’s pay is catching up with men’s? Or is it in a context of declining wages, through a process of leveling down, where living standards are falling for everyone?
Overall, gender pay gaps have narrowed slightly in the last decade, declining between 2000 and 2010 in 45 out of 50 countries with available data. But the pace of change has been slow and large gaps remain in most countries. In Australia, Colombia, Mongolia and Paraguay gender pay gaps have actually widened.

Out of the 45 countries where gender pay gaps have declined, 34 have seen unequivocally positive change, with an overall increase in real wages and a narrowing gender pay gap, meaning that women’s wages have grown faster than men’s. This has been the case, for example, in Brazil, Malta, Nepal and Ukraine.

Meanwhile, in five countries gender gaps have narrowed in a context of falling real wages for both women and men. In these cases, gaps have narrowed only because men’s wages have fallen more dramatically than women’s. This pattern—which prevails in Egypt, El Salvador, Hong Kong (SAR China), Panama and Sri Lanka —can hardly be considered progress as instead of women catching up there is a levelling down for all.

In the six remaining countries, the gender pay gap has narrowed in the context of rising real wages for women and falling or stagnating wages for men. This is the case in Austria, Honduras, Israel, Japan, Mexico and the State of Palestine, where women have been gaining some ground in terms of their pay while men have lost out.

Hence a seemingly positive development, such as the reduction in the gender pay gap needs further probing, and underlines the point about the need to scrutinize gender statistics with questions informed by gender analysis.

Perhaps the strongest take home message from this example is that it is only possible to do the analysis for 50 countries! The ILO, which is the obvious source of data on wages, has data on gender wage gap by sex for about 80 countries, but for 30 of those countries reliable trend data on women’s and men’s real wages are not available.

**Voice and participation**

**Voice and decision-making** have both intrinsic value as a sign of an individual’s, or a group’s, ability to exercise their democratic freedoms and rights, and can be instrumental in ensuring that their group-specific interests are advanced through public policies, or seen as legitimate matters for public deliberation.

Moving towards numerical parity in political office therefore remains an essential component of deepening democracy and creating a more just society. Women’s involvement in politics can also have a positive ‘role-modeling’ effect by encouraging other women to seek public office.

But meaningful participation is about more than just a numeric presence in high level decision-making fora such as parliaments—a feminine presence is not necessarily a feminist one (Anne Marie Goetz 1998). Political effectiveness, the ability to use voice to politicize issues of concern
to women, to use electoral leverage to press demands on decision-makers, to trigger better responsiveness from the public sector to women’s needs and better enforcement of constitutional commitments for their equal rights, often requires strong links with women’s organizations.

The importance of links between women representatives and a vibrant civil society presence is confirmed by research that seeks to identify the most critical factors for feminist policy change. We know, for example, from the work of Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon (2012) that the best indicator of strong policy responses on a range of gender inequality issues, including violence against women, is the strength of autonomous feminist organizing in civil society, a far stronger predictor of policy responsiveness than women’s presence in parliaments.

Yet attempts at measuring women’s political effectiveness invariably fall back on indicators such as the share of women in parliaments or in high levels of political office, because these are more readily available. However, as there is a certain ‘elitism’ in such measures of women’s political participation, unless we assume that power at the top ‘trickles down’ to less privileged women. (Cueva Beteta 2006). Need to be bolder and to press for measuring what really matters … strength of women’s political organizations is captured by Htun and Weldon through a range of indicators.

If we want to measure what really matters for human development, and for women’s human development and human rights more specifically, then we need to be bolder in terms of what we measure: going beyond the low-hanging fruits to get to some of the harder issues: not only quantity but also quality of paid work, unpaid care work, political effectiveness and participation and always, disaggregations that move behind the averages to capture how the most marginalized groups of women are faring.