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Gender equality and economic growth: a view from below

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1. Introduction

The persisting preoccupation with economic growth within policy circles combined with the growing interest in gender equality has, not surprisingly, given rise to various studies exploring the relationship between the two. Some focus on the impact of growth on gender equality, others on the impact of gender equality on growth. A recent paper brought together findings from macro-econometric studies into both sets of relationships (Kabeer and Natali, 2012). It concluded that evidence that gender equality makes a positive contribution to economic growth is fairly robust, holding across different country contexts and for different periods of time - but that the evidence for the reverse relationship, that economic growth contributes to gender equality, is less consistent and more likely to be found in high-income countries.

One reason for this asymmetry in impacts is that the two sets of studies did not necessarily use the same measures of gender equality. While the growth models rely on (in order of frequency) measures of gender equality in education, labor market participation and wages, the gender equality models use a greater diversity of variables: education, labor force participation and wages but also health, well-being and rights.

More interestingly, the asymmetry may reflect the fact that the two sets of relationships operate through different casual pathways. However, macro-econometric studies are carried out at the level of national aggregates and can rarely provide insights about the causal mechanisms that drive their models. More detailed, lower level analysis is more likely to illuminate possible mechanisms (Bandiera and Natraj). A review of such studies was carried out by Duflo (2012) and found that the evidence for both sets of impacts was weak and inconclusive. She concluded that while affirmative action in favor of women could be justified on grounds of gender equity, it could not be assumed that it would contribute to growth – and indeed might prove detrimental to it.

However, a number of limitations to her study suggest there is room for a fresh look at the evidence. First of all, she restricted herself to only those quantitative studies which used experimental or quasi-experimental methods. Her conclusions are thus based on very thin empirical grounds. And secondly, she relied on a very narrow, economistic interpretation of human behavior as driven by a rational choice calculus in which people strive to maximize their personal utility or self-interest, subject to individual budget and other constraints.

The aim of this paper is to use feminist theory to draw on an alternative account of human behavior, one which allows for the influence of wider contextual factors on the way that people behave. It will use this framework to analyze a range of empirical studies in order to uncover some of the causal pathways through which the inter-relationship between gender equality and economic growth might work – and possible reasons for the asymmetry in their impacts.

2. Gender, structure and agency

Feminist economists acknowledge that individuals make choices, but suggest that they do so within the limits imposed by their personal circumstances as well as by the structural distribution of rules, norms, assets and identities between different groups in a society, ‘the structures of constraint’ (Folbre, 1994). While these constraints may take different forms in different contexts, I have found it analytically helpful to develop a stylized categorization of these constraints, drawing on Whitehead's (1979) useful distinction between social relationships that are 'intrinsically' gendered and those that are 'bearers of gender'.

I use the concept of 'gender-specific constraints' to refer to the customary norms, beliefs and values that characterize the 'intrinsically gendered' relationships of family and kinship. These spell out dominant models of masculinity and femininity in different societies, allocating men and women, boys and girls to different roles and responsibilities on the basis of these definitions, and generally assigning a lower value to those aptitudes, abilities and activities conventionally defined as 'feminine' compared to those defined as 'masculine'.

The gendered division of labour between productive and reproductive work observed in different regions of the world partly reflects this category of constraint. The primary breadwinning responsibilities assigned to men in many cultures helps to explain their generally higher labour force participation rates relative to women. Women's labour force participation, on the other hand, varies considerably across regions. While most societies ascribe primary responsibility for unpaid domestic labour, both housework and care of the family, to women and girls, they vary considerably in their expectations of women's contributions to production.

In some regions, women are expected to share in breadwinning responsibilities and may have their own farms and enterprises in order to do so. In others, not only are they expected to confine themselves to unpaid domestic work, but there may be strong cultural restrictions on their mobility in the public domain. These latter restrictions contribute to the much lower rates of female labour force participation found in the MENA region and South Asia compared to the global average. Cultural expectations of female dependency appear to be associated with strong son preference and the phenomenon of 'missing women', reflecting excess levels of female mortality across the population and leading to abnormally high ratios of men to women.

The norms, values and practices associated with the 'private' domain of family and kinship are reinforced in most societies by the 'imposed' gender constraints encountered in the public domains of states and markets. Although the institutions of states and markets are purportedly impersonal, they become 'bearers of gender' when they reflect, reproduce and exacerbate preconceived notions about masculinity and femininity as routine aspects of their rules, procedures and practices.

Gender-related constraints, both intrinsic and imposed, underpin many of the gender inequalities documented in international statistics. They may operate invisibly and routinely through institutionalized bias or overtly through the discriminatory actions of powerful individuals and groups. In addition they may operate as feed-back mechanisms that represent rational responses to pre-existing constraints. For instance, there is nothing in custom or law that requires girls to be given less education than boys but if women face poorer job prospects in the labour market relative to men, it is understandable that parents will discriminate in favour of sons, particularly in contexts of severe resource constraint. Such feedback mechanisms reinforce and perpetuate gender inequality over time.

Two other points are relevant to our analysis. Firstly, gender is not the only form of inequality in a society. Many of the disadvantages faced by women from low income or socially marginalized households in their struggle to make a living are shared by men from such households but gender generally (but not always) intensifies class and other forms of disadvantage (see for instance Kabeer, 2010). Secondly, while the institutionalized nature of gender disadvantage emphasised in our analysis draws attention to its resilience in the face of change, it is not immutable. Public actions of various kinds, by states and civil society, have made many inroads into long-standing gender inequalities, helping to close – and sometimes reverse – these inequalities. We are interested here in the extent to which strategies for growth have been a part of this process of change.

3. The impact of gender equality on economic growth: exploring the causal pathways

We begin our empirical analysis by exploring what micro-level research can tell us about the impact of gender equality on economic growth. In his contribution to the macro-econometric literature, Klasen (1999) identified two causal pathway through which this impact might occur. The first, which is mediated by family relations, is premised on the assumption that women are more likely than men to translate the resources at their disposal into investments in children's human capital, increasing the productivity of the next generation of workers. The second, which is mediated by market forces, is premised on the assumption that innate talents and abilities are randomly distributed between men and women so that equalizing the gender distribution of resources and opportunities will maximize the productivity of the human resources available to an economy. We explore the empirical support for each of these pathways.

3.1 Gender equality and the 'human capital' effect

The support for the family-mediated pathway seems fairly conclusive. There is a large, and growing, body of studies which support the claim that women's access to a range of valued resources, including employment, unearned income, cash transfers, credit and productive assets, is associated with increased investments in family welfare, including children's health and education (refs). Some of these studies focus on female endowments and characteristics, others also include male while most take account of household income, wealth and other relevant variables. Where both are taken into account, studies suggest that female resources are more likely to have positive impacts on children's welfare than male.

There are exceptions, of course, to the positive association between women's access to resources and children's wellbeing: poorer women who take up agricultural wage labour often keep older daughters back from school in order to share in their domestic responsibilities or take their children to work with them in fields and roadsides as there is no one to look after them at home (ref). By and large, however, the results are sufficiently consistent for one recent review to conclude, 'Even though each individual study has certain shortcomings …., the fact that a variety of studies using different data sources and empirical methodologies arrive at essentially the same conclusions strongly suggests that these findings are robust features of the data' (p. 15).

How can we explain these findings? While individualized models of household bargaining interpret them in terms of the enhancement of women's ability to allocate household resources in closer alignment with their own preferences, the systematic nature of the findings suggests a structural element to the formation of these preferences. For instance, it is important to note that it is not 'women' per se who feature in these studies, but women in specific familial relations, most often mothers, sometimes grandmothers. While parents might be assumed to have special feelings for their children, the systematic association between mother's resources and children's welfare highlights the widespread significance of social constructions of motherhood in terms of special responsibility for children, one aspect of the structures of constraint noted earlier.

At the same time, and the two interpretations are not mutually exclusive, the association may also reflect the fact that, where women are cut off to a greater extent than men from resources and relationships beyond the household, their identities and interests are bound up to a greater extent with the welfare and interests of the family, particular their children. Indeed, one reason for questioning essentialist notions of maternal altruism as an explanation for mothers' behaviour is the fact that maternal investments may be gender-biased rather than equity-oriented. This is most marked in regions characterised by strong son preference where women's own preferences, their status within the household and their security in old age all depend on producing sons, ensuring their survival and winning their loyalty (Cain et al, 1979). In such contexts, women's access to education may reduce overall child mortality but raise mortality rates among higher birth order daughters (Das Gupta, 1987).

Another possible interpretation of the association between women's resources and children's welfare is that it reflects unobserved variables. For instance, Duflo suggests that the positive welfare implications of women's access to education and employment may simply reflect the fact that such women are more likely to be married to progressive or caring men. This interpretation does not find much empirical support. As we noted, studies that factor in male characteristics continue to find stronger or more consistent support for the association with female resources. Furthermore, the association holds when resources are transferred from men to women within the same household, as happened with changes in the UK's Family Allowance Policy in the late 1970s (Ward-Batts, 2008) or when resources are targeted by policy makers to women in the form of microcredit or cash transfers, a targeting that takes places independently of male attitudes. In addition, a number of studies have suggested that children are better nourished in female-headed households than male one, and sometimes better educated, further challenging the "unobserved variable" explanation (Kennedy and Peters, 1992 ; Lloyd and Blanc, 1996; Chant, 1997).

There have been other attempts to explain the association between women's resources and children's wellbeing. Some have expanded on the impact of access to resources in enhancing women's agency, not only in terms of how they allocate resources within the household but also in terms of their greater effectiveness as carers and ability to interact with health providers (Jejeebhoy, 1995). Others suggest that it reflects norms governing the allocation of different flows of income into the household (Duflo and Udry) while still others suggest that it reflects women's greater exclusion from certain individualized forms of consumption, such as bars and other forms of entertainment[1], leading them to invest more in the joint consumption of the family (). While such explanations, if valid, imply that the positive association between women's resources and children's well-being would be altered if the circumstances giving rise to them are altered, they do not invalidate current evidence supporting the family-mediated pathway as an explanation for the positive impact of gender equality on economic growth.

3.2 Gender equality and 'economic efficiency' effect

Macro-econometric evidence in support of the market-mediated pathway between gender equality and economic growth is provided by Knowles et al who found that female education had a stronger positive effect on worker productivity in the economy than male education, as suggested by Klasen. The micro-level evidence is less persuasive. The problem is not simply that women across the world are less likely than men to be involved in those forms of 'economic activity' that are seen to contribute to GNP, and hence to growth rates. It is also that those economic activities in which women do engage generally generate lower returns than those in which men engage. Consequently, merely increasing women's activity rates relative to men will not increase income at either household or national levels. It will also be necessary to improve women's productive capacity relative to men. This requires us to understand the factors that give rise to these gender disparities in returns.

One category of explanation has focused on gender differentials in resource endowments. Studies have made it clear that gender disparities in returns to labour reflect multiple, often mutually reinforcing, resource deficits. Research into gender wage gaps highlight differentials in education, skills, work experience and occupational status. Research into gender differentials in agricultural productivity highlight differentials in human capital, landholdings, security of land tenure, use of inputs, visits by agricultural extension officers and relevance of extension advice (Quisumbing, 1995; Saito; WDR 2012). Research on gender gaps in enterprise productivity highlight gender differentials in education, size of enterprise, access to start-up capital, age of firm and line of business (Hallward-Dreiner).

A second category of explanation, which build on the first, add gender differentials *in returns to endowments* to the analysis of gender differentials *in endowments*. Here the research suggests that while education generally increases labour force participation rates and earnings for both men and women, returns to education are often higher for men than women for a given level of education. Indeed, one study from India found that gender differences in returns to education and experience contributed more to the gender gap in hourly earnings that gender differences in education and experience.

A number of recent experimental studies report gender-differentiated returns to equal transfers in cash and kind to small-scale entrepreneurs. In the case of micro-entrepreneurs in Sri Lanka, male businesses reported an increment in monthly returns of around 9% of the value of the transfer but there was no change in female returns (De Mel et al. 2009). A similar experiment was carried out with small businesses in Ghana, but with greater variation in the scale of small businesses included. It reported positive returns to male businesses of different sizes. Among female businesses, those at the smaller end reported zero returns but positive returns were reported at the larger end. This latter group started out with higher initial profits, had higher levels of education, higher levels of household wealth and greater access to formal credit: in other words, class-based advantages partly helped to offset gender-based disadvantage.

A third category of explanation, which is partly bound up with the other two, suggests that gender disparities in earnings reflect the gender-segregated nature of labour markets across the world. In other words, while lower returns to female endowments may sometimes reflect direct discrimination – lower returns within the same occupations –more often it reflects the fact that men and women are located in different tasks, crops, activities, occupations and sectors which are characterised by different levels of productivity and rates of return. Women are more likely than men to be found in 'atypical' forms of work: mainly part-time work within the OECD and part-time, seasonal, casual and irregular work elsewhere. While wage labour dominates in the OECD context, both men and women are likely to be in self-employment elsewhere but men are more likely to be employers or own-account workers while women are more likely to be unpaid labour in family and farm enterprise. Women are also more likely than men to be found in informal employment where pay is generally lower and working conditions are worse. Finally, the evidence suggests that gender disparities appear to be larger at the lower end of the earning distribution, where of course poor and marginalised groups are most likely to be located, than at the higher. Class and social inequalities thus exacerbate the disadvantages associated with gender.

As WDR 2012 points out, two types of explanations feature in the literature on this marked and widely pervasive stratification of the opportunity structure: firstly, gender discrimination in the labour market and secondly, the voluntary selection of men and women into different sectors and occupations, primarily in response to their differential domestic responsibilities. While broadly in agreement with this statement, I would like to qualify it in a number of ways.

First of all, discrimination goes deeper than generally allowed for in the economic literature on this topic (Figart). Economists generally decompose gender gaps in earnings into the component that can be explained by gender differentials in individual endowments and characteristics and the unexplained residual component which they describe as 'discrimination'. In reality, the distinction is between explained and unexplained discrimination. Many of the gender differences in individual endowments and characteristics are themselves the product of gender discrimination within and outside the labour market. Most women do not choose to educate themselves less than men – it was chosen by their parents. Nor do they choose to own less or poorer quality land, to be visited by fewer extension agents or to exclude themselves from formal credit channels or from on-the-job training opportunities. Some of these differences are generated by the structures of constraint discussed earlier[2], others reflect rational feedback mechanisms and still others may be the product of active discrimination by employers, banks and government officials.

And secondly, it is not always clear that women's primary responsibility for housework and child care is a voluntary one. Some may welcome their socially assigned responsibilities, some may simply accept them as a 'given' features of their lives, but the rise of female household heads, the 'flight from marriage' and the dramatic decline in fertility rates to below net replacement rates reported in some regions of the world suggest that when a real choice becomes possible, compliance with these roles cannot be taken for granted (Kabeer, 2012).

To sum up, therefore, gender disparities in market returns to labour appears to reflect some combination of gender disparities in endowments, in returns to these endowments and in location within the occupational hierarchy. There are no simple explanations for the persistence of these disparities nor are the explanations likely to be the same everywhere. But what they do suggest is that the efficiency argument for gender equality has to be based on a *structural* understanding of gender equality and therefore on a *radical* approach to tackling it. Efforts to promote gender equality in the market place through isolated and piecemeal measures may not represent the most efficient use of resources in pursuit of economic growth.

4. The impact of economic growth on gender equality: exploring the causal pathways

The macro-econometric evidence for the reverse relationship, the impact of economic growth on gender equality, was found to be weak and inconsistent. Standard economic theories would predict otherwise. Claims about the 'the trickle-down' or 'rising tide' effects of growth offer generalized explanations why this might be the case. In addition, gender-specific causal pathways are suggested by the literature: the competitive market forces engendered by growth should increase the costs of gender-discrimination to employers while the benefits of growth should ease scarcity-related constraints which otherwise force households to discriminate against less productive or valued members (Becker, Duflo, Dollar and Gatti). In addition, states may be able use additional revenues generated by growth to tackle gender discrimination directly.

These various pathways cannot, however, be taken for granted. They depend on the capacity of growth strategies to generate competitive markets and reduce poverty and on the willingness of states to undertake affirmative action. In addition, the forces that create scarcity and wealth in a society are not necessarily the same forces that create and perpetuate the gendered structures of constraint so that there are no a priori reasons why economic growth should necessarily translate into gender inequality. For instance, as Gaddis and Klasen note that the 'historically contingent initial conditions' which gave rise to earlier variations in female labor force participation rates remain far more important than growth rates as determinants of current variations. These initial conditions are likely to include the extent and severity of gendered structures of constraint that prevail in different contexts.

4.1 Economic growth and gender equality in livelihood opportunities

The explanation for the weak and uneven impact of economic growth on gender inequality can be unpacked into a number of different components. First of all, it is important to note that the dominance of the neo-liberal agenda in international policy circles has led to a major shift away from the import-substituting, state-led industrialisation that marked the post-war decades in favour of the export-oriented growth strategies based on the liberalisation of markets, trade and capital flows. Many growth-related studies include measures of openness to trade and foreign direct investment to capture specificities of neo-liberal strategies for growth.

Second, the pace of export-led growth has not been uniform across the world. In fact, it has been associated with declines in per capita growth rates in most low and middle income countries, particularly in SSA and Latin America, till the mid-1990s with some recovery after that (Heintz). The exceptions to this generalisation are India and China which have reported strong and steady growth since the 1980s.

Third, the shift to export-led growth has been characterised by a gradual closing of the gender gap in labour force participation. This partly reflects stagnant or declining male participation rates (Standing) but it also reflects the fact that the female elasticity of employment for export-oriented growth has been higher than male at the global level (Kapsos; Heintz). However, the gender-specific elasticity of export-oriented growth varies considerably by *type* of export, giving rise in varying gender distribution of employment gains and losses by region and sector (Braunstein and Seguino, 2012). Women have predominated in waged employment generated by the export of labour-intensive manufacturing, such as garments and textiles, while men have predominated in wage opportunities generated by capital-intensive extractive industries. As a number of studies have noted, the favouring of male employment in the oil-producing economies of the Middle East and North Africa have had the effect of reinforcing the powerful male breadwinner ideologies that prevail in the region as well as the restrictions imposed on female mobility in the public domain (Moghadam). By contrast, women have been drawn into waged labour in export-oriented textile industries of the non-oil producing Morocco and Tunisia, despite similar restrictions on their mobility (Ross). Men continue to predominate in textile production for domestic markets.

Growth in traditional agricultural exports has largely benefited male cultivators because women are less likely to be engaged in the independent farming of commercial crops - although they may be major providers of unpaid family labour. As far as non-traditional export agriculture is concerned, women have largely benefited as wage labourers rather than independent cultivators. Women farmers receive a tiny fraction of contracts associated with agro-processing firms and out-grower schemes. The discriminatory feedback mechanisms noted earlier play a role in this. As Dolan (2001) points out, companies need to secure access to land and labour for a guaranteed supply of primary produce: women do not generally have statutory rights over land nor do they exercise the authority over family labour exercised by dominant male family members.

Cutbacks in the state's role in the economy, central to the neo-liberal agenda for market-led reform, is a further reason why economic growth has not translated more systematically into progress on gender equality. Although men enjoyed favoured access to public sector employment in most countries of the world, the public sector was – and generally remains - among the better paid and more gender equitable forms of employment available to women (Chen et al. 2005). However, women lost out disproportionately in public sector retrenchments that accompanied the economic liberalisation across the world. How they fared subsequently has varied considerably, reflecting variations in the gendered structures of opportunity and constraint in different contexts. This is evident from a recent report comparing Egypt, Ghana and Bangladesh.

In Egypt, which had a larger public sector with a higher percentage of female employees than the other two countries, women have lost out in the process of privatization because restrictions on their geographical mobility made it difficult to travel far in search of work and because of the discriminatory attitudes they encountered in the private formal sector. Oil rents had prevented the development of export capacity in light manufacturing and agriculture.

In Bangladesh, women were always a minority in public sector employment but they have benefited from (semi)-formal wage labour in the newly emerging export garment industry. However, this represents a very small percentage of female employment and much of the increase in female labour force participation in recent years has been in unpaid family labour.

In Ghana, women made important inroads into public sector employment but lost these jobs in disproportionate numbers during the structural adjustment years. They have not benefited from the sectors prioritized for export promotion: men dominate wage employment in the oil and timber industries and are primary cultivators of cocoa, the main agricultural export. However, the long-standing tradition of female entrepreneurship has allowed large numbers of women to take up off-farm enterprise where their earnings are higher than in most other sectors of the economy.

The failure of economic growth to translate into systematic progress on gender equality in labour market outcomes is illustrated by the case of India and China, the two countries which have powered the global economy in recent decades. Not only has the strong growth performance in India failed to generate the expected employment opportunities but it has been accompanied by a steady decline in already low female labour force participation rates – by around 23% in the last 25 years. According to the most recent estimates, it fell from 37% in 2004-05 to 29% in 2009/10. This decline holds for all age groups, across different education levels and in both urban and rural areas. Rising levels of female education have done little to alter the long-standing U-shaped relationship with labour force participation so that the vast majority of women with primary and secondary education are economically inactive.

There are, of course, exceptions to this gloomy overall picture that suggest that structural constraints could be overcome. For instance, the liberalisation of the Indian economy has led to a rise in IT-enabled services and hence new sources of employment for educated men and women in larger cities like Delhi and Mumbai. A study of students in Mumbai over a 20 year period (1982-2001) found that the dramatic increase in returns to the ability to speak English in the 1990s led to a rapid increase in English-based education for both boys and girls. The interesting finding of the study is that the increase in English-based education among lower caste family was less rapid for males who have traditionally relied on caste-based networks to find employment than it was for females who were traditionally locked out of these networks and were thus more able to respond to the new opportunities. While it is the case that market opportunities can help to dissolve older caste and gender hierarchies, what Duflo terms 'a quiet revolution' in her paper, it is also the case that economic growth in India has simply not generate sufficient new opportunities to constitute a revolution as yet.

The pattern is somewhat different in China. Here female labour force participation rates were – and remains – extremely high. Although women bore the brunt of economic restructuring in the 1990s, many younger women have found work in the country's export manufacturing sectors. Chen et al found that foreign and exporting firms tended to hire more women than domestic non-exporting firms and that regions and industries with higher foreign investment and export orientation reported higher female employment and declining gender wage gaps. However, Braunstein and Brenner (2007) suggest these gains may not last. While they also found that women experienced larger gains than men as a result of the inflow of foreign direct investment in the mid-1990s, the gender wage advantage was reversed a few years later with industrial upgrading of foreign direct investments and increased orientation to domestic markets.

The literature on gender wage gaps in the context of economic liberalisation suggests considerable variation. For instance, ILO estimates (2007) tell us that there has been a decline in the gender wage gap in the manufacturing sector in some countries, such as Costa Rica and the United Kingdom and an increase in others, for example, Egypt, Sri Lanka and El Salvador. It also reminds us that the decline in the gender wage gap cannot always be given a positive interpretation since it may reflect a decline in male wages rather than a rise in female ones – evident in a study from Mexico (ref). And in some cases, the decline in the wage gap between women and men may well conceal a growing class divide among women (McCrate, 2000; Benería, 2003).

The findings cited in this section are intended to illustrate some of the reasons for the uneven impact of economic growth on labor market inequalities. Patterns of growth in recent decades have reduced the gender gap in labour force participation, but failed to destabilize the gender segmented character of the occupational structure. There has been a very gradual reduction in the horizontal segregation of the occupational structure by gender , but almost no change in its vertical segregation,since the 1980s (Anker). There has been some decline in the gender pay gap but it has been extremely gradual - from 26.2% in 1995 to 22.9% in 2008-09 - a pace of change that would require more than 75 years to eradicate gender disparity in returns to labour. Furthermore, Oostendorp's study of the impact of economic growth on the gender wage gap between the 1980s and 1990s suggests that the observed decline is probably restricted to higher income countries; he found little or no impact in poorer countries.

The fact that women continue to be crowded into a limited number of jobs in the labour market, even where their waged opportunities have expanded with export oriented growth, has limited their capacity to bargain for higher wages while the global mobility of capital that has accompanied neo-liberal reform means that the threat of relocation can always be used to dampen labour demands (Seguino). While wages and working conditions generally tend to be better in larger-scale multinational enterprise who can afford these better working conditions, efforts by workers to demand a living wage or labour rights are very often accompanied by the closure of the company and the relocation of capital. There is also evidence from the broader literature that the gains that women have made in export-led manufacturing may be eroded over time as countries upgrade their technologies and move up the global value chain.

4.2 Economic growth and gender equality in wellbeing and agency

Turning to the impact of economic growth on gender equality in well-being and agency, as measured by education, life expectancy and rights, the macro-econometric literature surveyed by Kabeer and Natali found little evidence of impact in lower income countries. Indeed, in certain countries, high rates of growth have gone hand in hand with deterioration of women's survival chances relative to men. However, a number of studies suggest that female labour force participation and literacy appear to be important drivers of these other measures of women's wellbeing and agency. These findings receive some support from the micro-level literature.

We have noted the micro-level evidence suggesting that women's access to valued economic resources, including education and employment, has a positive association with children's wellbeing. Whatever the explanation for this association, it conforms to expected patterns of behaviour on the part of women. By contrast, if women's access to valued resources translates into changes in their own wellbeing and capacity for agency, it has the potential to challenge the gendered structures of constraint.

As we have seen, the impact of economic growth on the gender distribution of market opportunities has been extremely variable – increasing unpaid family labour or promoting self-employment in some contexts, increasing wage labour opportunities in others or adding to female unemployment rates in still others. One generalisation emerging from the micro-level literature is that these variations in the terms on which women are brought into the labour market has implications for other aspects of gender inequality – within the home and outside it. It suggests that paid work, particularly paid work that takes women outside the sphere of familial control, is more likely to translate into improvements in women's wellbeing and empowerment.

For instance, a comparative study of Egypt, Ghana and Bangladesh found that in all three contexts, women's participation in formal paid employment proved most consistently positive for a range of empowerment indicators, including their own sense of agency, their role in household decision-making about their own health and purchase of assets and their position within the community, the report cited earlier found that women's participation in formal paid employment proved to be most consistently positive for their capacity for agency. In Ghana and Bangladesh, women's participation in off-farm employment or work outside the home also proved positive but less consistently so.

However, the formal sector jobs reported by these women were mainly in the public sector which was on the decline in all three countries, as it is elsewhere. In its absence, private sector jobs at the larger-scale end of global value chains are emerging as some of the better jobs available to women although few reproduce the benefits available through the public sector. In Bangladesh, Kabeer and Mahmud () found that while female employment in export garments was generally better than in the local market, the best paid and working conditions prevailed in foreign owned firms. In Latin America, Deere (2009) has pointed out that the cut-flower industry in Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico offered examples of high-tech production processes that favoured female labour and offered year round employment. She noted that most studies suggest that packing house jobs were among the best available to women and preferable to working in the field. Similar points are made regard to jobs in the high value horticultural export supply chains in the African context. In particular, Maertens and Swinnen (2008) note that women are far more likely to benefit in terms of controlling the proceeds of their labour and enhanced bargaining power within the households when they are employed as wage labourers, and hence the directly contracted party, than when they are unpaid family labour and must rely on the mediation of household males (see also Dolan and Sorby, 2003). Studies into the impact of women's work in these forms of waged labour have highlighted their positive implications on many aspects of women's lives, including their capacity for strategic life choices.

There are a number of obvious reasons why pay and working conditions with these larger multinational are generally better than those in domestic enterprises. The MNCs are not only larger and more profitable, they are also under greater scrutiny from the media, trade unions and anti-sweatshop activists. However, not all women wage workers in global value chains are directly contracted by multinationals – pay and working conditions decline in direct relationship to their distance from these lead firms. The empowerment potential of work that is subcontracted out to small sweatshops or home-based workers is far less obvious.

In addition, studies point to certain aspects of gender inequality in intra-household relations that have proved resistant to change in household circumstances and the wider economy or have changed in perverse and unexpected ways. They remind us of the point made earlier: the forces that perpetuate gender inequality are not necessarily the same as those that drive economic growth.

The first of these inequalities relates to the gender division of unpaid labour within the home. As we have seen, this is one of the key factors explaining women's disadvantaged position in the occupational hierarchy. Contrary to standard economic theory which would predict that increasing returns to women's work in the market place should lead to some reallocation in the division of labour in unpaid work within the home, for most women, increased entry into market work is either accompanied by reallocation to other female family members, perhaps the eldest daughter, or else a longer working day. The same normative structures that associate femininity with caring roles also appear to define masculinity in terms of its distance from these roles. The resilience in the division of unpaid work meant that economically active women generally have a longer working day than men in much of the world.

This pattern holds to a varying degree across the world but the variation appears to reflect the role of the state and local cultural norms rather than rates of growth. For instance, a report by UNRISD (2010) found that, among higher income countries, gender distribution of total working hours was equal only among the Nordic countries (7.21 hours a day) with the largest gaps reported in southern European countries. The recent estimates in WDR 2012, covering

35 countries at different levels of development, found women devote 50% more time to housework and childcare than men in Cambodia and Sweden but 3 times more in Italy and six times more in Iraq.

A second aspect of intra-household inequality that appears resistant to changes in women's resource position is domestic violence. While the incidence of domestic violence is fairly universal, it varies considerably across contexts, reflecting both variations in the cultural norms defining masculinity and femininity as well as variations in the extent to which impunity is granted to perpetrators of violence. While it might be expected that improving women's access to material resources would strengthen their bargaining power within the intimate relationships of the domestic domain, the findings are highly mixed.

Jewkes (2002) offers one possible – and plausible - explanation for this. She suggests that while a key trigger for intimate partner violence across different contexts is the transgression of gender norms and the failure to fulfil cultural expectations of good womanhood/successful manhood, what constitutes such transgression is likely to vary by setting, thus leading to cross-national variation in behaviours that are risk factors. Since the cultural norms defining gender roles are likely to vary across contexts, the impact of women's access to material resources may also vary. Where men's role as breadwinners and power-holder within the domestic domain is deeply entrenched in the societal norms, improvements in women's economic status through work, credit or property is likely to threaten men's sense of his own manhood and self-worth, triggering a violent response on his part.

A final area where gender inequalities within the household have not only proved resistant to growth but been perversely affected by it relates to the phenomenon of 'missing women' reflecting gender inequalities in mortality rates and hence life expectancy resulting from severe discrimination against women. While there has been a decline in gender differentials in mortality in some of these regions, this decline does not appear to be related to economic growth (Seguino) Indeed, in countries with the fast rates of growth, namely India and China but also South Korea and Taiwan, the phenomenon of missing women has given way to the phenomenon of missing daughters, abnormally high ratio of males to females in the younger age groups. This reflects the persistence of excess female mortality among children combined with the emergence of the practice of female-selective abortion, made possible by the dissemination of new ultra-sound technologies. While fertility rates and desired family size have declined in most countries, it appears that in contexts characterised by strong son preference, the decline in fertility has been combined with the manipulation of the sex composition of children to ensure that sons dominate among the children that are born or that survive.

Different explanations of varying persuasiveness have been offered for this unexpected phenomenon. For instance, Duflo points to the role of dowry in increasing the cost of daughters in India and suggests that increased opportunities for women which might offset the cost of dowry would still not bring it to levels low enough to make it worthwhile to let girls live, given the low cost of abortion. However, this does not explain why the missing daughter phenomenon is most marked among the wealthy propertied castes of India as well as in its most prosperous states. It also does not explain why dowry itself, as well as the phenomenon of missing daughters, is spreading to lower castes which have always had high levels of female labour force participation. It does not explain why the phenomenon of missing daughters is *declining* in poorer neighbouring Bangladesh where the practice of dowry is on the rise. And it does not explain why the 'missing daughter' phenomenon persists among immigrants of Indian and East Asian descent in the US, Canada and other OECD countries.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the factors that might explain the growing phenomenon of missing daughters, but it reminds us once again that the impact of economic growth will be mediated by local structures of constraint in ways that confound easy predictions about the impact of growth on gender equality.

5. Conclusion

It was speculated at the start of this paper that one reason for the asymmetry in the two-way relationship between economic growth and gender equality was differences in the causal pathways involved. The analysis presented here offers some support for our conjecture. It suggests that the positive contribution of gender equality to economic growth partly operated through what we have described as the 'family-mediated' pathway. This rests on the culturally sanctioned support for women's care responsibilities that prevails in many different contexts across the world and thus does not pose a challenge to the structures of constraint. The empirical evidence on market-mediated pathways did not contradict the positive relationship but suggested that the pathway was more complicated and depended on tackling the intersecting deficits and barriers that stratify the opportunity structure and curtail the productivity of women's efforts relative to men's.

Turning to the reverse relationship, the fact that the impact of economic growth has to be mediated by local level structures of constraint and opportunity rules out the likelihood that its impact will be uniform for men or women in different contexts. Current patterns of export oriented growth have reduced the gender gap in labour market participation, often increasing women's bargaining power within the home when it generates waged opportunities in the more organised segments of global value chains, but they had not had a great deal of impact on the gender-stratified structure of market opportunities.

Current patterns of growth are characterised by the global mobility of capital, the restricted mobility of labour and the reduction of state intervention. The inequalities in bargaining power between capital and labour inherent in this pattern are further exacerbated in the case of women workers by the unequal terms on which they enter the market place and their confinement to restricted segments of the labour market. It is clear that market forces are not adequate on their own to address the structures of constraint that reproduce gender inequalities.

Instrumental arguments making 'the business case' for the positive contribution of gender equality to economic growth reflects efforts by gender advocates to persuade policy makers to tackle these structures but our analysis suggests that currently, these impacts rely strongly on women's conformity to socially ascribed maternal roles. Such conformity undermines their ability to contribute in other ways to economic growth or to benefit on more equal terms from its gains. It therefore leads us to raise questions about the desirability of a vision of economic progress that benefits from the unpaid labour of women but fails to recognize, let alone, reward it. Interestingly, it also takes us close to Duflo's conclusion, though we arrive at it through a different set of arguments. Gender equality will have to be argued for as a goal in its own right, regardless of 'the business case'. As such, it may require measures that do not necessarily contribute to economic growth - and may be detrimental to it - but will make for a fairer and more sustainable road to development in the long run.

[1] A reflection of findings reported by a number of studies that income in men's hands is associated with increased expenditure on alcohol, tobacco and other 'private' consumption goods.

[2] For instance, in a review of data from 141 countries in the world, the World Bank/IFC (2011) found widespread evidence of legally-sanctioned inequalities between men and women which differentiated their resource endowments and capacity for responding to available opportunities.