



Why is greater equality for women important?

Increasing women's access to assets and opportunities is the right thing to do—and the smart thing. Inequalities based solely on biological make-up, obviously unfair and unjust, are also inefficient. Equal opportunities for women boost their labor force participation, productivity, and earnings, reducing current poverty and promoting growth. And by improving the well-being of children, gender equality enhances the prospects for the future. The business case for investing in gender equality is compelling.

Investing in women—the business case

- Closing the gender gaps in education in countries where girls' school enrollment is lower than boys' could increase per capita growth by 0.1–0.3 percentage points.
- Gender equality in access to farm inputs in Sub-Saharan Africa could increase agricultural output by 20 percent.
- In Brazil the probability of a child surviving increases by about 20 percent when income is in the hands of the mother instead of the father.
- The Indian states with higher female labor force participation are the ones with faster growth. This growth lifts people out of poverty.
- In selected Latin American countries lower female earnings as a result of family violence against women translate into close to a 2 percent reduction in GDP.



What to do to promote greater gender equality?

Gender inequality is often deeply rooted in norms and traditions. So, policy for gender equality needs to focus on changing both outcomes and the underlying norms. Changes are needed in the laws that define the rules of the game for society, in the social institutions (including the family) that embody and transmit norms, and in the policies that affect outcomes.

- **Successful legal reforms to protect women's rights and level the playing field are contingent on effective enforcement. Otherwise, legislation remains merely good intentions.**
- **Interventions to increase the supply of services need to be combined with interventions that increase the demand for gender-equality interventions from the family, the community, and the state. As an example, conditional cash transfers have been used to increase family's investments in girls.**
- **Well conceived policies to address gender disparities need backing from adequate technical and financial resources. These policies entail budgetary expenditures and can have economic and political costs, so mobilizing domestic resources and donor financing will be required.**

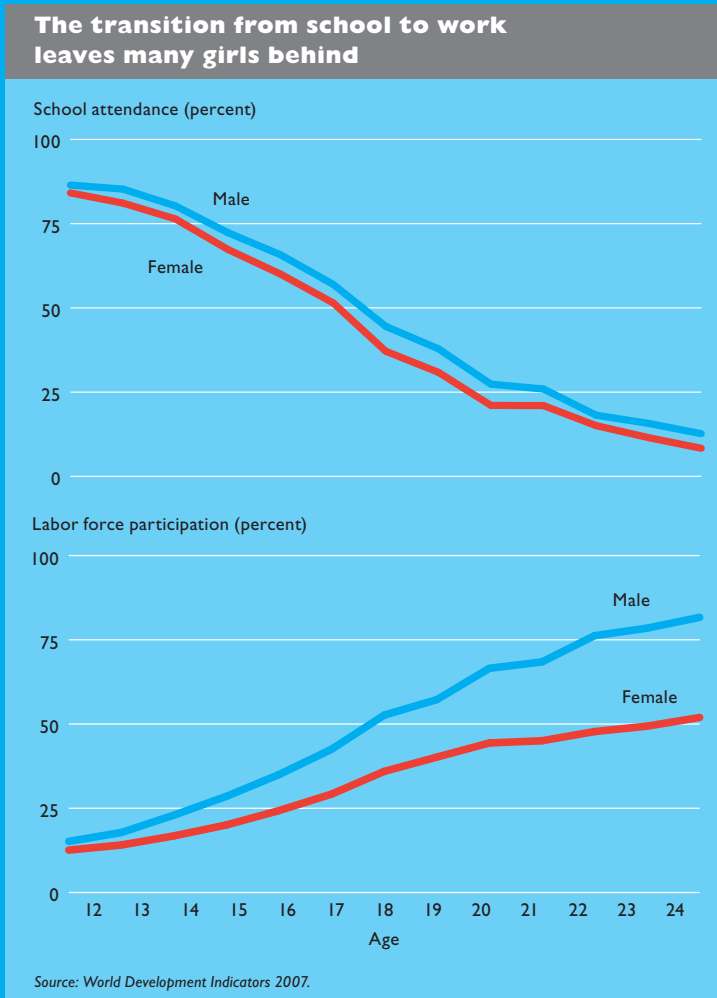


Equality for women

Where do we stand?

The world is moving quickly toward gender equality in education. Girls' enrollments are rising quickly, both in absolute terms and relative to boys'. Of 106 countries, 83 achieved the Millennium Development target of parity in primary and secondary education by 2005. Even so, 19 countries are off track to meet this target even by 2015. Even as girls' primary and secondary enrollments rose rapidly over 1990–2006, women's labor force participation stagnated, both for women 20–24 and for those 25–49.

For the progress in education to bring its full benefits—for women, for families, for societies—more policy attention must go to equality in economic opportunities, especially the transition from school to work. Growth in women's labor force participation over 1990–2006 has lagged behind schooling indicators. Women's wages, especially in manufacturing, also remain far below men's. And too many adolescents become mothers—in ideal circumstances, the pathway to transmit gains in parity to future generations—forcing them to abandon school and to face a lifetime of lower earnings.



School

Are gains in enrollment translating into gains in completion?

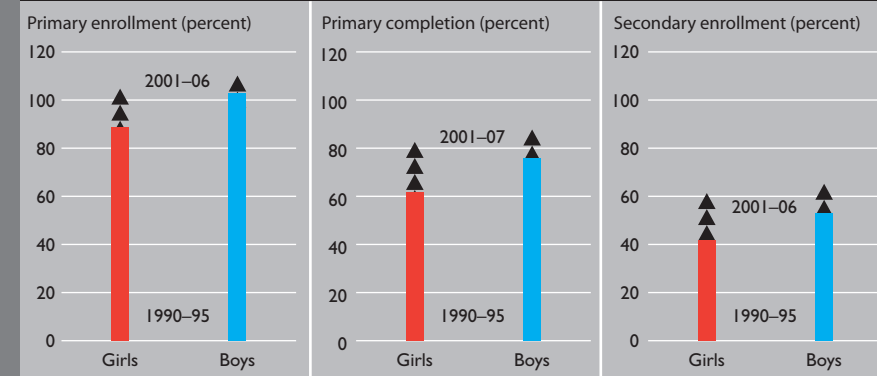
Progress toward gender parity in primary and secondary school has been impressive. The gains in primary education—particularly large in Sub-Saharan Africa,

the Middle East and North Africa, and South Asia—brought parity in primary enrollment rates by 2006 everywhere except Sub-Saharan Africa. On secondary education, East Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and the Middle East and North Africa have made impressive strides in increasing girls'

enrollment. South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa have farther to go, despite progress. Gains in enrollment translated into gains in completion in most regions, but not everywhere. In South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, girls are much less likely than boys to complete school once enrolled.

Education builds girls' capabilities. The benefits include higher earnings, better health, greater ability to adopt new technologies, and lower fertility. But building on the progress means focusing on parity in education in the lagging regions. And it means ensuring women's economic opportunities—so that women's higher capabilities translate into better outcomes.

Impressive progress in girls' enrollment and completion . . .



Source: World Development Indicators 2007.

Work

Does better access to education mean more job opportunities for women?

Progress in education is not matched by higher labor force participation. By age 24, women lag far

behind men in labor force participation everywhere except Sub-Saharan Africa.

The transition from school to work is critical for building on the achievements in women's education and sustaining them in later stages of life—for the benefit of all.

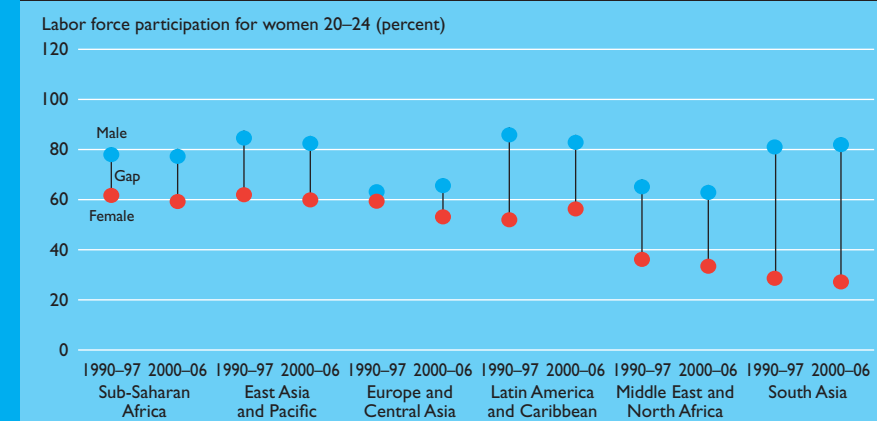
More attention for this transition is imperative.

In regions for which there is enough data, gender gaps in labor force participation at age 24 are surprisingly high. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the gap is around 30 percentage points. The

gap is even larger in South Asia, where 82% of men are active in the labor market, against just 27% of women.

The gaps widen as women age. Between ages 25 and 49, women make a greater contribution to care-giving for children, the sick, and the elderly, while men increase their labor supply outside the home.

. . . but women's labor force participation remains far below men's



Source: Household survey data, various years.

Wages

When women work, how do their wages compare with men's?

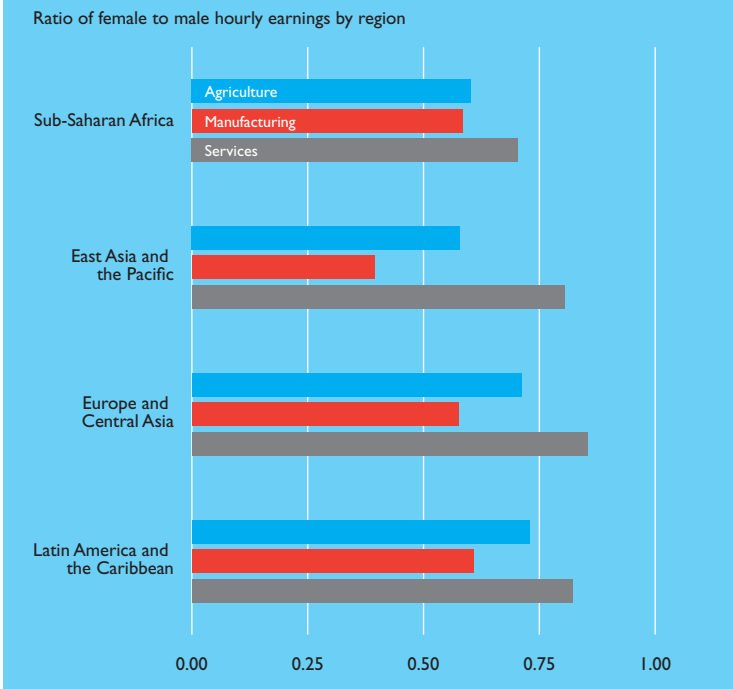
Women's hourly earnings relative to men's vary substantially across sectors—highest in services, ranging from 70% in Sub-Saharan Africa to 85% in Europe and Central Asia, and lowest in manufacturing, ranging from 39% in East Asia and the Pacific to 61% in Latin America in the Caribbean. One explanation for the smaller gap in services is that more of these jobs are in the public sector, where the gap is typically smaller.

Within sectors, the variation across regions

in hourly earnings is modest—except in manufacturing in East Asia and the Pacific, where women's hourly earnings are only 39% of men's. Data from Latin America and the Caribbean, the only region with data in both the early 1990s and recent years, indicate a declining gender gap in earnings. Research attributes much of the falling wage differentials to women's growing human capital.

Women's participation in the labor force can reduce poverty, improve health outcomes across generations, and empower. But attention must go beyond raw figures for participation.

Women's wages lag behind men's, especially in manufacturing



Source: Household survey data, various years.

The quality of the jobs matters for both personal and national outcomes.

Motherhood

Is adolescent motherhood putting at risk the gains in education and opportunities?

Recent data show that more than 10% of 15- to 19-year-olds are mothers in Sub-Saharan Africa,

South Asia, and Latin America. In Bangladesh and Mozambique more than 30% are mothers or pregnant.

Between the early 1990s and 2000, the percentage of adolescent mothers declined in many countries. But that

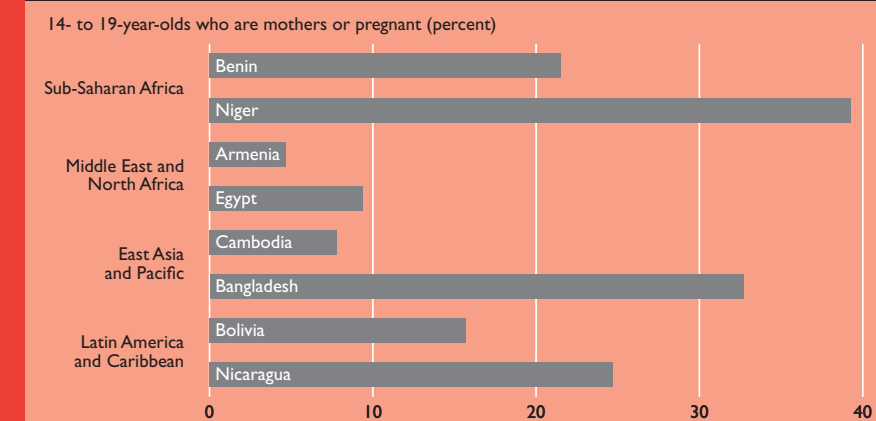
trend is far from universal, with the share increasing in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mozambique, Peru, the Philippines, Turkey, and the Republic of Yemen.

Motherhood is a key pathway for transmitting the gains

in women's equality to future generations, with benefits for children's health and education. But unintended pregnancies, especially for adolescents, can squander progress in education and labor markets.

Young girls either continue unintended pregnancies, giving up opportunities for education and employment, or seek unsafe abortions. Forty percent of abortions are performed on women younger than 25. Childbearing among teenagers can bring disproportionate health risks to the mother and the baby—maternal mortality, delivery complications, premature delivery, and low birth weight.

Adolescent motherhood is low in some countries, persistently high in others



Source: Demographic and Health Surveys, 2001-06.