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**Gendered Issues in Home and Market Production and Consumption in Rural Africa:
Social Norms, Institutions, and Economics**

SOCIAL SCIENCES: Economic Sciences

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Abstract. Recent research underscores the continued importance of gender in rural Africa. Analysis of gendered interactions within households is becoming more sophisticated, and continues to reject the unitary model. There is some evidence of discriminatory treatment of girls relative to boys, though the magnitudes of differential investments in health and schooling are not large and choices appear quite responsive to changes in opportunity costs. Social norms proscribing and prescribing male and female economic behavior remain substantial, extending into many domains, especially land tenure. Gender constructions are constantly evolving, though there is little evidence of rapid, transformative change in rural areas.

1. Introduction

The economic lives of people in many parts of rural Africa are deeply gendered. Farm activities have gender valences. Handling the plow is work for men, guiding the oxen work for women; rice is planted by women, cotton managed by men. Rural households often invest less in girl children than boy children. Governments assign programs and projects to different genders: microfinance for women, pesticides for men. Local judges interpret custom and law as properly gendered. A wife hoping to inherit her husband's land may find herself evicted by his brother. These are illustrative generalizations, of course, not facts. There is considerable variation across regions and ethnic groups and over time. But there can be little doubt that gendered structures and choices, and ensuing gendered life trajectories, are important and complex. This article reviews an expanding literature that examines the mechanisms involved, programs and policies designed around these mechanisms, and the effects of public action and large-scale change regarding gendered social structures in rural Africa.

Gender is best thought of as a set of shared discursive habits relating to male and female. These habits encompass but are not limited to cognitive characterizations of gendered behaviors, expectations about gendered actions, and gendered decision algorithms. The habits guide people when they think about how other people might react to proposed action. Sometimes the habits agree with a person's reasoned judgment, and sometimes they do not, in which case a person might experience mental distress and cognitive dissonance. The actions under consideration range from the ordinary chores of everyday living to the infrequent and worrisome markers of life changes, and from the private utterances intended for oneself to formal public pronouncements. These actions by individuals are evaluated by people in a community, and influence over time the discursive habits they share. Communities codify some gendered habits through law and culture, bringing official sanctions on those who would attempt to violate the gendered habits. For example, communities and governments in northern Nigeria created organizations known as *hisba* that enforced restrictions on women's mobility and activities.¹ Since shared discursive habits of gender overlap with discursive practices related to other important constructs (such as ethnicity and religion), shared codes and procedures emerge to resolve situations of ambiguity, contradiction and conflict.

This review focuses on gender as a social sciences phenomenon, rather than an equally interesting and important focus in the biological sciences on the sex-dimorphic effects of hormones such as testosterone that affect many dimensions of human behavior.^{2 3} Exposure and production of hormones construct the biological differences in male and female that underlie social discourses of gender.⁴ While a dimorphic approach to sex accounts for much human behavior, variance and complexity of hormone interactions mean there is considerable room for more complex ranges of outcomes, both within given human populations (male and female not fully capturing the range of biological outcomes) and over individual lifecycles.⁵

The aspects of gender reviewed here have major implications for policy. Attention to how household bargaining influences choices, particularly in agriculture, gives policy makers an increased ability to anticipate supply responses to program and policy change.⁶ Recognition that household bargaining influences the effectiveness of targeted transfers that are mediated through the household has led governments and development organizations to initiate programs of cash transfers to mothers, conditional on making schooling and health investments in children. Evidence on propensities to invest in boy children at the household level has led to greater focus on making schools friendly to girls and giving girls more incentives to perform well in school.⁷ Microfinance agencies target women, seeing in social norms of reciprocity and gender solidarity an effective mechanism to offset the lack of collateral and high cost of assessing individual creditworthiness.⁸

The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews research on how gender is manifested in households especially in terms of the interactions between husbands and wives. In rural Africa, many important productive activities and investments in production, as well as in children, are located at the level of the household. Section 3 summarizes the factors that influence household decisions about investments in girls and boy children. Section 4 examines how gendered social norms and patterns impact actions. Gender discourses are deployed outside the household, and a constellation of overlapping social norms inflect, in gendered ways, choice about investment, production and consumption. Women hold only secondary rights to land; crop, forest and bush resources are gendered; off-farm and household activities are gendered; women

are under coverture, so husbands control assets and labor; sexuality and fertility decisions are influenced by behavior of reference groups; and marriage contracts and inter-generational transfers are conditioned by norms of ethnic groups. Section 5 concludes with reflections on broad social processes that update and transform gendered discursive habits at the macro scale.

2. Gendered choice in households

There are significant differences in the choices taken by men and women acting in their roles as members of households (spouses, parents, grandparents and children of elderly parents). These differences are very relevant to policy, as governments throughout Africa have increasingly adopted cash transfer and pension schemes as major components of efforts to alleviate poverty. Many of these schemes target women, on the presumption that the resulting changes in household consumption and investment choices will be more aligned with development goals. Likewise, many policy makers perceive beneficial effects of government investment, subsidy, and price control programs that shift income (and opportunities to earn income) towards mothers and grandmothers. Investments in public provision of piped water, for example, save women the time of fetching water from distant wells. The extra income that women then earn might be more likely to be spent on better nutrition and health for children.

Becker's theory of interaction among household members predicted that changes in economic opportunities would lead to compensating transfers within the family. For a broad range of outcomes, then, this theory of the "unitary" household predicted that changes in the distribution of income or assets, holding constant the overall level of income or assets, would not lead to changes in household choices regarding consumption and production.⁹

There is broad consensus that this inclination to view households as sites of mutual consideration is not an appropriate generalization for households in rural Africa; bargaining and contestation are also present to significant degrees. Numerous analyses of consumption choices reject the unitary approach.¹⁰ Hoddinott and Haddad found that height of children in Cote d'Ivoire was partly determined by the share of assets controlled by the mother.¹¹ Lachaud found that expenditures on food and energy in Burkina Faso were partly determined by the income shares of wives or female household heads.¹² Quisumbing and Maluccio found that household expenditures, in samples from Ethiopia and South Africa, varied by the assets that spouses controlled before they were married.¹³ Fafchamps, Kebede and Quisumbing found that child nutrition and education, in a sample of Ethiopian households, varied with indicators of female empowerment.¹⁴ A caveat is that these correlations between the relative incomes or assets of husbands and wives and the expenditures of the household on consumption, investment and leisure, controlling for the overall level of well-being of the household, might not be causal, but rather emerge from marriage decisions. That is, men and women with certain preferences regarding household spending and activities might be matched, and if these preferences are also correlated with patterns of income or assets, then it might look like the distribution of income or assets are "causing" the household expenditure decisions, but in fact these were decided earlier at the time of household formation. Estimating the causal effect requires plausible measures of exogenous shocks to income. Recent years have seen increased reliance on randomized experiments and use of random climate variation to test (and continue to reject) the hypothesis of the "unitary" household.¹⁵

Studies of production practices in rural households also reject the "unitary" view. In the typical household, men and women are largely self-employed (that is, they work on their own fields or on their own activities rather than in supervised workplaces) and so production activities are linked to household interactions. Udry found differences in the farming practices of men and women in the same households in a sample from Burkina Faso.¹⁶ Controlling for plot characteristics and crop choices women's plots had considerably less manure applied and consequently considerably lower yields. The inefficiency was significant in terms of household income, even though women's fields were a small share of the total area. Naïve estimates of simply 'rearranging' inputs suggested overall agricultural incomes per person could be increased by 6%. Other studies have offered less definitive but still convincing evidence against the unitary model of household. Doss and McPeak reported correlations from a sample of Gabra nomadic pastoralists in northern Kenya, where there had been rapid growth of milk marketing opportunities for women, suggesting that men appeared to respond to the greater income-earning potential of their wives by spending less time near the towns where milk could be marketed.¹⁷ That is, they made decisions about herd location that favored milk

consumption (by both family and kin) over income (that accrued to wives). Lim, Winter-Nelson and Arends-Kuenning used data from a survey of coffee and ensete farms in Ethiopia, and found substantial variation in production practices according to measures of exit options and bargaining power of wives in the farm households.¹⁸

Since these findings are not drawn from randomized trials or natural experiments, they are subject to alternative explanations. As with consumption choices, the production practices of some households may be the result of matching patterns at the time of household formation. More importantly, perhaps, is that factors outside the household may be responsible for patterns of behavior within the household. Goldstein and Udry, for example, underscore the difficulty in attributing variation in the practices of men and women solely to differential household bargaining.¹⁹ They found that differences in farming practices in southern Ghana, including those between men and women, might be attributed to insecure tenure rather than strategic interaction and imperfect commitment among household members. Farmers without secure tenure would have short fallows for their fields, as they would fear losing their fallow fields to other farmers. Data on production practices on maize and cassava fields for over 250 farmers confirmed that farmers who were less connected to local lineage institutions fallowed their fields for shorter periods. Women were among the least politically powerful of farmers. It appeared that women had lower productivity not because they failed to agree with their husbands, but rather because they failed to secure commitment to long-term leases with lineage elders who allocated land.

These caveats notwithstanding, given the rejection of the unitary model as a broad characterization of households, work has turned in recent years to investigate more subtle aspects of behavior within households, with a view to providing better estimates of household responses to policy and exogenous trends.²⁰ Chiappori and various co-authors tout a tractable “collective” perspective where the interests of household members diverge and the members may not be able to commit to agreements made at the time of the formation of the household.²¹ If the household decision-making process is efficient, then the process for allocating resources within the household can be characterized as a rule for sharing household resources. Any change in income of a household member can be decomposed into a change in the share parameter and the effects of a change in the share parameter on the allocation of expenditure to a particular good. It follows that, to take a concrete example, the ratio of the expenditure effects on soap from a change in male income to a change in female income should be equal to the ratio of the expenditure effects on kola nuts from a change in male income to a change in female income. Only a handful of studies in African contexts have plausible measures of exogenous income with which to test this subtle prediction of the model. Dauphin, Fortin and Lacroix estimate a modified version of the test, using data from Burkina Faso, taking into account the polygamous nature of many Burkinabè households.²² They find the data do not reject the implications of the collective model.

Recent interest in investing heavily in rural Africa, whether through the distribution of anti-malarial bednets^{23 24}, heavily subsidized fertilizer^{25 26}, or extending pineapple as an export crop²⁷, accentuates the importance of understanding the gendered nature of interactions of household members, and attributing the gendered character of interaction to preferences, bargaining or social norms. Future research should not neglect the burgeoning field of behavioral economics, which assesses the likelihood of significant differences across men and women in procrastination and time preference, attitudes to risk and aversion to loss²⁸, willingness to invest in competitive social situations²⁹, and preferences to structure social arrangements in ways that are perceived to be fair. Moreover, it has also become clear that financial arrangements of many African households are heavily influenced by considerations of bargaining within households, and the difficulty of commitment to respect individual control over income. Informal savings groups and microfinance institutions are increasingly understood in this light.³⁰

3. Investments in children

For many rural areas in Africa, ratios of dependent children to working-age adults continue to grow. Parents see children as sources of income and old-age security. High dependency ratios make it difficult for households and public authorities to invest in better nutrition and schooling. The choice of rural households to favor boys in schooling is a possible contributory factor to this vicious circle. The presumption for policy

makers, then, is that greater investment in schooling of girls will bring about lower levels of fertility and population growth that will enable more investment per person.³¹

Effective policy hinges in part on estimates of the magnitude of the effects of changes in household income and demographic composition on gendered schooling choices, and more generally on child nutrition, labor, and leisure, and household influence on early fertility decisions of young women and men. If gendered investments in children are largely unresponsive to economic change, this would suggest that parental or social preferences or norms largely explain the phenomenon. If, however, gendered investments respond readily to changing opportunity costs (such as changing household budget constraints, or changing returns to schooling for boys and girls), then these effects ought to be incorporated into design of policy.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic has generated large increases in adult mortality, and this extreme shock to households has been used by many researchers to examine gendered household outcomes. In a sample from north-western Tanzania, hours in school were reduced substantially for girls following parental death.³² Analysis of a nationally-representative sample from Burkina Faso found that girl orphans were much more likely to suffer from delayed schooling than boy orphans.³³ In Uganda, parental death had significantly greater effects on schooling outcomes for girls in secondary school, compared with boys, but there were no differences for primary schoolchildren.³⁴ Another study from Uganda found that greater reductions in girl schooling following adult mortality were largely seen in relatively poor households, as the non-poor exhibited no reductions in schooling.³⁵ Looking at the positive effects of recovery from HIV/AIDS due to provision of antiretroviral therapy, a sample of households in Kenya revealed little gendered effects on child primary schooling. Both boys and girls largely remained in school (primary enrolment in the area was close to 100%) but increased their hours in school and reduced their time working as the health of their sick parent improved.³⁶

Some researchers have used the outlay-equivalence method introduced by Deaton for measuring the magnitude of parental preferences for girls compared with boys, treating the sex of the newborn child as, in effect, a random shock. If some expenditure items in the household are exclusively for adults, then measuring how additional girl or boy children affect expenditures on those items, holding constant overall income, is informative of how much parental expenditures respond to the additional child. Deaton found no gender differences in a sample from Cote d'Ivoire.³⁷

Other studies use larger-scale shocks to household status to estimate gendered effects. The negative shocks of civil war in Burundi and in Rwanda seemed to have had little impact on the health of girls relative to boys, although crop failure in Rwanda had larger negative effects on nutritional outcomes of girls.^{38 39} Duflo showed that the extension of old-age pensions in 1993 to elderly blacks in South Africa after the fall of apartheid had a very sizable effect improving weight and height of granddaughters when their grandmothers received pensions (but not when their grandfathers received pensions).⁴⁰

An important perspective on studies of gendered allocations has been raised by Kebede, who argued that much of the literature has focused on estimating the effect of a single change (e.g. death of a parent) and determining whether it is indicative of son preference. The implicit assumption is that exogenous changes are fungible: a death of a parent is the opposite of the saving of a parent; or an increase in income from crop production is the same as an increase in income from a government cash transfer.⁴¹ But it may well be that some shocks exhibit responses consistent with son preference, while other shocks go in the opposite direction. Kebede presented suggestive evidence, in estimating multiple relationships with data from a sample of Ethiopian households, that indeed demographic, price and income changes had different effects.

Overall, research results suggest that differential treatment girls and boys in rural Africa, especially in schooling, is quite responsive economic change and does not reflect strong preferences reinforced by social norms.

This finding resonates with the absence of overt imbalances in sex ratios at birth and early childhood in most African regions.⁴² There is little evidence of significant bias against girl children at birth and early childhood; sex ratios at birth actually appear to slightly favor girls, though extremely low incomes and high mortality make difficult precise comparisons with other human populations.^{43 44}

But a number of methodological warnings are in order on the issue of sex ratios. Parents may alter the sex ratios of their children through abortion, infanticide, and neglect, all the outcome of cognitive, shared decisions that are unlikely to be driven by hormones or other evolved attributes of males and females, and

may either be due to parental interests or to altruistic actions undertaken for the benefit of children. Measuring the magnitude of the preference for sons over daughters has turned out to be complex. This is particularly evident when son preference combined with equal treatment leads to differential mortality. When parents prefer sons they will tend to continue having children until they reach the desired number of sons, so girls will more likely have more siblings, possibly meaning lower expenditures per child and more likelihood of deaths among girl children. Also, the base proportion of boys and girls that will be born, from which the fraction of girls that are “missing” is calculated, may itself be altered due to son preference if there is sex ratio heterogeneity in human populations. That is, if some women or couples are naturally going to have more girls, then son preference induces them to have even more children (more girls) than there would be in a non-heterogeneous population. One other source of an outcome of neglect that may not be a deliberate decision: parents preferring sons might have mothers stop breastfeeding girls earlier than boys, as they want to try again to have a son, perhaps not realizing the importance of breastfeeding on subsequent health outcomes. Severe problems of data availability in rural Africa of sex ratios at birth, where large fractions of the population give birth at home, and so neglect leading to death, and infanticide and pre-term abortion may not be recorded, mean that sex ratios of surviving children are not necessarily indicative of neglect.

4. Gendered social norms

Gender operates at other social levels besides the household. Social norms, for example, are often explicitly about gender. These norms, which vary across societies in both content and degree of formalization, are shared discursive habits that prescribe and proscribe, and thus restrict the range of choice available to individuals. Burke and Young note that norms “warp” the choices that individuals might make because conforming to norms is positively reinforced.⁴⁵ In many parts of rural Africa, plants, crops and cropping activities are subject to gendered norms.^{46 47} Household practices are gendered. Women fetch water, gather fuel, cook, do laundry, and care for children; men often do very little household work in rural areas.⁴⁸ Discourses categorizing occupations in rural Africa as male or female are often naturalized, with discussion muted and uncontested. Fresh produce marketing⁴⁹, artisanal mining⁵⁰, beer-brewing⁵¹, weaving⁵², blacksmithing⁵³, and singing and playing music⁵⁴, are just some of the many examples of occupations that are strongly gendered in the informal, non-farm economy.

Some of these norms may be conventions, acting as convenient rules of thumb for avoiding the difficult problem of assessing fair or efficient division of labor. Sometimes the norms are patterns of behavior, created through unconstrained decisions balancing considerations of comparative advantage and specialization in skills, perhaps derived from the biology of pregnancy, breastfeeding, and different average capacities for endurance, repetitive motion, and strength.⁵⁵

Norms are different from patterns of behavior which result from unconstrained choices; because people reflect and talk about the meaning of the norms, the talk itself becomes a shared discursive habit that generates reinforcement. In some social situations, the magnitude of the reinforcement may be perceived to be so high that individuals no longer weigh options and calculate trade-offs, but rather act as if they were constrained. It should not be forgotten that violence underpins some social norms that are unfavorable to women.⁵⁶

Understanding of social norms comes largely from the work of anthropologists and sociologists, drawing on grounded, long-term case studies of specific social situations. These disciplines approach norms as shared ways by which members of a community interpret, predict and justify actions. Norms and culture are used by people because they have effects on other people. The anthropological approach is to view norms regarding gendered crops, tasks and occupations as complex, fluid processes.⁵⁷ Chant, for example, studied processes of “feminisation of responsibility and obligation” in understanding the how norms affect budget allocations in families and allocation of time.⁵⁸ She noted that programs and policies that leverage a gendered understanding of the household may end up reinforcing the social norms that, in part, underpinned that gendered structure. In terms of occupations, Laviolette, in a nuanced study, traced some of the many gender identity issues associated with pottery-making in the city of Jenne in Mali.⁵⁹ Lyons and Freeman found that female potters in Tigray region of Ethiopia resisted marginalized identities as tainted persons.⁶⁰ In agriculture, numerous studies have shown how meanings associated with crops are negotiated and changing. Carney and

Watts, for example, illustrated how in the Senegal River basin irrigated rice projects geared towards men provoked reconstitutions of the shared meanings of proper allocation of female labor.⁶¹

Nuanced understanding of how social norms are locally deployed and constructed is very important when analyzing land tenure. At a broad level, land tenure is gendered in similar ways in most of Africa. Local customary authorities who regulate land use are invariably men who typically assert that women obtain land through their husbands and his kin and thus are secondary holders of land rights. Surveys of actual claims to control over land reflect the local institutions, with women controlling far less land than men. For example, Jacob describes in considerable detail land tenure in Winye villages near Boromo, in southwestern Burkina Faso.⁶² A couple brief paragraphs discuss tenure for women: men give women old, “tired” fields that should be left fallow, and never give them newly cleared fields or fields that have been fallow long enough to recover significant productivity. The remainder of the book is practically devoid of mention of women, except as reference points for consanguinity (matrilineal or patrilineal). The absence of women in this and other discussions of land tenure accurately reflect local, socially-embedded presumptions of male rights to land trumping the possibility of female rights (other than secondary rights through social relationships to men).⁶³

Land tenure, though, is constantly evolving. The trajectory is sometimes to become more accommodating of women’s rights, as in Botswana.⁶⁴ Griffiths argued that women used notions of fairness, rather than equality, in pursuing land claims in local *kgotla* councils of Botswana.⁶⁵ Sometimes the trajectory is towards erosion of women’s rights, as in the case of the Gusii of Kenya. Formal marriage is declining and so women less frequently gain access to land.⁶⁶ Moreover, Henrysson and Joireman showed how Gusii men used favorable customary land tenure dispute resolution mechanisms to enhance their claims against women.⁶⁷ Some of this change happens as hitherto marginalized discourses in local land tenure mesh with national discourses that are increasingly moving towards more formalized equality of rights, impelled in part by adoption of the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).⁶⁸ Khadiagala reported that women in Kabala areas of Uganda deployed, in the formal legal process, rhetoric of rights and responsibilities emanating from their labor on the fields to assert control rights over land.⁶⁹

Policy and research on land tenure is occasionally inattentive to important gender dimensions of change. Local social norms favoring men in land tenure issues have been internalized and reproduced by government policy. For example, land reform in Zimbabwe appears to have been quite unfavorable to women.⁷⁰ Koopman argues that giving women’s issues short shrift in Senegal led to ineffective expenditures of upwards of \$2 billion in agricultural modernization projects.⁷¹ Similar effects have been documented in state-led reforms of land tenure that typically involve nationalizing untitled lands and depriving local customary authorities of legal standing. This kind of reform seems to have rarely generated investment incentives, often had perverse equity effects (especially for women), and had high implementation costs.^{72 73} There is some movement to remedy these past interventions. An early model is the large-scale rapid land certification program in Ethiopia that specifically targeted wives as landholders, by requiring the photo of a wife to be included on certificates, and encouraging land to be declared as jointly owned.⁷⁴

Social norms of coverture vary widely across ethnic groups in rural Africa, with some groups considering women to be under the tutelage of their husbands and constrained in their ability to exercise choice over the disposition of their assets and labor.⁷⁵ Kevane and Wydick examine variation in control by husbands over the allocation of time of their wives by measuring the responsiveness of women’s allocation of time to changing assets of their husbands.⁷⁶ Anthropological accounts suggested that one ethnic group, the Bwa, would have higher responsiveness than another ethnic group, the Mossi.⁷⁷ The estimated coefficients of responsiveness were indeed close to zero for the patriarchal Mossi, where women were viewed locally as having no control over their time, while responsiveness was high for Bwa women, who were thought to be considerably free in their allocation of time. The estimates are, however, subject to bias due to endogeneity of the assets of husbands. A very similar finding was obtained for a sample of farmers in Ethiopia.⁷⁸

The tutelage implied by coverture is embedded in marriage institutions, and generally is validated through payments from the groom or his family to the family of the bride. This brideprice, or bridewealth, has experienced considerable transformation over time and across regions. There is a serious lacuna in empirical cross-regional or time-series work to understand the major transformations. Given that marriage agreements are complex, multi-dimensional and inter-temporal, there are major challenges in aggregating and even observing the major components of agreements. For example, Luke and Munshi argue that in the

Kisumu area of Kenya marriage apparently entails some obligation of remittances to kin after migration to urban areas.⁷⁹ Consequently, men who judge themselves to likely be successful in urban livelihoods delay marriage. Moreover, there is evidence from a number of countries that brideprice payments and assets transferred to children at the time of marriage are strategic choices of parents and not just social norms.^{80 81}

Norms regarding sexuality, family planning and fertility are complex determinants of life possibilities for women, and vary considerably over time and across regions.⁸² Wight, et al., for example, argue that in rural northern Tanzania several norms regarding youth sexuality operate simultaneously, some restrictive and some permissive.⁸³ Kin or ethnic groups would seem to be likely suspects in reinforcing high fertility, though Mace and Colleran find that the advent of contraception in The Gambia has greatly diminished the importance of kin in influencing fertility.⁸⁴ Most studies of fertility norms in rural Africa lack the fortuitous quasi-experimental setup of Munshi and Myaux who convincingly identify the causality of group social norms, finding that within communities of Hindus and Muslims, who have similar exposure to contraception outreach and similar livelihoods, average behavior within each group influences individual behavior, and there is little cross-group influence.⁸⁵

5. Gender at the macro-level: implications for agriculture and rural households

Africa remains largely rural, and so household and local social interaction remain important determinants of livelihoods. Local interactions and the gender structures that inform them are, of course, influenced by changes in national-level discourses about gender. Urbanization, building out of road networks, and advances in communication are likely to hasten the influence of and participation in national discourses. There is, at present, scant evidence of broad liberalizing social movements that seem in other parts of the world and in history to be associated with transformative changes in households, the investments made in girl or boy children, and social norms that influence choices of occupations and investments. Indeed there are cues suggesting that such social movements may be going in the opposite direction in rural Africa: these include the resurgence of child labor, forced labor and child trafficking in countries that have seen breakdowns in civil order, and the resurgence of restrictive ideologies of women's place in public spheres in regions as disparate as northern Nigeria and Swaziland. In rural Sudan, for example, several case studies have shown how Islamist discourses of the military government restricted, through new gender norms, livelihood choices in village marketplaces.^{86 87}

Three broad trends affecting macroeconomic change should be on the research agenda. First, local constructions of gender may be changing in subtle ways as ubiquitous cell phones increase the demand for basic literacy by rural women and enable women to have more access to discourses of equal rights and an expanded social network.⁸⁸ One of the key features of coverture in many rural African societies is that women have to obtain permission from husbands to visit kin. Moreover, local social norms typically prescribe house-related work and often proscribe long-distance trade and market work. These constraints reduce the potential social networks of women; cell phones may then have more rapid effects on expanding social networks of women compared with men, with consequent changes in household bargaining and erosion of local social norms. More broadly, electronic communication media have the potential to introduce new patterns of change at the level of large-scale, popular culture. While many societies developed cultures of nationalism that drew in part on stereotypes of domesticity as ideal female behavior, compartmentalized interactions through social networks may generate quite different, and more ephemeral and fragmented, cultural representations.

A second likely change is the move to factory work. Only a handful of countries, principally in southern Africa, and Ethiopia, are creating significant peri-urban industrial zones. But these zones are likely to expand rapidly once wages in China rise and African countries regain competitive advantage in low-skill manual assembly operations. Elsewhere, factory work has had profound effects on gender relationships, with important implications for the sustainability of rural livelihoods (e.g., responsibilities of daughters to remit incomes to parents who remain on the farm).^{89 90 91}

Finally, the continued trend towards democratic and participatory governance⁹², especially at the sub-national level, suggests the likelihood of important gendered effects on agricultural and rural development policy. In democracies, perceptions of women's capabilities in terms of management and communications skills, leadership, and incorruptibility, all come into play in political campaigns and in the voting booth.

Involvement of women in electoral politics (as voters and elected officials) can have large effects on changing formal policies towards gender equality, though it remains to be seen whether family law and land tenure are also transformable from the capital city.⁹³

6. Conclusion

There is much evidence that gender significantly affects production and consumption in rural Africa. This is seen clearly in households, the pervasive form of social organization in rural areas. Villages, ethnic groups, religious orders, and national communities also construct and share gendered norms. New technologies of communication, emerging industrial clusters, and the wave of participatory politics of the last decade presage more rapid change in these norms. There are, however, serious challenges to understanding, predicting, and evaluating the evolution of gender norms. The research reviewed in this paper illustrates some of the techniques being used by social scientists to deal with these challenges.

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