

Gender & other divides

Discussant comments

Structure

- Two closely related papers that will be discussed together
- One that differs greatly by reason of object of study, method, etc.
 - Discussed first

Attracting & keeping BD women in ICT profession

- Addresses a legitimate policy problem: As IT and ITES (software & BPO) industries grow, lack of qualified workers may become a constraint
 - Excluding half or more of the potential workforce (women) is a problem
 - But authors have not established this fact; they rely on a series of anecdotes, despite this not being very hard to do
 - But let us take under-representation of women on trust
 - Citing international data is not the most illuminating since both India & Sri Lanka, in the neighborhood, seem to have managed the problem, as should be evident from just looking around this campus
 - Also, an imbalance in a specific sector has to be set in the context of overall labor force participation by men and women (e.g., LK overall female participation rate is 32%; the BD number should be known)

Attracting & keeping BD women in ICT profession

- Looking at the paper from policy maker perspective
 - A study that identified the factors giving rise to different outcomes in India and Sri Lanka would be more illuminating
- So let me ask a different question
 - Could this study contribute to a solution that would help customize the lessons from comparative analysis?

Attracting & keeping BD women in ICT profession

- Leaky pipe v life-cycle
 - Not fully persuaded by the rejection of leaky pipe, but . . .
 - Policy interventions in leaky pipe approach are easy to identify; how would they differ in life-cycle approach?
- I do not see actionable proposals
 - “Hopefully, through the present study, the government will develop and adopt a gender-based strategy on attracting and keeping Bangladeshi women in the ICT profession.”
 - Suggests a naïve faith in the value of written policy documents in Bangladesh
- Even if concrete policy recommendations could be derived from this study, the method is unlikely to be persuasive to intended policy audiences

“Gender & entrepreneurship in informal sector”
(Africa) & “Do location and gender matter for mobile
ownership?” (Asia)

- Two closely related papers also addressing “gap” issues so beloved by donors and activists: but focusing specifically on gender
- Both draw from large representative-sample surveys

“Do location and gender matter for mobile ownership?” Asia Paper

- Starting point for Asian paper is a contrary finding
 - Hilbert (2011), using data from select African and Latin American countries, found gender no longer significant in mobile ownership, when education and occupation controlled
 - Also referred to in African paper
- The Asian paper finds evidence contrary to Hilbert in the BOP in the six countries they study, except for Thailand where the odds are stronger for women
 - I would have liked a deeper investigation of why? Is Hilbert wrong? Are there other factors at play in BOP segments in PK, IN, BD, LK, IN?
- The policy recommendation flowing from Hilbert would be inaction; the Asian authors recommend policy action on women’s education. Why? Is the Pakistan illustration adequate? Is more work needed to flesh out this recommendation?
 - Again, from policy perspective, useful to think about the practical problems of implementing their recommendation
 - Silo problem
 - Time problem

“Do location and gender matter for mobile ownership?” Asia Paper

- I found their rural finding quite interesting
 - Much of public policy is fixated on the rural (because more votes there?)
 - If you are taking down sacred cows, better bring heavy artillery (more evidence)
 - Potential for future work

“Gender & entrepreneurship in informal sector”

Africa paper

- “Pushed, not pulled, into entrepreneurship”
 - So what?
- “Lack of access to financial resources”
 - Nicely fits the ICT as complement, not principal driver narrative; resonates with morning discussion
 - Bank account = Access to financial resources?
- “Govt should provide training”
 - Why on ICTs, when we’re talking about mobiles?
 - Can the needed skills be prioritized, based on the research: entrepreneurship ahead of/behind ICT skills?

Asia and Africa papers

- Praiseworthy attempts to untangle the multiple factors that affect participation in the economy (Africa) and ICTs (Asia)
 - Good if the authors get together and tease out the commonalties and possible areas of future analysis
 - Also think about looping back to Hilbert
 - Too many pendulum swings do not contribute to credibility
 - Both would benefit from graphical depiction of the postulated causal links
 - I suspect there are some confusions that will come to light if this additional step is done as part of the next revision