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