

Why is Gender Equality Good for Governance?

The empowerment of women and girls benefits society on both intrinsic and extrinsic grounds. On intrinsic grounds, gender inequalities are unjust. Any argument that an individual's sex should limit her pursuits and achievements is indefensible on liberal, principled grounds, and runs contrary to democratic ideals.¹

Adding to justice claims, a growing empirical literature mounts support for the extrinsic benefits of gender equality. This literature evidences positive relationships between gender equality and democratic norms,² peace and security,³ economic performance,⁴ and anti-corruption.⁵

This call solicits contributions to the latter literature. We call for investigations into the increasingly established link between indicators of gender equality and good governance, in particular in areas of limited statehood, where the state is too weak and often not willing to provide collective goods and services. Why and when does gender equality matter for good governance?

Indeed, while the positive, extrinsic effects of gender equality are well tested against alternatives, what remains less clear is the *why*. Why is it that, repeatedly, gender equality increases these governance goods? As far as we can tell the mechanism is both neglected and unclear. And, yet, the *why* has several possible roots: 1) gender as a primary agent of emancipative or authoritative socialization; 2) gender inequality as limiting of the diversity and talent pool; and 3) gender equality's positive externalities. The following paragraphs discuss each in turn.

One possibility is gender's role as a socialization agent. When it occurs and in its various forms, the ill treatment or systematic disadvantage of women and girls is so widespread that no person in society can insulate themselves from repeated experiences of hierarchical, oppressive and/or disadvantaged treatment of some relative to others on the basis of ascriptive difference. Plausibly, this normalizes

¹ Nussbaum, M. 2000. *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

² Coleman, I. 2004. "The Payoff from Women's Rights." *Foreign Affairs* 83: 85-95; Fish, S. 2002. "Islam and Authoritarianism." *World Politics* 55: 4-37; Goetz, A-M. (Ed.) 2009. *Governing Women: Women's Political Effectiveness in Contexts of Democratization and Governance Reform*. New York: Routledge; Norris, P. and Inglehart, R. 2003. "The True Clash of Civilizations." *Foreign Policy* March/April; Welzel, C. and Inglehart, R. 2005. *Human Development, Cultural Change and Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Welzel, C. and Alexander, A.C. 2013. "Rising Support for Reproductive Freedoms: Emancipatory Breakthroughs into a Bulwark of Tradition," *Unpublished Manuscript*; Welzel, C. 2013. *Freedom Rising*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³ Hudson, V., Ballif-Spanvill, B., Caprioli, M., and Emmett, C. 2012. *Sex and World Peace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴ Blackden, M., Canagarajah, S., Klasen, S., and Lawson, D.. 2007. "Gender and Growth in Africa: Evidence and Issues," in G. Mavrotas and A. Shorrocks, eds. *Advancing Development: Core Themes in Global Economics*, pp.349-70. London: Palgrave Macmillan; Coleman 2004. Duflo, E. 2012. "Women's Empowerment and Economic Development." *Journal of Economic Literature*, 50 (4): 1051-1079. Kabeer, N. and L. Natali. 2013. "Gender Equality and Economic Growth: Is there a win-win?" IDS Working Paper No. 417. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies; Seguino, S. 2000. "Gender Inequality and Growth: A Cross-Country Analysis." *World Development* 28(7): 1211-1230.

⁵ Goetz, A. M. 2007. "Political Cleaners: Women as the New Anti-Corruption Force." *Development and Change* 38: 87-105.

unequal treatment, creating a legitimacy basis for other forms of authoritarian, partial treatment. Past and present injustices rest on a biological and/or religious authorization of the unequal worth of some relative to others by, for instance, birth right, ethnic/racial right, divine right or familial right. Corruption rests on a similarly *partial* treatment as opposed to *universal* treatment logic. Discrimination on the basis of sex is a powerful mode for developing and reinforcing such inequality norms. For instance, when the nutrition and health of a boy is prioritized over the nutrition and health of a girl in Vietnam, or when there is widespread male dominance of decision-making structures in the United States, this normalizes systematic *partial* advantage. In both instances, albeit tempered by how explicit or implicit the treatment, the gendered structures socialize beliefs and behaviors that run contrary to the engine of universal treatment that powers good governance.

An equally compelling piece to the gender equality/governance puzzle is gender inequality's reduction of the pool of diverse interests and talents. Women make up roughly half of the population of most societies. Thus, sex-based advantage reduces the average amount of human capital in society, including *governance capital*. Gender inequality does this by artificially restricting the pool of talent from which to draw for: 1) interest articulation, 2) citizen participation, 3) elite participation, and 4) advocacy. If we agree that a nation's good governance is only as strong as the real competitiveness of its citizens' interests, gender inequality is a powerful limitation.

A third argument relates to the positive externalities of women's empowerment. Women's empowerment is known to reduce fertility levels, violence, financial irresponsibility, and disease insecurity.⁶ In short, gender gaps writ large reduce the indirect benefits to society of more capable and autonomous women: effects incurred from women's roles as mothers, household decision-makers, leaders and fellow citizens.⁷ Relatedly, by increasing the general level of societal equality, women's empowerment can indirectly contribute to social trust and its myriad social benefits.⁸

An overview of the literature pinpoints these as the key mechanisms behind the gender equality/governance puzzle. We call for papers that further develop and test the socialization, competition and externality hypotheses. We are also interested in additional mechanisms that might explain the link. And, we are equally interested in inquiries into whether the apparent relationship is spurious: perhaps a third factor drives both the increase in gender equality and good governance.⁹ Thus, this call is not limited to just these three theoretical possibilities. This is a call for both theoretical as well as empirical inquiry into the increasingly established link between gender equality and good governance. We look forward to hearing from the field as to why gender equality is good for governance.

⁶ Coleman 2004; UN Women 2013. "A Transformative Stand-Alone Goal on Achieving Gender Equality, Women's Rights and Women's Empowerment."

http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2013/10/UNWomen_post2015_positionpaper_English_final_web%20pdf.pdf.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Rothstein, B. and Uslaner, E. 2006. "All for All: Equality, Corruption and Social Trust." *World Politics* 58: 41-72.

⁹ See, for instance, Sung, H. E., 2012. "Women in Government, Public Corruption and Liberal Democracy: A Panel Analysis." *Crime, Law and Social Change* 58: 195-219.