

**Published as:** Van Staveren, Irene, 'How Gendered Institutions Constrain Women's Empowerment', Chapter 10 in *Handbook of Research on Gender and Economic Life*, Deborah Figart and Tonia Warnecke (eds.), Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2013, pp. 150-166.

## **How gendered institutions constrain women's empowerment**

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### **I Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Since the 1980s, gender policies at the international level have emphasized women's participation in the economy. In particular, international gender policies tend to concentrate on the promotion of women's access to resources, such as jobs, education, land, other assets, and credit. Recent literature acknowledges that women's empowerment involves more than access to resources but also implies agency and an enabling institutional context, which together help women to achieve better well-being (Kabeer, 2001; Narayan, 2005a; Alsop *et al.*, 2006; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). In light of the recent literature on women's empowerment, this chapter undertakes an innovative exploratory analysis of the role of resources relative to women's agency, captured by gendered institutions that limit this agency. Non-market institutions that constrain women's economic position as well as economic development in general are measured, like all other variables, at the macro level.

Whereas most scholarship on women's empowerment is at the micro level, the empirical analysis here is cross-country. The advantage of a cross-country empirical analysis is that it allows for much more variation in institutions, and, hence, it helps to understand more fully how these affect women's agency and access to resources. (At the micro level, for example, a negative effect of gender norms on women's bargaining power has been demonstrated, even to

the extent that it overrides a positive effect of resources.) In support of a macro-level analysis of empowerment, a useful database has become available with indicators for gendered institutions for most countries of the world (OECD, 2006). Obviously, data on institutions that are qualitative have their limitations for quantitative analysis and require a careful assessment in terms of measurement and multi-collinearity. These limitations will be discussed.

The next section will briefly discuss the literature on empowerment. The two sections thereafter will introduce exploratory models and the data as well as the empirical analysis. The chapter ends with policy implications. I conclude that we need to transform formal and informal gendered institutions throughout society.

## **II Women's empowerment**

Recently, the empowerment literature has been enriched by conceptual and empirical work around issues of measurement, comparison, subjective/objective dimensions, and the recognition of different domains of empowerment (Narayan, 2005a; Walby, 2005; Alsop *et al.*, 2006; Ibrahim and Alkire, 2007). One of the definitions of empowerment emerging from this literature has been formulated by Deepa Nayaran (2005b, p. 5): "Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives." Although there are some differences, the literature tends to agree that women's empowerment is a process involving *agency* (referred to in the definition above with words such as "negotiate", "influence", and "control"), access to *resources* (or assets), and *institutions*, which together affect how women are able to improve their well-being absolutely, and more importantly, relative to men. Moreover, research suggests that the three constitutive elements of empowerment—agency, resources and institutions—tend

to be closely related, so that the absence of one element cannot, or can only partially be, compensated by the presence of another. Indeed, as the capability approach has pointed out, agency without resources is rather meaningless when being able to make one's own choices and having the self-confidence to do so are not matched by any real opportunities to choose from (Alkire, 2002; Robeyns, 2003). The other way around is equally compelling in cases where women may have access to resources but feel constrained by internalized oppression from actually making use of the available resources (Sen, 1990; Nagar and Raju, 2003).

The role of resources for women's empowerment is well understood. Already in 1986, Pampel and Tanaka demonstrated a U-shaped relationship between economic development and the female labor force participation rate, in which the latter might be considered, though with qualifications, as a proxy for empowerment. More recent empirical studies have shown that access to land (Agarwal, 1994; Deere and Doss, 2006; Allendorf, 2007), access to credit (Kabeer, 2001) and access to education (Jejeebhoy, 1995) are all important for women's empowerment, and, as other studies show, also for economic development (Klasen, 2002; Lagerlöf, 2003). However, human capital investment is arguably most effective in a context of medium or high economic development, which is not always the case in agricultural economies relying on low technology. In such cases, education, in particular for women, may not be translated effectively through labor market participation into higher incomes and GDP growth (Barro, 2000).<sup>2</sup> In general, however, the literature indicates that education, at least primary education, tends to have a positive effect on development, and for women through more routes than for men including lower fertility, which may contribute to women's empowerment.

The role of agency on women's empowerment, however, has only recently come under the attention of researchers. Agency has been defined "as an actor's or group's ability to make

purposeful choices” (Alsop *et al.*, 2006, p. 11), recognizing that psychological as well as social factors are crucial for this. The authors explain that “actors need a raised level of consciousness if they are to translate their assets into choices—that is, to become ‘agents’” (p. 11). Drawing on this insight, Solava Ibrahim and Sabina Alkire (2007, p. 8) define agency, embedded in the social realm, as “the ability to act on behalf of what you value and have reason to value.” Both understandings of agency combine psychological factors with social factors of having control over assets and facing real options. This understanding of agency as embedded in the social realm points at a relationship of agency with the third element for empowerment, namely institutions.

Women face a variety of intangible constraints to plan their lives, to choose their goals, and to make their own choices, inside and outside households, often more so than men. Such constraints, understood as *gendered institutions* (Goetz, 1997), limit their opportunities both in terms of access to resources as well as their agency (Narayan, 2005b). Both formal and informal institutions reflect power relations, since institutions tend to be supported and defended by those who derive advantages from them; for gendered institutions, these power relations are embedded in formal and informal expressions of patriarchy (Folbre, 1994; Goetz, 1997). Formal gendered institutions then can be interpreted as codified gendered social norms such as inheritance laws, property rights, or the fiscal system, with different effects for women and men. On the other hand, informal gendered institutions can be understood as the set of non-codified social norms and cultural practices that impact differently on men and women. The influence of informal gendered institutions leads to stereotypes of masculine and feminine agency, as Bina Agarwal (1997, p. 1) has explained, by “ascribing to women and men different abilities, attitudes, desires, personality traits, behaviour patterns, and so on.” This not only results in adaptive preferences

(Sen, 1990) that are an internalization of gender inequalities, but experimental research has indicated that gender stereotypes also lead to different self-evaluations, lowering women's self-esteem, motivation and confidence (Biernat *et al.*, 1998; Shih *et al.*, 2006).

Most studies that pay attention to the impact of gendered institutions on women's empowerment have been carried out at the micro level. While these studies in general find a positive impact of access to resources on women's empowerment, empirical studies using detailed survey data and case study data indicate that this is not always the case due to the influence of gendered norms, networks, beliefs, and practices (Blumberg, 1991; Mayoux, 2001; Odebode and van Staveren, 2007). For example, a detailed household bargaining study on China has recently found that the standard hypothesis on the role of resources in empowerment, "...that an increase in women's relative household income contribution will enable them greater household decision-making control, is not supported by any regression results" (MacPhail and Dong, 2007, p. 114). Or, to give another example, Sharada Srinivasan and Arjun Bedi (2008) have found for Tamil Nadu that higher levels of education for women do not reduce the incidence of daughter elimination. So, the higher women's educational levels, the more often women undertake sex-selective abortions, and the stronger the inequality in the state's sex ratio. These findings therefore suggest that it is relevant for the understanding of women's empowerment to focus not only on access to resources but also on the intangible constraints that prevent women from benefiting from them.

One way to analyze the impact of institutions on agency is a cross-country analysis in which differences in countries' gendered institutions are included in the analysis of women's empowerment. There are only very few studies available that have analyzed gendered institutions in relation to women's wellbeing at the macro level. They have found that labor

market segmentation, discrimination, high female unemployment rates and the gender wage gap all limit the benefits that women may derive from their education and labor force participation (Jayaweera, 1997; Elson, 1999; Seguino, 2000; Casale, 2004; Busse and Spielman, 2006). Moreover, a macro-level study by Klasen and Wink (2003) on China, Taiwan, South Korea, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia confirms the micro analyses of a positive relationship between women's education and daughter elimination referred to above. What is much less clear from the literature is which types of gendered institutions are responsible for the negative, or at least not positive, effects of women's increased access to resources on their empowerment. This requires a cross-country analysis in which a range of formal and informal gendered institutions is included in order to explore the relative impacts of resources and institutions on women's empowerment.

### **III Women's empowerment: A cross-country study**

#### ***The empowerment model***

Given the limitations of working with a cross-country dataset with rather crude estimates of variables and no observations over time, which does not allow for panel estimations, I will employ a simplified model. In this model, variables express gender gaps rather than absolute values, because the concepts of gender and empowerment are relative and not absolute. Women's achievements are measured as gender gaps in health, education and decision making power. Resources are defined in terms of women's relative access to education (gender gaps in combined primary and secondary school enrolment rates) and to jobs (female share of the non-agricultural labor force). Gender gaps are mostly measured as ratios of female scores over male scores, for example in education. In a few cases, they are taken as percentages of female out of

the total. Variable construction will be explained below.<sup>3</sup> The two categories of institutions, formal and informal, each consist of three variables that are taken from the OECD-GID (Gender, Institutions and Development) database (see explanation below). The empowerment model is presented in Figure 1: formal and informal institutions influence women's access to resources, whereas these institutions and women's access to resources together influence women's achievements.

[Figure 1 about here]

This role of gendered institutions reflects the views in the empowerment literature that gendered institutions not only affect women's and men's access to resources but also that they impact directly on women's achievements, through affecting their agency. Obviously, the direction of causality is not straightforward and various endogeneity effects may occur. For example, in looking at the access to resources box in Figure 1, a higher ratio of female education is likely to increase the female non-agricultural labor force participation rate, whereas higher women's empowerment may increase the average age at marriage. Hence, the regressions results should be taken with caution, because coefficients and their estimated level of significance and/or R square may be biased upwards due to the implicit accumulation of feedback effects. But, as indicated earlier, the data set has no observations over time. The estimations presented here only serve an exploratory purpose. The results may therefore best be interpreted as descriptive. Further research is clearly needed and will hopefully be able to reduce endogeneity effects (for a further discussion of measuring and modelling empowerment, see Khwaja, 2005). Hence, gendered institutions are not only likely to constrain women's access to resources, as others have argued with bivariate regression analysis of the same data set (Morrisson and Jütting,

2005), but they are also likely to affect women's agency, directly affecting women's empowerment, irrespective of women's access to resources.

### *Variables and data*

Data are from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (2008) and the OECD – GID data base. These are the only two datasets with a substantial number of developing countries included for which gender disaggregated data are available. For achievements, the three variables selected are: female/male ratio in life expectancy, female/male ratio in young adult literacy (15-24 years), and female decision making power in politics and the economy. The life expectancy variable reflects women's relative health status, taken as the ratio of female over male life expectancy. The young adult literacy variable, as a ratio, was chosen because it reflects how current levels of illiteracy may be affected by resources and institutions. Moreover, literacy was preferred over school enrolment because literacy is an expected outcome of school enrolment, so it is more suitable as an achievement measure of well-being. The third achievement variable that was selected is a composite index of female decision making power, which is available in the data set as an unweighted average of three indicators that all refer to senior positions: the share of female parliamentarians in the political arena, the share of women among administrators and managers in the administrative arena, and the share of women among professionals and technical specialists, which are top occupations in the standard classifications of occupations.

The two resource variables are key variables in the empowerment literature: access to education and paid employment. They are measured as the gender gap (a ratio) in the combined primary and secondary school enrolment rate and the female share (a percentage) of the non-agricultural labor force. The first one broadly reflects women's relative educational levels



compared to men, excluding tertiary education since in many developing countries there is only a small minority of both men and women enrolled at that level. The second resource variable, the female share of the non-agricultural labor force, reflects women's relative access to paid labor. Women's share of the agricultural labor force was excluded because in many developing countries, this includes a large proportion of unpaid family workers who do not derive an independent income from their work.

The variables on gendered institutions lie between zero and one: the more asymmetric the institutions are, disadvantaging women, the closer the values are to one. The variables for gendered institutions for this article were chosen from the thirteen gendered institutions in the GID database. I have selected these using the following two criteria<sup>4</sup>. First, variables that are very country or religion specific were dropped, such as polygamy and the obligation to wear a veil in public. Second, there is a risk of multicollinearity when including all available variables in the regression equation. I selected correlations of less than 0.50, with one exception: the Pearson zero-order correlations between the four property rights variables are quite high: inheritance laws, land rights, credit rights and other property rights<sup>5</sup>. From these four variables, I therefore selected only one, namely the variable for land rights. The reason is that these are key for women in developing countries, probably more urgent than other property rights.

Six gendered institutional variables are useful for the empirical analysis, representing three formal and three informal institutions. The three formal gendered institutions (FGI) included are:

- parental authority: measures whether women have the same right to be a legal guardian of a child during marriage, and whether women have custody rights over a child after divorce.

- land rights: measures women's right and de facto access to agricultural land.
- laws against violence against women: measures the existence of women's legal protection against violent attacks such as rape, assault and sexual harassment.

The three informal gendered institutions (IFGI) included are:

- female genital mutilation: measures the share of women who have been subjected to any type of female genital cutting.
- early marriage: measures the percentage of girls between the ages of 15 and 19 who are married, divorced or widowed, providing an indication of forced or arranged marriages.
- missing women: son preference reflects the economic valuation of women; the variable missing women measures gender bias in mortality due to sex selective abortions or insufficient care given to baby girls.

The GID institutional database has in most cases transformed qualitative information into quantitative data, which necessarily involves some degree of subjectivity. On the other hand, much of the information refers to laws, which are either in place or not, while a few other variables are already quantitative, such as the extent of early marriage.<sup>6</sup> A second limitation of the GID database is that it uses a single observation about gendered institutions for a variety of years because of lack of availability of all information for every single year. This, however, should not be a very serious problem because gendered institutions tend to change slowly over time, as is the case with institutions in general (Hodgson, 2006). The GID database contains the kind of institutional data that others also have used in analyzing women's empowerment, for example: Karen Oppenheim Mason (2005), using data on freedom of movement and wife beating for five Asian countries; and Jayaweera (1997) and Christiaan Grootaert (2005), using

the UNDP Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) for the analysis of women's empowerment in developing countries and in transition economies. The empirical analyses in the models shown below include between 53 and 153 countries, depending on data availability for the variables used in the various models.

#### **IV Empirical analysis<sup>7</sup>**

##### ***Resource Models***

The first step in the empirical analysis, as portrayed in Figure 1, is the testing of the resource models for education and employment. The two models have independent variables for resources ( $RES_i$ ), with  $i$  referring to women's relative access to education and their share in the non-agricultural labour force. The dependent variables are a constant,  $C$ , the six gendered institutions, referred to as  $GI_j$ , with  $\varepsilon$  as the error term:

$$RES_i = C + \beta_1 GI_j + \varepsilon$$

The differential impact of formal and informal gendered institutions can be analyzed by aggregating the institutional variables into two composite indexes, one for formal and one for informal gendered institutions, FGI and IFGI respectively.

The results of the regressions with the resources models, using aggregate variables for the gendered institutions, are shown in Table 1. The regressions show that both variables have the expected negative sign and are statistically significant. Hence, both types of gendered institutions seem to be influential, with parameter values between 0.30 and 0.41. In order to test for any statistical problems, a residual analysis was done. The plots of standardized residuals and standardized predicted values do not show any non-normal pattern, nor any serious sign of heteroskedasticity. This suggests that the models are indeed linear, that there are no clear outliers

that could have biased the regressions results, and that the variation is rather constant around the regression line.

[Table 1 about here]

Table 2 presents the exploratory regression results for the two disaggregated resource models. The results for the education model show that five out of six coefficients have the expected negative sign and that three coefficients are statistically significant: land rights (-0.13), early marriage (-0.27), and female genital mutilation (-0.10). Hence, the lower women's access to land ownership and the higher the prevalence of early marriage and female genital mutilation, the lower is women's access to education. Whereas marriage between 15 and 19 years is a clear direct constraint on women's school enrollment, lack of land ownership and experience of female genital mutilation are expressions of a patriarchal norm that regards women as men's property, handed over from fathers' to husbands' control, which therefore does not stimulate women's individual accumulation of knowledge and skills.

[Table 2 about here]

For the second empirical model, with the female share of the non-agricultural labor force as the dependent variable, results again show three of the six institutional variables being statistically significant, but only one is the same as in the education model. Of the three non-significant variables two have an unexpected sign, which is difficult to interpret, but parameter values are low. The three variables that are statistically significant all have expected negative signs: parental authority (-0.09), early marriage (-0.34), and missing women (-0.19). In other words, the more parental authority is granted to the father and the higher the extent of early marriage and missing women, the lower is women's access to the non-agricultural labour force. These negative relationships can be explained by underlying patriarchal norms that limit

women's freedom to earn an independent income outside a family farm and apart from domestic responsibilities.

Although both models have women's access to resources as dependent variables, they clearly have different results. This is because access to education and access to non-agricultural employment measure two different types of resources, which do not necessarily go together. In some countries, women have higher levels of education than men (Argentina and Lesotho, for example), while having relatively low levels of labor force participation, whereas in other countries women's education is very low while they participate in the non-agricultural labour force at a rate that does not differ very much from men, as is the case in various African and South Asian countries. Education provides women with knowledge and information to make their own choices, while paid employment provides them with the actual means to make choices that would require resources and may go against the will of a male partner in the household. Therefore, they do not measure the same thing. As a result, we would not expect a high correlation coefficient between these two dependent variables. This was confirmed in a test with cross-correlations between the female/male education ratio and the female share of the non-agricultural labour force, which resulted in  $r = 0.45$ .

The exploratory resource models have two implications. First, they show that the more asymmetric gender norms and practices are, the less is women's access to resources. This confirms the bivariate results obtained by the initiators of the GID database, Christian Morrisson and Johannes Jütting (2005). Second, the models suggest that informal gendered institutions are more often a constraint for women's access to resources than formal gendered institutions: in each of the two models, two informal against one formal institutional variable were statistically

significant. This suggests that social norms put a stronger constraint on women's access to resources than laws and regulations.

### *Achievement Models*

The models for women's achievements can be specified as follows, in line with the model in Figure 1:

$$ACH_i = C + \beta_2 GI_j + \beta_3 GDP_{ln} + \beta_4 GDP_{ln}SQ + \beta_5 RES_i + \varepsilon$$

Achievements ( $ACH_i$ ) are measured with three variables: the female/male ratio in life expectancy and the female/male ratio in the young adult literacy rate, as well as the average share of women as parliamentarians, administrative persons and managers, and professionals and technicians. Gross Domestic Product is included in logarithmic form as GDP (ln) and GDP (ln) squared, as control variables for level of development. It is also included as a squared variable in order to account for possible nonlinearity, since the dataset includes both developing and developed countries. The achievement model for literacy has a new variable, namely primary school enrollment, with a time lag, so it refers to the year 1991. This variable replaces the current education variable which would lead to high autocorrelation. It is expected to have a high coefficient, because there is a likely strong relationship between school enrollment in the past and youth literacy today. The two resource variables ( $RES_i$ ) are the ratio of female over male education and the share of women in the non-agricultural labour force, as before, and also the six gendered institutions are the same as before.

The results for the aggregate achievement models are shown in Table 3, and for the disaggregate achievement models are shown in Table 4. It is important to note here that lack of data for some variables has seriously reduced the number of countries included, in particular for

model 2, on youth literacy. This makes the results of the second model not very well comparable with the other two models.

[Tables 3 and 4 about here]

The results presented in Table 3 indicate again that both formal and informal gendered institutions impact negatively upon women's empowerment. In all three aggregate achievement models, both types of institutions appear to be statistically significant, with similar parameter sizes. Table 5's results indicate quite varied relationships for women's empowerment. The achievement model for the gender gap in health, measured as the male/female ratio in life expectancy, shows that the level of GDP per capita has a relatively strong positive impact (0.09). Also the squared income variable is significant, but negative (-0.01), implying a nonlinear effect of income. This may suggest that men are catching up with women's life expectancy rate when countries get richer, with women following less healthy lifestyles, including smoking and becoming overweight, in richer countries (for a study on the US, see Ezzati *et al.*, 2008). Of the two resource variables, only one is statistically significant, women's access to education (-0.06), but it has a negative sign, which is difficult to interpret. Two formal gendered institutions do have a statistically significant negative impact on women's relative health: parental authority (-0.02) and land rights (-0.04). This suggests that gender biased laws and regulations have a stronger impact on women's relative health achievements than gender norms and beliefs.

The achievement model for the gender gap in youth literacy shows that GDP is not statistically significant, whereas GDP squared is only barely so, and negative. Income, hence, does not seem to be a strong determinant of women's relative educational achievements. As expected, the gender gap in the lagged primary school enrollment rate is positive and statistically significant (0.79) (see Table 4). This may suggest that the international efforts to achieve the

third goal of the Millennium Development Goals, which is on gender equality in education, may not depend so much on economic development in general but on spending on girls' education. In addition, the informal institution of early marriage appears to be influential (-.29), and statistically significant, which has a clear link to girl's access to education.

The final achievement model in Table 4, the model for women's decision making power in the last column, shows again a different picture. Here, the level of economic development has a relatively strong statistically significant impact, again suggesting nonlinearity (0.21 for GDP and -0.01 for GDP squared). Women's relative access to jobs has a relatively strong positive and statistically significant impact on women's decision making power (0.23). This may be explained probably not only by the income effect but also by the social participation effect—that is, a strengthening of women's agency—of non-agricultural jobs for women. This effect is important for taking up leadership positions in politics, administration, and management. Finally, when looking at the results for gendered institutions, we see that none of the coefficients is statistically significant. Hence, it is not so much unequal laws or biased social norms that constrain women's leadership roles, but rather low labour force participation and low level of economic development which form hurdles for women to break through the glass ceiling in the economy and politics.

## **V Conclusions and policy implications**

The overall picture from the extended women's empowerment model and exploratory empirical results is fourfold. First, the level of development has an important impact on women's achievements in health and political and economic decision making power, but not on literacy. Also, income seems to have a nonlinear effect on women's achievements. Second, in each of the



three achievement models (in Table 3), one of the two resources variables is statistically significant (even though the negative sign could not be explained in the health achievement model). Third, depending on the type of achievement, different gendered institutions play a role, or none at all. For health, formal institutions appear to be significant constraints, for education it was an informal institution that appears to limit women's achievements, whereas for political and economic influence, none of the gendered institutions seems to matter. The results suggest that gender policies would be more effective when contextualized to a country's binding constraints in terms of specific laws, regulations, social norms and cultural practices that may negatively affect particular dimensions of women's empowerment. Thus, legal changes may need to be prioritized to improve women's relative health, whereas the traditional practice of early marriage would be a more likely candidate to address for achieving MDG 3. Fourth, the results point out that women's access to resources is important but not sufficient for women's empowerment. Formal and informal gendered institutions both put a constraint on women's agency, which prevents them from turning their resources effectively into wellbeing achievements.

Of course, these are only exploratory results that require further exploration beyond the descriptive analysis provided here. They suggest, however, that gender policies may become more effective when they are contextualized, and not only help women to increase their access to resources, but also address the constraints to their agency from laws, regulations, norms and practices that underlie particular gendered institutions.

Indeed, two types of policies are relevant: (1) legal changes towards equal treatment of women and men, and the enforcement of such laws, focusing on changing formal gendered institutions; (2) awareness campaigns and civil society pressure towards abandoning traditional

norms and cultural patterns, focusing on informal gendered institutions. I will briefly discuss examples of policies in both areas, drawing from the development literature.

Women tend to be the major food growers in the developing world. They work on family land, communal land, and land owned by male relatives (only a very small percentage of women owns the land that she works). This lack of land titles has several consequences for women's role as food producers, limiting their empowerment and leading to inefficiencies. First, without a land title, she cannot obtain credit for improving land productivity, because she cannot use the land she works as collateral. This, for example, will not allow poor women to join irrigation projects or to purchase drought animals or fertilizer. Hence, there will be under-investment in the land that women grow, and women will find it difficult to meet the needs for sufficient food in their households, or will spend inefficient amounts of labor time (Agarwal, 1994). Second, without a legitimate hold on the land, she has little decision making power over the use of the land (Doss, 1999). This may lead to the use of (parts of) the land for cash crops by her husband or other male relatives, or the sale of the land to satisfy cash needs of male owners. This puts pressure on women's role, as part of the gender division of labor in rural households, as food provider: a woman would need to purchase food if she can no longer grow it, and therefore needs to find wage work, which is scarce and often very hard work, without a formal contract. Third, the lack of legitimacy of her land claim also leads to limited control over her own labor time for production on the land: other household members tend to claim women's labor time for cash crop production on their own lands, without compensation. Research has pointed out, however, that with a shift of resources such as labour and fertilizer, from male to female plots, total household production would increase (Udry *et al.*, 1995). Moreover, when men claim women's labor to work on their own land without compensation, this can result in an aggregate under-

supply of cash crops, because of the low work input or effort that women will provide without any sharing in the cash crop earnings (Warner and Campbell, 2000).

In addition, women's land rights contribute to women's bargaining power in other realms of life, simply because their value to the household goes up. This contributes directly to their empowerment. The research referred to above has pointed at women's land rights leading to lower fertility, lower unpaid workload, better health status and more education for their daughters.

A second policy affecting women's empowerment involves the power of civil society action where the enforcement of law is lacking, as in the successful action of groups in various African countries to ban harmful practices. An illustrative example comes from Ethiopia, where I studied women's empowerment and bargaining in households (Mabsout and van Staveren, 2010). In Ethiopia, for example, female genital mutilation (FGM) is prohibited, polygamy has been abolished and the legal minimum marriage age for girls has been increased from 15 to 18 years (Vaughan and Tronvoll, 2003; Bevan and Pankhurst, 2007). Informal norms, however, remain strong, so that the practices are still widespread. Seventy-four percent of the women are circumcised according to household survey data from the Demographic and Health Survey 2005, and polygamy still occurs (Bevan and Pankhurst, 2007), while traditional practices and customs dominate marriage practices, such as kidnapping and girl child brides, in spite of the legal reforms (Fafchamps and Quisumbing, 2002). The federal government has limited capacity to enforce the laws (WHO, 1999), whereas various Ethiopian states have been granted full sovereignty, which allows them to practice earlier laws that discriminate against women (World Bank, 1998). Bevan and Pankhurst (2007) add a similar argument on the widespread practice of female circumcision: "female circumcision is widely supported by males and females throughout

rural Ethiopia; uncircumcised girls/women (depending on cultural context) bring shame on their families, cannot get married, and cannot be buried in churchyards” (p. 12). Indeed, the household survey data for 2005 show that 31 percent of women support the continuation of female circumcision.

In several African countries, including Ethiopia, civil society campaigns have emerged and appear to be quite effective in changing the harmful cultural practice of FGM, precisely because they are not state-led and neither initiated by donor countries or foreign NGOs. Hence, they are not perceived as top-down intrusions on local culture. They are very local based, often emerging from a small group of women who stand up against these practices and do not want their daughters to be mutilated with a razor blade at a young age by older village women who reinforce this practice by referring to norms of chastity and women’s subordination to men and the family lineage. One example is the Senegalese NGO Tostan, which has organized discussions in many villages across the country about FGM, in which the villagers themselves discuss the topic. Such discussions often reveal negative side effects and encourage people to speak about these. One father told about the death of his daughter, probably from tetanus, after circumcision. Also, the campaigns turn enlightened religious leaders into their allies by requesting them to confirm and tell the people that FGM is not supported in the holy books, whether it is Islam or Christianity. Many of the campaigns result in declarations denouncing FGM practices signed by complete villages.

In Ethiopia, the strategy has combined a state-led with a civil society approach, in which village discussions were supported with trainings and workshops on a wider set of issues related to women’s health, morality, gender relations, and religious norms and values. The project evaluation in 2005 indicated clear advancements in reducing FGM, but it also signalled that the

government's involvement was not sustainable due to upcoming elections and changes in government (Feldman-Jacobs and Ryniak, 2006). This lesson reinforces the need to have civil society as the driving force for abandoning particular harmful practices against women, and hence, changing informal gendered institutions from the bottom-up.

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Figures and tables for:

## HOW INSTITUTIONS CONSTRAIN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Figure 1. Women's Empowerment Model

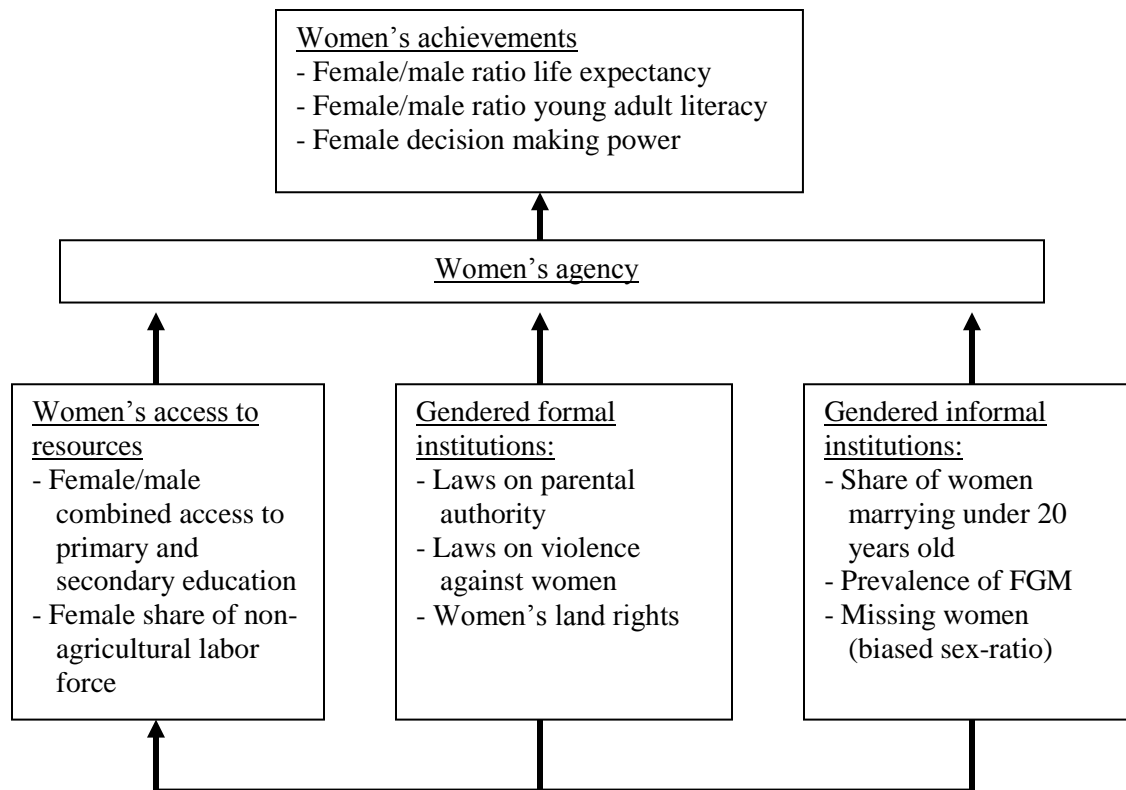


Table 1. Correlation Table for the Selection of Variables for Gendered Institutions

	PA	INH	LR	EM	FGM	MW	VIO	PR	CR
PA	1.00	0.83 ***	0.70 ***	0.62 ***	0.52 ***	0.477 ***	0.49 ***	0.66 ***	0.61 ***
INH	0.83 ***	1.00	0.73 ***	0.53 ***	0.43 ***	0.461 ***	0.47 ***	0.80 ***	0.74 ***
LR	0.70 ***	0.73 ***	1.00	0.68 ***	0.49 ***	0.313 ***	0.49 ***	0.85 ***	0.78 ***
EM	0.62 ***	0.53 ***	0.68 ***	1.00	0.49 ***	0.229 ***	0.50 ***	0.58 ***	0.48 ***
FGM	0.52	0.43 ***	0.49 ***	0.49 ***	1.00	0.179 **	0.36 ***	0.40 ***	0.36 ***
MW	0.48	0.46 ***	0.31 ***	0.23 **	0.18 **	1.000	0.20 **	0.31 ***	0.32 ***
VIO	0.49	0.47 ***	0.49 ***	0.50 ***	0.36 ***	0.203 **	1.00	0.47 ***	0.47 ***
PR	0.66	0.81 ***	0.85 ***	0.58 ***	0.40 ***	0.307 ***	0.47 ***	1.00	0.92 ***
CR	0.61	0.74 ***	0.78 ***	0.48 ***	0.36 ***	0.315 ***	0.44 ***	0.92 ***	1.00

Notes: N = 99. Level of significance:  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ . Shaded cells: these variables were dropped due to high correlations among each other.

Key: PA = parental authority; INH = inheritance rights; LR = land rights; EM = early marriage; FGM = female genital mutilation; MW = missing women; VIO = violence against women; PR = property rights; CR = credit rights.

Source: GID online, accessed 17 November 2008:

<http://stats.oecd.org/WBOS/default.aspx?DatasetCode=GID&lang=en>.

*Table 2. Resource Models with Aggregate Institutions*

Independent variables	Female/male education	Female non-agricultural labour share
Formal Gendered Institutions	-0.30*** (-3.63)	-0.41*** (-5.44)
Informal Gendered Institutions	-0.38*** (-4.50)	-0.32*** (-4.17)
Constant	*** (64.09)	*** (32.10)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.36*** (40.88)	0.42*** (55.04)
N	142	153

Notes: Standardized coefficients (beta) with t-statistics

in brackets. Level of significance for t-statistics for

independent variables and for F-statistic for adjusted R<sup>2</sup>:

=  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ . Sources: GID.

*Table 3. Resource Models with Disaggregate Institutions*

Independent	Female/male	Female non-

variables	education	agricultural labour share
Parental authority	0.00 (0.04)	-0.09*** (0.03)
Land rights	-0.13*** (0.04)	0.01 (0.03)
Violence against women	-0.03 (0.06)	-0.07 (0.05)
Early marriage	-0.27** (0.11)	-0.34*** (0.09)
Female genital mutilation	-0.10* (0.05)	0.05 (0.04)
Missing women	-0.02 (0.07)	-0.19*** (0.06)
Constant	1.06*** (0.03)	0.49*** (0.02)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.50*** (F-statistic 15.058)	0.58*** (F-statistic 21.269)
N	96	99

Notes: Coefficients with standard errors in brackets. Level of significance: \* =  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ . Source: GID online, accessed 17 November 2008:

<http://stats.oecd.org/WBOS/default.aspx?DatasetCode=GID&lang=en>.

*Table 4. Empowerment Model with Aggregate Institutions*

Independent variables	Female/male life expectancy	Female/male youth literacy	Female decision making power
Formal Gendered Institutions	-0.27*** (-3.09)	-0.25*** (-3.19)	-0.50*** (-6.31)
Informal Gendered Institutions	-0.25*** (-2.78)	-0.60*** (-7.60)	-0.17** (-2.12)
Constant	*** (216.28)	*** (52.21)	*** (24.18)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	0.20*** (20.39)	0.57*** (64.02)	0.37*** (45.07)
N	153	96	149

Notes: Standardized coefficients (beta) with t-statistics in brackets.

Level of significance for t-statistics for independent variables and

for F-statistic for adjusted R<sup>2</sup>; \* =  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ .

Sources: GID and World Development Indicators 2006

*Table 5. Achievement Models: Women's Achievements in Health, Education, and Decision making*

Independent variables	Female/male life expectancy	Female/male youth literacy	Female decision making power
GDP (ln)	0.09** (0.04)	0.15 (0.10)	0.21* (0.10)
GDP (ln) squared	-0.01**	-0.01*	-0.01*

	(0.00)	(0.01)	(0.00)
Parental authority	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.03)
Land rights	-0.04*** (0.01)	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.03)
Violence against women	0.02 (0.01)	0.03 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.04)
Early marriage	0.04 (0.04)	-0.29*** (0.08)	0.09 (0.10)
Female genital mutilation	0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.04)
Missing women	-0.03 (0.02)	0.01 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.05)
Female % non-agricult. labour	0.04 (0.03)		0.23** (0.09)
Female/male education	-0.06** (0.03)		0.12 (0.07)
Female/male primary school '91		0.79*** (0.07)	
Constant	0.70*** (0.16)	-0.33 (0.41)	-0.95** (0.46)
R <sup>2</sup>	0.55*** (F-stat. 9.600)	0.94*** (F-stat. 70.403)	0.63*** (F-stat. 13.154)
N	90	53	90

Notes: In the second model, the female/male ratio of primary education enrolment in 1991 replaces the current education enrolment variable, which would otherwise be very similar to the dependent variable and hence would cause strong auto-correlation. Coefficients with standard errors in brackets. Level of significance: \* =  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\* =  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* =  $p < 0.01$ . Sources: World Development Indicators, World Bank, 2008: <http://data.worldbank.org/products/data-books/WDI-2008> and GID online, accessed 17 November 2008: <http://stats.oecd.org/WBOS/default.aspx?DatasetCode=GID&lang=en>. Empowerment data on achievements for period 2003-2005 and 1991 for FMprim91.



## ANNEX

This annex provides first a list of all variables presented in the tables and then a list of countries included.

### Variable list

CR	= credit rights of women
EM	= early marriage of women (under age 19)
Fdec	= female decision making power (Fdec) in politics and the economy (as a percentage of all parliamentarians and managers & professionals)
FGM	= female genital mutilation
FMedu	= female-male ratio in primary and secondary enrolment
FMlife	= female/male ratio in life expectancy
Fnalf	= female non-agricultural labour force participation rate
FMprim91	= female-male ratio of primary school enrolment in the year 1991
FMyLit	= female/male ratio in young adult literacy (15-24 years)
GDPIn	= GDP per capita in USD, natural logarithm
GDPInSQ	= GDP per capita in USD, natural logarithm, squared
INH	= inheritance rights of women
LR	= land rights of women
MW	= missing women in demographic statistics
PA	= parental authority over girls
PR	= property rights of women, other than land rights

VIO = laws on violence against women

### **Country list**

It would take too much space to give 5 country lists, each for every model included in tables 2 and 3. To give an indication of the countries included, I will give two country lists. The first list, called table 2, is of the 96 countries included in the education model of table 2. The second list, called table 3, is of the 53 countries included in the youth literacy model of table 3. As can be seen, the majority of countries in both lists are developing countries, including large countries like china and India and excluding very small countries.

#### Country list table 2:

Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Austria, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Korea, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Senegal, Slovak Republic, South Africa, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Country list table 3:

Algeria, Angola, Benin, Bolivia, Botswana, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cote d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Niger, Peru, Philippines, Russian Federation, Senegal, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Switzerland, Syria, Tanzania, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter has benefitted from discussions with Arjun Bedi and Francesca Bettio.

<sup>2</sup> There is additional empirical research about the relationship between gender inequality or female labor participation and economic growth not cited here. Others have provided overviews of women's position across countries, such as UNIFEM, UNDP and the World Economic Forum, but have not included empirical analyses with possible underlying variables, also omitted.

<sup>3</sup> The list of all variables is available from the author.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted that for some variables, for developed countries there is (almost) no variation. But excluding the developed countries from the analysis would result in a dramatic reduction in the number of cases, with subsequent negative impact on the econometric results. For property rights and parental authority the values are zero for all but one OECD country. Only for violence, there is considerable variation for OECD countries, with a mean of 0.31 and a standard deviation of 0.16. Early marriage also has some variation for OECD countries.

<sup>5</sup> A table of these correlations is available from the author.

<sup>6</sup> For more detailed information about the opportunities and constraints of the database, see Christiaan Morrisson and Johannes Jütting (2005).

<sup>7</sup> All models were run using linear regression analysis with SPSS version 16. The countries included are all countries for which data was available, the majority being developing countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, including China and India and excluding small island economies. There are no weights for population size, following the standard in cross-country analyses with social data.