

Strengthening Women's Control of Assets for Better Development Outcomes

Despite evidence that strengthening women's asset holdings is critical to several development outcomes—including food security, child nutrition, education, and women's well-being—a substantial asset gap remains between men and women. Recognizing the importance of this issue, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) initiated a new research program in 2007, “Strengthening Women's Control of Assets for Better Development Outcomes,” which is jointly led by the Institute's Environment and Production Technology Division (EPTD) and Food Consumption and Nutrition Division (FCND). The program adopts a broad definition of assets to include natural and physical capital, as well as human, social, and political capital. The research aims, first, to document gender disparities in asset control and barriers to reducing these gaps; second, to understand the impact of these disparities on poverty; and, third, to identify effective policy interventions to close the gender gap in assets. The approach incorporates wide-ranging policy interventions and policy linkages across sectors; the impacts of targeted gender programs; and how overarching trends, such as migration, rural–urban linkages, and the changing landscape of financial services, affect women's abilities to acquire and derive benefits from assets.



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STRENGTHENING LAND OWNERSHIP AND PROPERTY RIGHTS

Research on natural resource capital assesses the extent of the asset gap in control over land and evaluates national policies and local interventions instituted in attempts to enhance women's property rights. The concept of natural resource assets extends beyond ownership to include multiple rights to property and resources such as land, water, and trees. Because rights are only as strong as the institutions standing behind them, research also examines the institutions that implement and enforce rights, including how they treat women and men. This project builds on IFPRI's ongoing work on sustainable land management, and it links to the Systemwide Program on Collective Action and Property Rights (CAPRI) under the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and other CGIAR programs to strengthen women's control over natural resources.

ACCESSING INFRASTRUCTURE AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

This area of IFPRI's gender research focuses on the consequences of gender disparities in the control over agricultural and business equipment, housing, transport, livestock, household and consumer durables, and access to infrastructure and infor-

mation and communication technologies. The social impacts and the interactions among different types of capital are considered in addition to the economic consequences of gender disparities. Access to roads, transportation, and labor-saving devices, for example, can reduce the costs of participating in markets or collective action, which is particularly important for women, whose time usually has a high opportunity cost. ICTs also may play an important role in building women's social and financial capital, and their knowledge of agricultural practices and market conditions.

BENEFITING FROM AGRICULTURAL ADVISORY SERVICES

Studies on human capital typically focus on indicators such as schooling, health, and nutrition, rather than other, harder to measure, factors such as agricultural practices or indigenous knowledge. Knowledge of agricultural practices is an important part of human capital, and agricultural technology—often promoted through extension—is a potentially critical pathway out of poverty for rural women. And while women account for more than half the agricultural output in Africa and Asia, they receive a disproportionately small share of agricultural investment. Thus, this project documents the consequences of the gender gap in extension services and identifies both barriers to and success-

RESEARCH GOALS

Gender research is critical to IFPRI's mission of contributing effectively to food and nutrition security and poverty reduction. While gender is integrated throughout IFPRI's research, the Institute recognizes the importance of a distinct, high-profile portfolio of research on key gender issues. The gender program contributes to the goal of reducing poverty in several ways, including

- identifying factors that influence women's access to and control over assets,
- exploring the consequences of the gender gap,
- strengthening methods for measuring men's and women's access to and control over assets,
- evaluating the effectiveness of approaches to increase women's control of assets, and
- developing tools for monitoring and evaluating the impact of interventions on asset accumulation.

The program is organized along two complementary tracks: the first involves developing and implementing necessary methods for analyzing the causes, consequences, and obstacles to addressing the gender gap in asset accumulation, while the second track involves working directly with development practitioners and policymakers to evaluate the impact of interventions that aim to increase women's control of assets.

ful strategies in support of women's participation in agricultural advisory services. Ongoing research in the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) Division and in other CGIAR centers on national agricultural innovation systems provides an important linkage to this project.

BOOSTING WOMEN'S POLITICAL INFLUENCE

Political capital is the vertical link to policy and decisionmaking. Women's traditional roles and their limited political representation suggest that their political capital is weaker than men's, but a greater presence of women in decisionmaking roles at all levels of government could reduce these imbalances. Research

in this area complements investigations by IFPRI's governance team into the consequences of the gender gap in political capital on other types of asset accumulation, as well as efforts to formulate strategies to redress the gap. Issues include the impact on resource allocation of women's political participation both at different levels of government and within resource management institutions; how decentralization affects women's political capital; and how public policy and the rule of law affect women's chances of owning assets, especially land.

DEEPENING SOCIAL NETWORKS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Social networks can help women and men gain access to information, credit, influence, and power. Social capital can also serve as a building block for collective action. Yet, women and men accumulate different types of social capital. In South Africa, for example, although women's social capital networks are wider than men's, they are also more localized and mobilize fewer economic resources. Research in this area evaluates the role of social networks on men's and women's ability to access labor, information, markets, and safety nets. The program also looks at the effectiveness of different targeted programs in strengthening women's social capital, and whether greater social capital has led to the accumulation of other forms of capital.

EARNING AND MANAGING MONEY

Given that the poor have limited options for credit and asset accumulation, savings are a preferred asset. Women's and men's motives for saving and the manner in which they save may differ, however. In Bangladesh, for example, married women may prefer not to accumulate cash for fear their husbands will take control of it. Single women, on the other hand, may need to save large sums of money as dowries because assets held at marriage are an important determinant of future welfare. Gender and age-based savings preferences have implications for the types of groups women join. Further, the relationship between social and financial capital is significant because group-based microfinance and micro-insurance programs are important resources for the poor, but those with low social capital are excluded, and remittances frequently depend on social ties. Access to financial capital also affects women's ability to transition from home-based activities to higher returning entrepreneurial activities.

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IFPRI is one of 15 agricultural research centers that receive principal funding from governments, private foundations, and international and regional organizations, most of which are members of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). IFPRI's research, capacity strengthening, and communications work is made possible by its financial contributors and partners. IFPRI gratefully acknowledges the generous unrestricted funding from Australia, Canada, China, Finland, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States, and World Bank.