

International Seminar on “Informal Institutions and Development: What do we know and what can we do?”

Paris, 11-12 December 2006

Experiences from the field: *Gender*
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Questions:

- What kind of informal institutions prevent progress towards gender equality?
- What are appropriate policies or approaches for dealing with gender discriminating institutions? – Country examples of successes and failures
- Which actors are well placed to initiate and support changes? – Country examples of success and failures

Informal institutions, Development Processes and Gender Equality in Africa

I would like to start by thanking the OECD for organizing this seminar and inviting me to present today. The following overview presents the main points on the issue of *Informal Institutions, Development Processes and Gender Equality in Africa*.

I. Introduction:

In sub-Saharan Africa, women comprise 60 percent of the informal sector (including informal trade), provide about 70 percent of the total agricultural labour, and produce about 90 percent of the food (World Bank, 2000). Yet, women lack equal access to basic services including health, education, finance and other essential resources at community and national levels. These are the realities of women in Sub-Saharan Africa, who by virtue of their gender, operate on a daily basis within informal institutions created by her family and her community.

These informal institutions have a direct impact on her behaviour and her economic and social well-being. Often, however, these informal institutions can prevent progress towards gender equality by setting limitations on the role of women. For example, institutions based on cultural norms of limiting girl's and young women's access to education and preparing her instead for an early marriage, or denying a woman's right to land based on her marital status, lineage or gender.

Development processes in addressing gender inequality in the last few decades have concentrated on the role and impact of formal institutions without the deserved recognition on the impact of informal institutions which often dictate the status of women in her family, community, and country.

One aspect of informal institutions that requires attention is the role of social capital in Africa and its affect on gender equality.

II. Social Capital and Time Constraints on Women:

Social capital refers to the institutions, relationships, and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions... Social capital is not just the sum of the institutions which underpin a society – it is the glue that holds them together. (The World Bank 1999) Recent studies have indicated that voluntary associations have more impact on household income than educational attainment. Another study found that women's outputs and income are lower than they would be if time constraints were reduced. For example, a study in Tanzania found that reducing women's time constraints in a community of small-holder coffee and banana growers could increase household cash incomes by 10 per cent, labour productivity by 15 per cent and capital productivity by 44 percent. (Tibajjuka, 1994)

The challenge then becomes to identify (a) the beneficial characteristics within informal institutions as a starting point in linking informal and formal institutions; (b) the gaps filled by, and impact of, informal institutions; and (c) how formal institutions can collaborate with their informal counterparts at household and community levels in order to improve gender equality in society.

III. Analysis of the Policy and Legal Environments:

Additional research is needed to isolate the value added benefits of, and the common points between, informal and formal institutions at household, community, and national levels in light of analyzing their impact on gender equality (examples are available from East and West Africa). To conduct such research, the policy and legal environments that institutionalize the equal participation of men and women and in which these institutions operate needs to be examined.

Legal and policy examples from Kenya and Tanzania reveal that gender discriminating institutions thrive due to a lack of protection of women's rights. In Kenya, gender discrimination is not prohibited in labour law. Tanzania and Rwanda have both attempted approaches dealing with educational discrimination despite policy provisions encouraging women's education. The narrow definition of 'work' in Zimbabwe excludes the work performed by women. As a result, women in Africa have created alternative institutions in which they can attain equal access to health, education and employment. Examples include credit and saving groups and community-based health insurance schemes, however a majority of these groups are small and lack official recognition thus keeping them outside national mainstream social and economic planning.

IV. Linking Formal and Informal Institutions

The following are given as strategies to better evaluate the linkages between formal and informal institutions and their affect on gender equality:

- Working with women's groups at household and community levels to better identify and measure the impact of informal institutions at both levels;
- Providing women's groups with tools to develop local approaches on linking informal and formal institutions;
- Conducting social capital and time use studies to generate gender-disaggregated data;
- Monitoring and evaluating policy implementation on reducing gender inequality.