

The Africa region Gender Innovation Lab's findings on social norms

The objective of the Africa Gender Innovation Lab (GIL), within the Africa Region Chief Economist's Office, is to increase the take-up of effective policies by development policymakers to address the underlying causes of gender inequality in Africa. GIL is currently engaged in over 60 rigorous impact evaluations of high-profile, large-scale, innovative projects, to produce evidence on what works and what does not to close gender gaps. GIL has worked with various World Bank and external partners to test innovative approaches to – and to influence the design of – projects related to social norms that constrain women's economic opportunities across Africa.



Researchers and practitioners have recognized that women's economic opportunities and outcomes are constrained by a range of social norms. These include norms about each of the following:

- (i) appropriate types of work for men and women
- (ii) acceptability of gender-based violence
- (iii) division of domestic labor and time use
- (iv) division of decision-making spheres and capabilities
- (v) rights to inheritance and ownership of assets
- (vi) early-life human capital investments - timing of marriage and childbearing

GIL studies are contributing to our understanding of how social norms affect women's economic outcomes, and/or how to effectively shift social norms to increase women's economic empowerment.

(i) "Appropriate" work/sector segregation

In [a GIL study in Nigeria](#), we found that offering training in information and communications technology to university graduates led to a 26% increase in women working in this male-dominated sector. The training had an especially strong effect on women who initially exhibited implicit biases against women's professionalism, suggesting that exposure and skill development can shift norms about appropriate work and choices about sector of operation.

Relatedly, [inferential research conducted by GIL in Ethiopia](#) contributed to our understanding of what factors facilitated women's entry into non-traditional sectors in the absence of an intervention. GIL

examined differences between women entrepreneurs working in female-dominated and male-dominated trades. Women in male-dominated trades did not have more education or skills, but they did have greater support from their social networks, with many benefiting from the assistance of husbands or male relatives. Similarly, GIL found that women are more likely to select male-dominated trades for vocational training if they have personal connections with someone working in that trade. These studies suggest ways forward for designing interventions to support women who wish to work in more highly remunerative sectors that are typically dominated by men.

- (ii) Acceptability of gender-based violence and**
- (iii) Division of domestic labor/time use**

GIL participated in [a study in Rwanda](#) that examined the impact of a counseling program for new and soon to be fathers and their partners/spouses. The program resulted in a halving of women's reports of intimate partner violence a year and a half after the intervention concluded and increased the amount of unpaid carework performed by men. The Bandedereho (Kinyarwanda for "role model") program consists of 15-session curriculum adapted from a Brazilian program. Sessions are organized as guided group discussions on gender and power; fatherhood; couple communication and decision-making; violence; caregiving; child development; and engaging men in reproductive and maternal health. The participants in the program are meant to act as role models in their communities so that their behavior change can serve as inspiration for broader normative changes regarding the acceptability of violence and the division of tasks and decision-making authority in the household. Future research will be needed to test whether the observed shifts in intra-household behaviors result in changes in women's economic activities.

GIL is also awaiting results of two other interventions designed to reduce intimate partner violence and increase women's economic empowerment. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Engaging Men through Accountable Practice (EMAP) intervention is a program developed and implemented by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to engage men to reflect on how they can reduce and prevent violence against women and girls in their homes and communities. Qualitative research during program implementation found that male participants gained an appreciation for the value of helping their wives in the house but were not willing to cede any authority, highlighting the stickiness of some social norms that underlie gender inequality. An impact evaluation of the Great Lakes Emergency Sexual and Gender Based Violence and Women's Health project in Rwanda aims to assess the effects of a couples' training intervention on gender norms, the prevalence of intimate partner violence, and women's socioeconomic empowerment. Combined, these studies will contribute to a small but growing body of knowledge on how to shift norms about violence against women, and how those shifts can relieve constraints to women's economic activities.

- (iv) Division of decision-making spheres and capabilities**

GIL is testing several interventions designed to shift the division of responsibilities and capabilities in the household. The interventions are not necessarily norm change interventions (which would seek to change what people think is typical or desirable in their community), but they are designed to encourage



individuals or couples to deviate from norms that limit women's control in the household. Most of the studies have not yet conducted follow-up surveys to measure impacts.

In Uganda, GIL is testing the combination of a couples' training that emphasizes cooperative decision-making and budget management with sugar cane out grower contracts assigned to either the man or woman in the household. The study will provide insights on ways to increase women's control over the allocation of income from cash crops. Initial results show that the couples' training nudged some households to accept the offer to transfer or newly register of sugar cane contract to the wife, suggesting that increased dialogue between the spouses can help overcome barriers to women's economic participation ([Ambler et al. 2018](#)).

In Ghana, GIL is testing whether a short interactive training that highlights the value of cooperative budget management can increase the ability of women microentrepreneurs to invest in their businesses.

(v) Asset ownership

In Uganda, GIL is evaluating two interventions designed to increase women's land tenure security: subsidized titles conditional on the husband and wife jointly titling their land and information about the benefits of joint land titling. Take-up results show that both of these interventions increased co-titling, which can improve women's control over an important asset. We do not know whether the interventions in Uganda worked by changing individual's attitudes and preferences regarding women's land ownership or by changing what individuals perceive to be common and accepted practices in their communities (a shift in perceived norms). Nonetheless, we did learn that in this context standard practices of excluding women from asset ownership, which are guided by social norms, could be changed to the benefit of women.

(vi) Early-life human capital investments- timing of marriage and childbearing

GIL is evaluating several interventions that seek to increase investments in the [human capital of girls and young women](#). Each of these programs includes components that are designed to shift attitudes about gender roles or perceptions of gender norms. All of these studies are ongoing. The results will shed light on effective ways of reducing the constraining effects of norms on young women's early life choices. Save the Children's Challenging Harmful Attitudes and Norms for Gender Equality and Empowerment in Somalia (CHANGES) includes a package of interventions implemented at the regional, district, and community level aimed at transforming social norms to support gender equality. GIL is evaluating the CHOICES component of CHANGES, which involves a curriculum for young adolescents (aged 10-14 years) focused on gender norms and their effect on women's economic empowerment in Somalia. The Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend (SWEDD) is a six-country program aiming to accelerate the demographic transition by addressing both supply- and demand-side constraints to family planning and reproductive and sexual health. The program includes clubs for girls and clubs for boys, which will offer safe spaces for reflecting on gender norms related to education, marriage, and childbearing.