Title: Interventions to promote female economic empowerment in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review of reforms to labor market, land, inheritance and participation of women in decision making

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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Background:

In many places of the world women remain in a disadvantaged position compared with men. School enrolment and attendance rates, labor force participation, political participation and earnings are lower among women than men (Global economic forum, 2015). Gender inequality in access to economic opportunities, lack of voice and participation, and limited opportunities to accumulate could perpetuate vulnerability to poverty among women, limit human capital accumulation and restrict economic growth.

With this view, the World Bank millennium development goals (MDGs) and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have recognized that improving women’s economic empowerment is not only valuable in its own right but is also a key element to end poverty and boost economic prosperity. Based on these premises, international organizations, local governments, non-profit organizations and private companies have engaged in various initiatives that aim to improve women’s economic empowerment.

There are multiple definitions of economic empowerment. One of the most commonly accepted definitions is the one advanced by Eyben et al. (2008), who propose that economic empowerment is the capacity for women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that “recognize the value of their contribution, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth.”

Women’s economic participation and empowerment is seen as a fundamental factor in creating just and equitable societies in which both women and men have control over their lives and exert influence in society. First, access to education could decrease the poverty of women and generate long-term growth. More educated women are expected to be more productive, have access to better economic opportunities and have lower fertility rates. Improved access to income generation activities for women could give them more bargaining power within the household. Resources in the hands of women have been expected to translate into higher investments in children’s education, health and nutrition, leading to long-term growth. Female economic empowerment will have positive effects on the next generation, changing attitudes towards gender equity, changing the perception of women in power and setting a positive development path.

Programmes that address women’s economic empowerment are very diverse, both in terms of intervention and in terms of the institutional framework within which they are implemented. Interventions have focused, for example, on promoting women's ability to secure decent jobs, accumulate assets and influence the institutions and public policies determining growth and development. The interventions used to foster women’s economic empowerment are very diverse. They include interventions addressing young women as improved access to education, provision of health care, the support of women as entrepreneurs (i.e. financial assistance, training), the promotion of women participating in
the labor market, changing laws that give women access to land, inheritance and property rights, and changing laws that give women political decision-making power. These types of intervention have been tried in institutional contexts that differ in terms of the formal and informal norms regarding the role of women in society. In the review, we explore how this dimension affects the effectiveness of the different interventions.

Despite the large amount of attention given to women’s economic empowerment as a policy objective, to date, this research appears largely scattered and the few existing literature reviews have focused on a limited number of articles, a limited time span, or a non-systematic assessment of the available published and unpublished studies (e.g. Duflo, 2012; Bandiera and Natraj, 2013; Buvinic and Furst-Nichols, 2016).

Objectives:

Our research objective is to provide a comprehensive and systematic review of the impact of interventions that aim at promoting female economic empowerment on economic growth in low and middle-income countries. We address the following questions:

1) What are the effects of interventions that aim to promote women’s economic empowerment by fostering labor market participation, implementing reforms to give women access to land and inheritance rights and promoting the participation of women in decision making in the ability of households to accumulate income in low and middle-income countries?

2) What are the effects of interventions that aim to promote women’s economic empowerment by fostering labor market participation, implementing reforms to give women access to land and inheritance rights and promoting the participation of women in decision making on attitudes towards gender equity in low and middle-income countries?

3) What are the effects of interventions that aim to promote women’s economic empowerment by fostering labor market participation, implementing reforms to give women access to land and inheritance rights and promoting the participation of women in decision making on children’s development outcomes in low and middle-income countries?

4) Which institutional contexts are more favorable for such interventions to affect development?

We expect that this work will lead to two systematic reviews. The first review will focus on the impact interventions that foster female economic empowerment on household ability to accumulate income and on changes in norms regarding gender equity, while the second would consider the inter-generational effects.
EXISTING REVIEWS

Existing systematic reviews address interventions that aim to empower women similar to the ones we consider here (Brody et al., 2015; Gibbs et al., 2012, Steward et al., 2012). However, the main focus of these reviews is on the effectiveness of the intervention to achieve female economic empowerment without considering its impact on economic development. In our analysis, we build on these reviews and focus on studies that consider outcomes that are conducive to economic growth (i.e. savings, investments, impacts on second generation). Other reviews consider the impact of interventions that aim at improving economic conditions of men and women alike and compare the gender impacts of these interventions (Cho and Honorati, 2014; Ton et al., 2013). We focus on interventions that target women. Another branch of reviews focuses on interventions that aim at generating impacts on the second generation (Bhutta et al., 2008, Leroy et al., 2012). However, these reviews do not consider interventions that aim at empowering women. Few reviews have considered interventions that aim at improving female economic empowerment (Lawry et al., 2014; Vaessen et al., 2014; Yoong et al., 2012). We expand on these reviews by considering the spillover effects of these interventions on attitudes towards gender roles and intergenerational impacts. Finally, while the different reviews have addressed particular aspects of female economic empowerment, another important contribution of this review is that it gives a more comprehensive review of interventions aiming at achieving female empowerment.

Related Systematic reviews:


**DEFINE THE POPULATION**

Eligible populations are women and girls targeted by interventions that aim at fostering female economic empowerment. Programmes in which men can participate are also eligible for inclusion as long as the goal of the intervention is to promote female economic empowerment.
**Location**

- Include studies of interventions in L&MICs, as defined by the World Bank at the time the intervention was carried out. (http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-classifications/country-and-lending-groups#Low_income).
- Exclude studies of interventions in high-income countries.

**Time period**

- Exclude studies that were not published within this time frame.

**DEFINE THE INTERVENTION**

**Description of Interventions:**

We focus on a number of interventions that aim at increasing female economic empowerment.

First, we are interested in analyzing interventions that **foster women to enter the labor market**. This includes initiatives that make women more likely to apply for a position (i.e. giving advantage in the selection process conditioned on equal qualification), generate environments that make easier for women to perform at work, respecting traditions and cultural norms (i.e. decrease risks of sexual violence, provide child care or extend school day), provide economic incentives for women to work (i.e. tax deductions, subsidized employment) or promote urban or rural entrepreneurial activities (i.e. improved financial access). The interventions can be established by the government or by a particular company or sector.

Second, we consider interventions that **reform the law to give women access to land and inheritance rights**.

Third we consider interventions that **increase participation of women in decision making in the household, in firms and in politics**.

Fourth, we consider interventions that **give women better access to information regarding their rights**.

NOTE: The types of interventions to be included in the review will be further defined and delimited during the protocol stage, based on discussions with the advisory group, funders and a preliminary scoping of the literature.
Comparison Conditions:

For interventions that are experimental, we compare the results with the groups that were not subject to the programme, who received a different component, who received no intervention or who are in a waiting list.

For quasi experimental studies, things are a bit more complex because selection into treatment has to be address and therefore a simple comparison of treated and untreated individuals is not feasible. Typically, these studies identify exogenous variation in treatment assignment, which serves as comparison condition.

OUTCOMES

Primary Outcomes:

We explore the direct impact of interventions to promote female empowerment on women and their households as well as the impact on the next generation. We consider outcomes in four domains: economic, familial, legal and political, and psychological. The outcomes of the next generation can be categorized into four groups: health, human capital, resources spent, and other outcomes including age at marriage and fertility decision of the next generation.

1. Impact on women and households:

   - Economic domain (eg. savings, debts, capital accumulation),
   - Familial/interpersonal (eg. household decision-making index, attitudes towards gender equity).
   - Legal and political (e.g. attitudes towards women in decision making roles, trust in women as decision maker)
   - Psychological (e.g. risk aversion, competition aversion, self-reported stress)

2. Impacts on the next generation

   - Children’s health (e.g. infant and child morality, growth status or immunization status)
   - Children’s human capital (e.g. school enrollment and attendance or learning outcomes)*
   - Resources spent on children (e.g. expenditure on children’s health and education or time spent on children)
   - Other intergenerational outcomes (e.g. age at marriage or fertility of the next generation)

Adverse or Unintended Outcomes:

While it is expected that the above interventions would have positive effects on growth, problems in the design and implementation of the programmes and cultural and behavioral factors could lead to unintended side effects. For instance, it is argued that programmes could benefit those women who were already in a relatively favored position or displace other women in a general equilibrium effect. Giving women economic power might not
necessarily translate into more efficiency. Access to credit and financial services could also result in increased indebtedness. Increased economic empowerment could lead to increased domestic violence. Education and health spending on children might be done disproportionately, i.e. a female child could receive a smaller share of the investment than a male child in the household. Furthermore, social norms regarding adequate gender roles can limit the impact of the programmes.

Finally, taking up work may lead to exposure to occupational hazards and subsequent occupational injury or disease. These risks of course vary with the type of work but may be significant if there are hazardous exposures that are poorly controlled. There is also a risk of triple burden in which, along with house work and childcare, women experience an increased burden of work. Children could also be more vulnerable as the mother is at work.

**STUDY DESIGNS**

The quantitative component of the review will consider randomized controlled trials, non-randomized controlled trials and quasi-experimental data and natural experiments. Studies that are not based on a randomized control trial should apply corrections for self-selection or confounding, for instance through difference-in-differences, matching methods, regression discontinuity, instrumental variables or Heckman selection models.

We will exclude:

- Quantitative studies without any type of observable contrast (e.g. time or control group).
- Qualitative studies that do not employ rigorous methodologies to draw causal claims.

Studies that we might include in this review are:


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ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

• Content:

The review is expected to be broadly divided into two chapters. Pr. Ibanez will take the lead on the content on the first chapter that will focus on the impact of female economic empowerment on women and households. Pr. Ibanez is leader of the research group behavioral development economics at University of Göttingen. She has recently conducted research on the impact of affirmative action on female labor force participation and is currently conducting various projects investigating the effectiveness of interventions that aim at empowering women by giving them access to decision making. Pr. Ibanez will provide guidance on the conceptualization of the review question. Her research focuses on segregation of women in labor markets, focusing on the role of culture and contextual factors.

Pr. Vollmer will take the lead on the content of the second chapter that will focus on the impact of female economic empowerment on the next generation. The chapter will focus particularly on child health and development. Pr. Vollmer leads a research group in development economics with focus on health at the University of Göttingen and is Adjunct Assistant Professor of Global Health at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. He is the lead PI of various randomized field experiments, particularly of an impact evaluation of a female self help group programme to empower women in the state of Bihar in India.

• Systematic review methods:

Dr. Straube and Pr. Friede will provide guidance on questions of systematic review methodology.

Dr. Straube has written around 40 systematic reviews in different subject areas from pain medicine to neurology to occupational medicine. He serves on a number of editorial boards including two editorial boards of the Cochrane Collaboration. Dr. Straube was formerly the
Secretary of the Special Interest Group on Systematic Reviews in Pain Relief of the International Association for the Study of Pain and continues to serve as a committee member of this special interest group.

Pr. Friede is a biostatistician with substantial experience in systematic reviews and meta-analyses documented by a track record of publications. Furthermore, he has contributed to the literature on statistical methods for meta-analysis and is a co-founder of the Systematic Review Unit at the University Medical Center Göttingen (http://ams.med.uni-goettingen.de/sysreview-en.shtml).

• Statistical analysis:

Statistical analysis in the first chapter will be carried jointly by Dr. Khan, Dr. Minasyan, Dr. Sahoo, Pooja Balasubramanian, Atika Pasha and Le Thi Ngoc Tu. They have experience with data analysis and familiarity with statistical analysis in meta-analysis. Pr. Friede will serve as a statistical advisor. He is a biostatistician with substantial experience in systematic reviews, meta-analyses and generalized evidence synthesis methods.

• Information retrieval:

Pr. Ibanez, Dr. Khan, Dr. Minasyan, and Dr. Sahoo and by Pooja Balasubramanian will jointly develop the information retrieval for the first chapter. Pr. Vollmer, Dr. Khan, Dr. Sahoo, Atika Pasha and Le Thi Ngoc Tu will jointly develop the information retrieval for the second chapter. All of them have experience in literature review and a good understanding of statistical methods. They have access to University of Göttingen’s library.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

We all have participated in research that is related to this research question in some way, but if any publications from our own work are determined to be eligible for inclusion in the study, we will have an independent evaluator assess the quality of the study.

SUPPORT

No need for additional support has been identified so far.

FUNDING

The systematic review will be a part of the ‘GrOW’ (Growth and Economic Opportunities of Women) Programme, which has received funding from IDRC, the Hewlett Foundation, and DFID. The final review is due by the end of 2017, before we have to submit progress reports.
PRELIMINARY TIMEFRAME

- Date you plan to submit a draft protocol: September 1, 2016
- Date you plan to submit a draft review: December 1, 2017

DECLARATION

Authors’ responsibilities

By completing this form, you accept responsibility for preparing, maintaining and updating the review in accordance with Campbell Collaboration policy. The Campbell International Development Group will provide as much support as possible to assist with the preparation of the review.

A draft protocol must be submitted to the Group within six months. If drafts are not submitted before the agreed deadlines, or if we are unable to contact you for an extended period, the Group has the right to de-register the title or transfer the title to alternative authors. The Group also has the right to de-register or transfer the title if it does not meet the standards of the Group and/or the Campbell Collaboration.

You accept responsibility for maintaining the review in light of new evidence, comments and criticisms, and other developments, and updating the review at least once every three years, or, if requested, transferring responsibility for maintaining the review to others as agreed with the Group.

Publication in the Campbell Library

The support of the International Development Group in preparing your review is conditional upon your agreement to publish the protocol, finished review and subsequent updates in the Campbell Library. Concurrent publication in other journals is encouraged. However, a Campbell systematic review should be published either before, or at the same time as, its publication in other journals. Authors should not publish Campbell reviews in journals before they are ready for publication in CL. Authors should remember to include the statement: "This is a version of a Campbell review, which is available in The Campbell Library".

I understand the commitment required to undertake a Campbell review, and agree to publish in the Campbell Library. Signed on behalf of the authors:

Date: 11.04.2016
References


