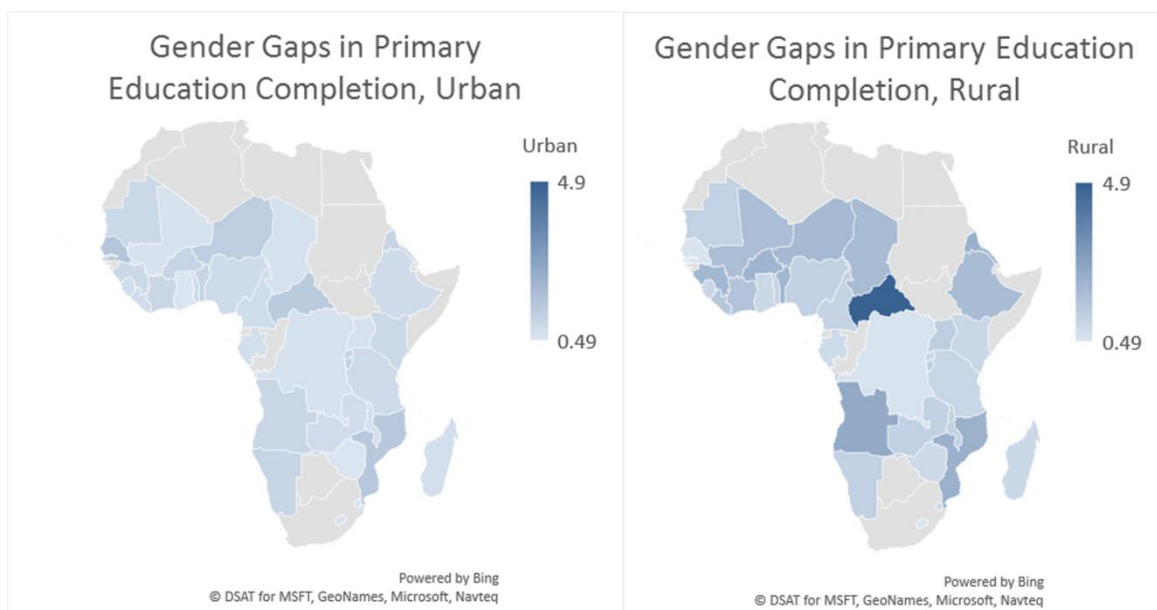


What Drives Support for Gender Equality?

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These brief notes document outlines trends in economic growth, income inequality, and gender; explains how social norms change; and identifies opportunities to support ongoing progress.

- **Support for gender equality is rising, across the world.** People increasingly champion girls' education, women's employment, and leadership (Afrobarometer, 2018; Seguino, 2016; Stotsky et al, 2017).
- **Seeing is believing.** Through widespread exposure to women undertaking socially valued roles (in employment and politics), people come to recognise women's equal competence. But this raises a further question: how is it that women come to undertake socially valued roles in employment and politics?
- **Shifts in gender roles usually occur through shifts in interests** – e.g. worsening economic security triggers growing support for female employment. When men are no longer able to support their families, as breadwinners, people become more supportive of women going out to earn money.
- **Civil wars have also catalysed major shifts in gender relations.** Across Africa, conflicts have pushed women to become fighters, breadwinners, and leaders in peace movements. By seeing women in socially valued, masculine roles, their compatriots increasingly perceived women as equally competent and deserving of status. This attitudinal shift has cultivated growing support for women leaders in parliaments, executive branches, government bureaucracies, judiciaries and civil society. However, conflict is not in itself transformative. Women's movements have played a key role in pressing for egalitarian reforms in postconflict countries. Their influence appears mediated by the national and international context. At the national level, transitions to multipartyism in the early 1990s greatly expanded the political space for feminist lobbying. But authoritarian restrictions remain in some postconflict African countries, such as Angola (where executive power is reinforced by substantial oil and diamond wealth). The 1990s also heralded a shift in global and regional norms, with greater support for women's rights. This appears to have compounded pressure on national governments to enact more equitable laws and policies (Tripp, 2015).
- **Social change has been faster in cities.** Urban residents are more likely to support gender equality in education, employment and leadership than their rural compatriots. They are also more likely to condemn gender-based violence. This holds even when controlling for age, education, employment, income, and access to infrastructure (Evans and Swiss, 2017). As shown below, gender gaps in primary education are larger in rural Africa (Evans, forthcoming). The prevalence of (and support for) female genital cutting is also lower (and falling more rapidly) in urban areas (UNICEF 2013).



- Cities can catalyse progress towards gender equality because they: (1) raise opportunity costs; (2) increase proximity to services; and most crucially (3) amplify exposure to alternatives.
 - **Cities often raise the opportunity costs of gender divisions of labour:** higher living costs; more economic opportunities for women (in services and manufacturing); and the contemporary precarity of male employment. These macro-economic changes mean that urban Africans increasingly see women's work as advantageous.
 - **Urban women are closer to health and police services** – so potentially more able to control their fertility and secure external support against gender-based violence. But if these service-providers are unhelpful (e.g. blame victims), then proximity is no safeguard. Urban experiences are also mediated by macro-economic context, the sectoral composition of job growth, and occupational status (Evans, forthcoming; Evans and Swiss, 2017).
 - **People in interconnected, heterogeneous, densely populated cities are more likely to see women demonstrating their equal competence in socially valued, masculine domains.** Seeing women mechanics, breadwinners and leaders increases people's confidence in the possibility of social change. This catalyses further experimentation, and generates a positive feedback loop. This process is much slower in rural Africa. Rural remoteness and homogeneity curb exposure to alternatives, dampening confidence in the possibility of social change, deterring deviation.

How Do Social Norms Change?

- **Sensitisation is not well-supported by evidence.**
 - Donor-financed NGO campaigns usually try to shift people's internalised ideologies: encouraging disadvantaged groups to believe they have 'human rights'; are entitled to government services; should 'say no' to corruption; abandon female genital cutting; and for men to share care work. But this sensitisation may be ineffective if participants lack confidence in the possibility of change – expecting an unresponsive government, illiberal suitors, or neighbourhood condemnation (Evans, 2015; forthcoming). Sensitisation may even be counter-productive. For example, by drawing attention to widespread corruption, donor-financed campaigns may reinforce norm perceptions that corruption is widespread. This may lead people to regard it as inevitable and so partake (Burbidge, 2015). Likewise, if campaigns highlight the extent of inequalities, but not widespread disapproval, then viewers may doubt the possibility of change, believing the system to be stacked against them.
 - Rather than directly asking people to change their behaviour, it may be more effective to show that their peers *are* increasingly doing so (Mackie and LeJeune, 2009; Tankard and Paluck, 2016; Bicchieri, 2017).
- **Social change accelerates when people see that others are changing.**
 - Through observation and interaction, we develop beliefs about which behaviours are widely supported in our social networks. If everyone else complies with the status quo, we assume collective approval – not recognising that others may be privately critical. Even if we do not privately endorse these practices, we are still motivated to conform – because we do not wish to be reprimanded, reproached or violently repressed. For example, if men think that others will mock them for sharing care work, they may be reluctant to publicly perform such work. This invisibility reinforces widely-shared norm perceptions that men do not share care work.
 - These beliefs about what others think and do ('norm perceptions') are developed through first-hand exposure, peers' narratives, and media consumption. While individuals have idiosyncratic encounters and interactions, their experiences are shaped by wider political and economic structures. For example, under authoritarian regimes, people may be scared to speak out and be openly critical. Accordingly, their compatriots may not realise widespread dissatisfaction. While trade unions *could* provide spaces to hear alternative perspectives and see workers' collective strength, they may be

hampered by military repression and economic restructuring – augmenting informalisation, short-term contracts, turnover and instability.

- People may also underestimate public resistance to inequality and support for redistribution if television, radio and newspapers are largely controlled by the government (and its allies): rarely showing strikes, protests or roadblocks; portraying critics as dangerous radicals; ridiculing ethnic minorities and women; not providing platforms to discuss diverse perspectives; and if this media is not held accountable for disinformation.
- Norm perceptions can also deter use of government services, accountability mechanisms, and bottom-up pressure for reform. If workers expect the government to be unresponsive, they are unlikely to report labour violations or corruption. Without seeing successful mobilisation, workers may be fatalistic, pessimistic about reform, reluctant to join a union or initiate labour claims. Likewise, women may be reluctant to report gender-based violence or local corruption if they believe that the police will be unsympathetic. People may remain quiet if they presume that government officials and political leaders will ignore their demands. Activism may also be deterred by expectations of brutal repression. So, even if citizens are provided with information about resource flows and service delivery outcomes, they may not mobilise for reform if they lack confidence in collective mobilisation, as well as the state's capacity and inclination to respond positively (Fox, 2014; Lieberman et al, 2014; Moore and Putzel, 1999: 14-15).
- Unilateral deviation is very costly: disapproval, mockery and punishment. This creates a major collective action problem. Herein lies a major challenge: the need for a coordinated change in beliefs and behaviour.
- **Practices change when people change their expectations about what others think and do.** This may occur by hearing critical discourses; seeing slogans of resistance emblazoned in street art; migrating to new places, seeing more responsive governance; interacting with diverse groups; learning about successful activism; realising widespread support for change; and thereby gaining confidence in the possibility of reform. Likewise, governments may feel compelled to reform if they anticipate backlash; if they believe in the public's capacity for independent political action.
- **To tackle these norm perceptions, and overcome collective action problems, we might support civil society and governments to publicise positive deviance.**
 - **Carefully designed mass media campaigns can support progress towards equality.** Television soap operas can shift norm perceptions about what is normal, feasible and socially acceptable. For example, IPA funded videos of Ugandan women reporting of gender-based violence. After watching this mass media campaign, Ugandan viewers were much more likely to say they would speak out against violence, and say they would be widely supported by others (Green et al, 2018). Local film-making could depict successful activism across that region: highlight their presence, viability and strength; showcase effective governance; raise expectations.
 - **Norm perceptions can also shift through regional benchmarking and peer review** (e.g. the MDGs and SDGs). Despondent pessimists (within government and wider society) may be inspired and invigorated by seeing achievements in similar districts, sectors and countries. Reputation-conscious agencies may also be anxious to improve, so as to avoid the embarrassment of lagging behind their peers rapidly making progress towards widely-shared ideas of 'Development'. Merely setting standards does not achieve these results, because it does not shift norm perceptions about what others are doing. The regional element is important here, as people are more likely to conform to the norms of a group with which they identify (Bicchieri, 2017; Evans, forthcomingb; Tankard and Paluck, 2016: 196).

In brief, social change accelerates when people see that others are changing. So, to fortify ongoing progress, we need to increase exposure to positive deviance – whether it is more effective, responsive governance; successful activism; or more egalitarian practices.

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