

TOP POLICY LESSONS FROM AFRICA GENDER INNOVATION LAB RESEARCH



1. TEACHING PERSONAL INITIATIVE BEATS TRADITIONAL TRAINING IN BOOSTING SMALL BUSINESS IN WEST AFRICA

Our study in Togo reveals that psychology-based entrepreneur training (personal initiative training) increases firm profits by 30%, compared to a statistically insignificant increase for traditional business training. Personal initiative training was particularly effective for female-owned businesses, who saw their profits increase by 40%, compared to no impact from traditional business training.

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2. SUPPORTING FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS TO ENTER MALE DOMINATED SECTORS CAN BOOST PROFITS

Getting more women into traditionally male-dominated sectors of the economy could boost the incomes of women entrepreneurs and their households. Our study in Ethiopia revealed that firms owned by women who cross over into male-dominated sectors are two times more profitable than firms owned by women who remain in traditionally female sectors, and they are just as profitable as businesses owned by men. Women are more likely to cross-over when parents and husbands support them and when they have access to information on the higher earnings potential in male-dominated sectors.

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3. ADOLESCENT GIRLS' CLUBS OFFERING LIFE SKILLS AND LIVELIHOOD TRAINING POSITIVELY IMPACTS GIRLS

Adolescent girls programs that combine life skills and vocational skills can help improve the school-to-work transition of the large youth populations in the region, while also reducing adolescent fertility. Our study of BRAC's Empowerment and Livelihoods for Adolescents (ELA) program, indicates that ELA raised girls' likelihood of engaging in income-generating activities by 72 % and raised their monthly consumption expenditures by 38%, while reducing teen pregnancy and early marriage by 26 % and 58 % respectively. The program not only worked but was also cost effective at \$100 per girl per year.

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GENDER INNOVATION LAB

The Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) conducts impact evaluations of development interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa, seeking to generate evidence on how to close the gender gap in earnings, productivity, assets and agency. The GIL team is currently working on over 50 impact evaluations in 21 countries with the aim of building an evidence base with lessons for the region.

The impact objective of GIL is increasing take-up of effective policies by governments, development organizations and the private sector in order to address the underlying causes of gender inequality in Africa, particularly in terms of women's economic and social empowerment. The lab aims to do this by producing and delivering a new body of evidence and developing a compelling narrative, geared towards policymakers, on what works and what does not work in promoting gender equality.



TAKING RESULTS TO SCALE

Evidence from GIL studies have been used in the design of programs in Africa, Latin America and Asia. A relatively small investment in research and evidence can yield lasting impacts on women and girls and can inform the design of large-scale policies and programs around the world.



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4. TRAINING WOMEN IN ICT CAN HELP OVERCOME THEIR OWN SELF-DEFEATING BIASES

An evaluation of a job training program in Nigeria that sought to prepare university graduates for work in the ICT sector not only found that the training was successful for women and men, with successful applicants 26% more likely to work in the ICT sector two years after the training, but also indicated that such programs can be particularly useful for women who initially exhibit a bias against women's professionalism - after the training, these women were three times more likely to find an IT job than unbiased women.

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5. MAKING IT EASIER FOR WOMEN TO FORMALIZE THEIR FIRMS PLUS WORKING WITH A BANK LEADS TO INCREASED ACCESS TO FINANCIAL SERVICES

Through an experiment in Malawi, we established an effective and replicable design to offer informal firms support to formalize, costing much less than the typical private sector development intervention. Combining this business registration solution with an information session at a bank (including the offer of a business bank account) improved access to financial services: participating women entrepreneurs increased their use of bank accounts for business-only purposes, financial record keeping, and other financial services including insurance. They also saw a significant increase in their profits.

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6. POLICY PRIORITIES FOR CLOSING THE GENDER GAP IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTIVITY

Women farmers consistently produce less per hectare than their male counterparts. When comparing women and men with similar-sized plots in a similar context, the gender gaps range from 23% in Tanzania to a strikingly large 66% in Niger. The gender gap is caused by more than unequal access to inputs; women also face unequal returns to the inputs they have. Our research identifies the key drivers of the gender gap in individual countries and helps policymakers to prioritize the interventions, such as farmer field schools and price discounts on fertilizer, that are most likely to increase productivity and economic growth.

[Synthesis Report | Executive Summary](#)



7. NONCOGNITIVE SKILLS MATTER FOR THE ADOPTION OF CASH CROPS BY WOMEN FARMERS

Inferential research shows a positive link between women farmers' noncognitive entrepreneurial skills (such as perseverance, passion for work, and optimism) and their adoption of cash crops. Noncognitive skills work by encouraging women to make higher use of productive farm inputs, including labor, fertilizer, and agricultural extension services. Our results suggest that non-cognitive skills are a crucial and under-explored mechanism for boosting women's agricultural productivity and policy interventions aimed at fostering noncognitive skills in farmers should be implemented and tested.

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8. FORMALIZING RURAL LAND RIGHTS CAN BOOST WOMEN'S PRODUCTIVE INVESTMENTS ON THEIR PLOTS

Women in Sub-Saharan Africa are less likely than men to own land, use less land, and have lower tenure security. These gaps are costly in terms of lost productive output. Early results from a study in Benin show that improved tenure security through land demarcation increases long-term investments in cash crops and trees and erases the gender gap in land fallowing—a key soil fertility investment.

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