CHAPTER 4

Gender inequality: A double break on poverty reduction
• **Gender inequality limits Africa’s progress** in tackling poverty in two ways. First, the continent forfeits potential growth that could have come from women who are excluded from the growth process. Second, restricting women’s access to human capital enhancing services, such as education and healthcare, limits the extent to which growth can impact on their poverty status. **African women have benefited immensely from 15 years of MDG prioritisation**, and from the global alliance driving their implementation. Gender gaps in education, healthcare and other wellbeing indicators have witnessed significant improvements over this period.

• Despite these achievements, **women still constitute the majority of the continent’s poor**, they are more likely to drop out of school than boys, less likely to be employed in the formal sector and the risk of maternal mortality remains high in many countries. Gender inequalities in agriculture are characterised by unequal access to agricultural inputs such as land, fertilizers, and finance. Women who depend on agriculture and do not own land for this purpose are more vulnerable to domestic violence. Women dominate in vulnerable employment, with most of them working in seasonal, petty trading of agricultural products.

• **Up to 50% of women in some countries are victims of domestic violence.** Victims of domestic violence are less likely to be in control of their own reproductive decisions, which also has negative consequences on children. Because the fate of women determines the fate of the continent’s next generation, undermining their role in today’s development could reduce the continent’s future growth prospects.

• **Empowering women through education** (secondary school or beyond) and **employment in the formal sector** limits their vulnerability to violence from their partners. Closing the gender gap in education is, therefore, a powerful strategy in addressing violence against women.
Recently, researchers and policymakers have been concerned with understanding why the continent’s high growth rates have had limited impact on poverty reduction. As discussed in a previous chapter, measures of the growth elasticity of poverty suggest that the effect is even lower in countries where inequality is high. However, most of these measures consider inequality along the income dimension. At the same time, there is another type of inequality that deserves attention: That is the inequality between men and women, which continues to be substantial in many African countries.

Achieving equality between men and women has both intrinsic and instrumental significance. Intrinsically, women, like men, have a right to justice in all societies. Instrumentally, achieving gender equality would have numerous economic and social benefits for women, their children and for society as a whole. Denying 50% of Africa’s population from their deserved justice and the opportunity to contribute to economic and social development impacts the continent as a whole. Despite the numerous merits of achieving a gender equal society, men and women are far from being equal in Africa.

This chapter highlights the extent and challenge of gender inequality in Africa, with a focus on gender disparities in education, health, and political and economic participation. The chapter also provides evidence on the extent of violence against women, its consequences and some policy interventions that have proved most effective in lowering the incidence of violence against women.
4.1 Why gender inequality is a major concern in Africa

Apart from physical capital and technology, one of the factors that explains differences in the level of development across countries is the wealth of human capital. The number of people and the accumulated skills they have is a vital determinant of how much progress society can achieve. In most countries, while at least half of the population is female, much less than half of the work force is female. In the same way, a significant fraction of high-ability girls and women do not have the opportunity to attend school or to acquire other forms of skills. Women and girls are less likely to attend school, and if they do, their chances of completing secondary level education are much more limited than for boys. For those that complete secondary education, they do not have equal chances of getting employed, particularly in the formal sector, compared to the chances faced by men with equivalent levels of education. For those that are working in the agricultural sector, they have limited entitlement to ownership of land and other farming inputs (AfDB, 2015).

In sum, the contribution of women and girls in Africa’s development is limited by their low numbers in the labour force. In addition, the selection bias in favour of boys means that, relative to girls, boys with less innate ability are more likely to be educated and employed, resulting in sub-optimal resource allocation between the sexes (Klasen and Lamanna, 2003). However, whether women are educated or not, employed in the formal sector or not, they continue to play a central role in the wellbeing of children. Their lack of resources therefore, poses costs to society as a whole and has implications for future generations.

Understanding the link between economic growth and poverty reduction requires identification of major obstacles that constrain their participation and limit the flow of economic prosperity to the poor. In Africa, an important starting point for such an analysis is an assessment of the gender composition of the poor. Because most poverty assessments are conducted at household level, statistics on gender-disaggregated poverty are hard to come by, especially in Africa. Most of the gender estimates are based on “male-headed” versus “female-headed” households. However, due to the focus on this particular group of households, this method is likely to understate incidence of poverty among women because female headship at household level is not common, especially among the poor in Africa. The rare cases of female headed households are likely to be affluent women with means to financially support a household. Even with this form of disaggregating poverty by gender, evidence shows higher...
incidence among women than men. Some evidence suggests that for countries such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin and Niger, between 48 and 65 percent of women live in poverty. Similarly, Moghadam (2005) noted that females account for half of the world’s population but 70 percent of the poor\textsuperscript{36}.

In our analysis, nearly a million households representative of 33 African countries have been ranked according to household-level wealth at country level. Exploring the gender composition of these households, 52\% of those with female majority and 46\% of those with male majority have wealth below the national mean. In all countries, less wealthy households tend to have more concentration of women than men. This is in line with the high incidence of poverty among female-headed households that is commonly observed in African countries. The figure below (Figure 4.1) compares households with three-quarters female membership to those with comparable male composition. Higher female concentration in households is associated with lower asset ownership in almost all the countries. The worst performing country in our sample is Burundi with majority of single-sex concentrated households having wealth below the national mean. The country also has a huge gap in disfavour of households with more female concentration.

\textsuperscript{36} For an alternative discussion of this, see Klasen (2007).

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**Figure 4.1** Households below mean wealth, by gender concentration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Female &gt; 75%</th>
<th>Male &gt; 75%</th>
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<td>Gabon</td>
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<td>Burundi</td>
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Note: The wealth index is based on the DHS asset index. The index is a composite measure of a household’s cumulative living standard. It is based on selected assets, such as televisions and bicycles; materials used for housing construction; and types of water access and sanitation facilities. The x-axis is the percentage of households with high male concentration and percentage of households with high female concentration, whose wealth is less than the national mean.
Lifting restrictions on women is associated with progress in both income growth and poverty reduction. Studies have shown that countries with relatively high gender gaps and those that have made least progress over time are associated with lower GDP growth per capita (Klasen and Lamanna (2003), King, Klasen, and Porter (2008) and Klasen (2002)). In this set of countries, the poverty-reducing effect of growth is lower than for countries with relatively lower gender gaps.

For the poor to share in the benefits of economic growth, they either have to be economically active in the growth process (earn income through their factors of production) or receive transfers (through redistribution and other public provisioning of goods). Across much of the continent, however, participation of women in economic activities is largely concentrated in agricultural and informal sectors, with low and seasonal earnings that barely cover subsistence needs. On the redistribution side, policies that target households are unlikely to achieve equal poverty reducing-effects for men and women. Evidence of high prevalence of violence against women in homes is suggestive of their limited bargaining power. Low bargaining power among women, driven mainly by their low asset, income and educational endowments plus adverse social norms, have constrained their ability to move out of poverty.

Gender inequality remains a major barrier to efforts to reduce poverty in Africa. There has, however, been some progress, especially in educational enrolment and access to healthcare. Notwithstanding this, women and girls in Africa are far from enjoying the opportunities and benefits arising from economic prosperity compared to their male counterparts. This calls for prioritisation of gender issues in development and the need to recognise ‘equity’ as an important prerequisite for success in other development objectives.

4.1.1 Gender inequality in education remains, despite some improvements

Low levels of human capital characterise many countries in Africa. Worse yet, levels of human capital are much lower for women than for men. For instance, literacy rates among African women have historically been lower than those for men. Similarly, women complete fewer years of schooling than men. These unequal outputs have implication on the ability of men and women to tap into the opportunities presented by economic growth. Sweeping policies are required to disproportionately favour women and girls.

There has been most progress in closing gender gaps in education, especially for enrolments. Achieving parity in educational outcomes is an important achievement and lays the foundation for progress in many other dimensions of gender equality. The past 15 years has witnessed substantial investment by African governments and their development partners in the education of girls and boys alike. Figure 4.2 presents literacy rates by gender. The figure shows that there has been an upward trend in literacy rates for both women and men, but, the literacy rate among men has consistently been higher than that for women.
Boys and girls enrolment in school, which is one of the indicators for measuring MDG3, does not translate into equivalent attendance and completion rates in primary, secondary or tertiary education. For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger, and Mali, where more than half of girls between ages 15-19 are married, there are fewer numbers of girls enrolled in primary school. UN Women (2014) estimate that in 63 developing countries, girls are more likely to be out of school than boys for both primary and lower secondary education. Furthermore, the gender gap in school attendance widens in lower secondary education, even for girls living in better-off households.

Figure 4.3 depicts the ratio of female to male enrolment in primary, secondary, and tertiary schools. For each 100 males enrolled in school, less than 100 females were enrolled during the period of analysis\(^{37}\). However, the number

\(^{37}\) In some societies, this is partly due to different views on the right to education for girls.
of females enrolled for each male enrolled in school has been continuously increasing. This implies that girls are slowly catching up in school enrolment. Interestingly, the catch-up is more pronounced in tertiary schools or college enrolment. For instance, as few as 40 females were enrolled in college for each 100 males enrolled in 1990. In 2013, the number of women enrolled per 100 males has increased to 88, a 120 percent increment from its 1990 level.

Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3 highlight that during the period of rapid economic growth, the increase in literacy rates seems to be gender neutral. However, economic growth has resulted in differential improvement in enrolment at all levels of education, in favour of women. Thus, economic growth has helped narrow gender inequality in school enrolment.

These trends suggest a positive outlook for educational outcomes of both boys and girls. It implies that in the coming years, if the continent is able to keep both boys and girls in school and does not discriminate against girls in the labour market, it would witness significant progress in closing gender gaps in educational attainment and in labour-force participation. This is not assured. Despite closing enrolment gaps, gender-gaps in educational attainment (years of education) are still significantly in favour of boys: Girls are much more likely to drop out of school. The graph below (Figure 4.4) shows the percentage of children of lower secondary school age that are out of school. It can be seen that the gender gap persisted from 1999 to 2013, closing only marginally in the last three years.

This phenomenon is explained by gender-specific factors that limit attendance and retention rates of girls in education. These include social factors such as taking care of younger siblings and helping with household chores; cultural factors such as boy preference for education, early marriage and violence against girls both in and out of school, which includes sexual violence, discrimination, etc. (Jones et al., 2008). Early marriages are a prevalent practice in several African countries. In a recent UNICEF report on child marriages, seven out of ten countries with the world’s highest rate of child marriages are African. Such marriages do not only terminate schooling for young girls, but they add the burden of large numbers of children which has health and economic implications for the women and their children. Figure 4.5 shows the percentage of women aged 20 to 24 who have had three or more children, by age at first marriage. As can be seen, this share is substantial in a number of African countries which seriously constrains the ability of women to contribute to the economy. Moreover, this contributes to very high fertility rates that slow down the demographic transition in Africa. Other reasons for girls being withdrawn from school include helping parents at home or serving as domestic workers. Because little is known about these girls and those that they work for, it is difficult to suggest more direct policies that address this phenomenon.

**Figure 4.4** Percentage of children of secondary school going age that are out of school, by gender

![Graph showing percentage of children of secondary school going age that are out of school, by gender.](source: Authors’ computation using World Development Indicators)
Figure 4.5 Early marriages, and percentage child brides with more than two children

![Bar chart showing early marriages and percentage of child brides with more than two children for various countries.]

Source: UNICEF, 2014

Figure 4.6 Percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married by age 15 and 18

![Bar chart showing percentage of women aged 20-24 who were married by age 15 and 18 for various countries.]

Source: UNICEF 2014
4.1.2 Gender inequality in health remains, despite improvements

As everywhere else in the world, women in Africa have always lived longer than men. However, it is interesting to see whether life-expectancy at birth has increased during the period of Africa’s rapid economic growth. Figure 4.7 presents the trend in life-expectancy at birth in Africa, by gender. As expected, women in Africa, on average, live longer than men during the period of analysis. Interestingly, life-expectancies for both genders were more or less constant in the 1990s. Since the turn of the Millennium, however, life-expectancy at birth has increased continuously. The trend in life-expectancy aligns with the trend in economic growth in Africa, suggesting strong positive correlation. Life-expectancy is heavily affected by two things: AIDS mortality (where women in Africa tend to be disadvantaged) and child mortality related to malaria and other infectious diseases. The period after 2000 also witnessed significant decline in HIV infection and child mortality rates. It is important to note that both improvements happened during the 15 years of focused and intense MDG interventions.

The second important measure of women’s health is maternal health. Maternal health is an important indicator in assessing both women’s health status and the overall accessibility and effectiveness of a country’s health service system. One of the most common indicators of maternal health is the maternal mortality ratio. Africa has gone a long way to decrease maternal mortality ratios and this is perhaps one of the strongest achievements of the continent in recent years. Data from the World Bank’s WDI reveal that the maternal mortality ratio per 100,000 live births has decreased by 49 percent; from 820 in 1990, to 420 in 2013. Rapid economic growth may have contributed to the observed decline in maternal mortality ratios, but factors such as reductions in fertility, better access to prenatal care and vaccination, and reduction in HIV/AIDs prevalence played a more determining role.

This is an astonishing achievement: Birth related maternal deaths have been consistently high for a long time. However, Africa still accounts for the largest share of global maternal deaths. In 2013, Africa was home to 16 out of the 18 countries with the highest maternal mortality ratios globally (i.e., above 500 deaths per 100,000 live births). The most

**Figure 4.7** Life-expectancy at birth, by gender

Source: Author’s computation using data from World Development Indicators (WDI), the World Bank
cited causes of maternal mortality are abortions, bleeding after child birth, and infections. Most maternal deaths are preventable, particularly if mothers have access to skilled birth attendants and contraceptives. Since these are less accessible, maternal deaths are higher among women who live in remote rural areas. Higher rates of maternal death are also observed among poor and uneducated women.

4.1.3 Progress on women’s participation in economic and political activities

The relationships between economic growth and women’s empowerment - measured by economic participation – are even more complex. Madagascar and Botswana saw an annual drop of -0.5% and -0.15% respectively, per annum, in the share of women in non-agricultural employment between 2000 and 2013. GDP grew at a rate of 1.61% per annum over the same period (Figure 4.8). Ethiopia, while seeing a significantly higher rate of GDP growth per year at 3.15%, experienced only a modest increase in the share of women in non-agricultural employment, at 0.08%. How aggregate GDP growth translates into increases in the participation of women in the labour market, outside of the home or subsistence agriculture, remains to be understood. Unpaid care work has been known to be a heavy burden on women in Africa that hinders them from providing their services to the market. Reaching the poor and reducing gender inequality requires direct investment and special measures.

4.1.3.1 Formal non-agricultural employment

Globally, women’s participation in the labour force is far below that of men. In Africa, women with equivalent education are still less likely to be employed in the formal employment market. Based on an expert survey in 37 African countries, men, across all educational levels, tend to have higher chances of employment than women. The employment gap between men and women with secondary education is 37% in favour of
men. African economies could benefit substantially from greater female participation by tapping the large numbers of women, including those of high-ability.

4.1.3.2 Agricultural employment

The majority of Africa’s poor reside in rural areas and depend on agriculture as their source of livelihood. While productivity in this sector is largely undermined by its low mechanisation, allocation of resources between men and women in this sector has left the continent with less than desired levels of productivity. Gender disparities in agriculture are mainly characterised by unequal access to agricultural inputs. Pervasive inequality, especially over the ownership of agricultural land, continues to limit women’s contribution to household food baskets. Most women do not have access to agricultural inputs, apart from their own labour. Using data from 15 African countries, 41% of women and only 5% of men farmers indicated that they do not independently own land for agricultural purposes.

Similarly, out of 20 African countries, Figure 4.10 shows that only one country, Cape Verde, achieved gender parity in the ownership of agricultural land. Land ownership in Africa is heavily skewed to men: For some countries, men own more than 90 percent of all lands used for agricultural production.

A recent World Bank report (O’Sullivan et al., 2014) on the extent and determinants of gender gaps in agriculture across a selection of African countries (Ethiopia, Malawi, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda), showed large productivity gaps between men and women. The shortfall, when women’s productivity is compared to that of men, is as large as 66% in some countries. The low productivity among women farmers is considered to be an outcome of their limited access to agricultural inputs such as land, fertilizer and extension services. Low levels of education and limited access to markets also contributed to the observed low productivity among women farmers.

![Figure 4.9](image-url)  
**Figure 4.9** Probability of employment at different educational levels, by gender
Figure 4.10  Fraction of agricultural land owned by women in various countries

Source: Authors’ computation using data from FAO-Gender and Land Rights (2015)38.

Figure 4.11  Share of men and women in vulnerable employment

Source: Authors' computation using World Development Indicators

Apart from the low productivity faced by women in the agricultural sector, they also dominate in Africa’s share of employment that is considered vulnerable. 36 percent of women in sub-Saharan Africa are in non-agricultural wage employment, just 22 percent of North African women are in this category (UN, 2005). Most women that are not working in the agricultural sector are involved in seasonal petty trading that generates limited income and lasts for just a few months each year. The graph below shows that Africa has the highest share of women in vulnerable employment in the world. In a study focused on factors that constraint women entrepreneurs, Brixiová and Kangoye (forthcoming, 2015) find evidence that links women's limited access to capital and their low productivity (see Box: 4.1).

### Box 4.1 Gender and constraints to entrepreneurship: Evidence from Swaziland

Entrepreneurship is an important source of employment. Women involved in informal businesses are often self-employed in small-scale retail. Hallward-Driemier (2011) noted that women operate disproportionately in smaller firms, the informal sector and low value added industries. Often however, limited access to capital constrains their ability to grow and sustain their businesses. Brixiová and Kangoye (forthcoming, 2015) find evidence that women’s limited access to capital translates into their relatively low returns. Using data from Swaziland, the authors find that women entrepreneurs have lower start-up capital than men throughout the entire distribution (Figure 1a). They are also less likely to access finance from formal sources than their male counterparts. Their results further show significant performance disparities (in terms of sales levels and growth) between men and women entrepreneurs (Figure 1b).

### Kernel density estimates of sales and start-up capital among men and women entrepreneurs

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start-up capital (log)</th>
<th>Sales performance (log)</th>
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<td><strong>Men</strong></td>
<td><strong>Women</strong></td>
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Note: Sales are for a typical month in 2012.
Source: Brixiová and Kangoye (2015)
the only country that has more women in parliament than men. Similarly, in a more recent gender inequality ranking (AfDB, 2015), South Africa and Rwanda have been ranked first and second most gender equal countries in Africa. However, despite the pace of progress made over the last 15 years, it is estimated that the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament will take nearly 40 years to reach gender parity (UN Women, 2014).

UN Women (2014) explains slow progress on MDG3 as emanating from failure to address fundamental issues such as violence against women, inequalities in the division of unpaid care work, women’s limited access to assets, violations of women and girls’ sexual and reproductive health and rights, and, the unequal participation of women in private and public decision-making beyond national parliaments. Progress in economic growth, or the lack of it, has not been widely blamed as a leading factor determining the slow growth of female representation in parliament. Indeed, Figure 4.12 indicates no systematic relationship between these variables.

Low representation of women may be explained by a combination of unfavourable gender role ideologies, less effective institutional frameworks and limited political will. What is clear, however, is that increased opportunity for women's participation at household and community levels provides them the chance to influence outcomes that affect their wellbeing and the wellbeing of children and society as a whole.

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**Figure 4.12** Average annual GDP growth rate and annual change in seats held by women in national parliaments (%), 2000-2013

![Graph showing average annual GDP growth rate and annual change in seats held by women in national parliaments for various African countries from 2000 to 2013.](source: Authors’ computation using World Development Indicators)
4.2 Domestic violence: So much commitment, little progress

4.2.1 Commitment to stop violence against women

In the midst of increasing global concern over the need to eradicate poverty and attain sustainable development, the UN’s fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 gave prominence to violence against women. This, the Beijing, conference recognised gender-based violence as a violation of fundamental human rights and as an obstacle to the achievement of other development objectives. Prior to the Beijing platform for action, the UN General Assembly in the 1993 Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defined such violence as; “…any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threat of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.”

This section attempts to profile the extent of violence against women and its associated consequences for society as a whole. It does not, however, claim to capture the intensity and many indirect consequences for victims (see Box 4.2).

From the late 1990s to date there have been increased attempts amongst African governments, development agencies and private partners towards sensitisation and the push for legal reforms that address domestic violence. These efforts are complemented by an increased number of local advocacy groups around the continent. Alongside pursuits on the legal front, gender empowerment policies that aim at achieving equal outcomes for men and women are being widely pursued across the continent. The link between these empowerment strategies and domestic violence is that empowering women through education and employment increases their weight in household bargaining, which reduces violence against them. For this reason, concerted efforts at national and international levels continue to enhance women’s ability to bargain meaningfully in the household by targeting increases in their participation in education, the labour-market and political arenas.

4.2.2 Africa has high prevalence of domestic violence

Violence against women in marital union has been on the rise, particularly in Africa. Recent statistics show staggering increases in both spousal and non-spousal violence. At the global level, Figure 4.13 shows that, as of 2010, Low and Middle Income Countries (LMIC) in Africa have the highest prevalence of sexual violence, followed closely by LMICs in South East Asia. According to a recent WHO report (WHO, 2013), over 36% of women in sub-Saharan Africa have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of husbands or intimate partners.

Using data from various country level DHS surveys, and applying the DHS sampling weights, Figure 4.14, below, is a measure of violence intensity index for 15 African countries. The index is based on women (aged 15-49) who have responded to at least three out of eight sub-questions on whether she has ever suffered one of a list of forms of violence in the hands of her intimate partner. Using this naïve measure of domestic violence, a violence intensity index is generated. The mean values

39 The focus of this report narrows this definition in two ways: First, instead of assessing violence against all women, it considers intimate partner violence. Second, other forms of violence against women, such as female genital mutilation (practiced in many African countries), is not included in the measure of our violence variable.

40 Women that have experienced violence but responded to less than three of the sub-questions are dropped out of the index.
One of the biggest challenges in research into domestic violence, especially using self-reported data, is determining whether incidence is under or over estimated. Understanding why people may overstate the number of times they were abused, in itself, provides a clue on the prevalence of violence, if not the intensity. While the count may be misleading if victims overstate the incidence of abuse, the occurrence may not be. The fact that a woman has been violently abused at least once is sufficient to determine the prevalence of violence in a society. Clearly, measuring domestic violence as a discrete variable such as the count of incidents of beating, sexual offence, etc., can in a way be considered an underestimation of its magnitude. This is because many abuses go unreported and because most abuse incidents are continuous rather than discrete events. The prolonged threat, pain and costly options that victims undergo between incidents of discrete measures of violence is mostly not accounted for. To capture the true extent of abuse, this continuous factor needs to be included. Frequency based measures of violence attempt to capture this continuous factor. But this is hard to implement, and even frequency measures do not come close to capturing the true intensity of violence, thus a more simplified measure such as the occurrence of violence, rather than its rate, is sufficient.

In addition, using the frequency of abuse as a measure of the rate of violence may not truly reflect the number of people at risk. For example, calculating the number of incidents per 1000 of the population is less likely to reflect the number of people at risk compared to the prevalence rate of the number of victims per 1000 of the population that experience violence. Similarly, because it is hard for anyone to give objective weights to different forms of violence or even to their counts, it is more plausible for one to use prevalence rather than frequency. Another advantage of using prevalence is that it is less susceptible to measurement error given that recalling any incidence of violence may be more accurately captured that recalling the number on incidents.

In reporting on the incidence and severity of domestic violence, we are aware of the tendency that what we see in data will only represent a fraction of cases and the extent it has affected the victims. Given that our focus is on spousal violence we are even more likely to underestimate the menace due to the fact that most victims, especially those that are still in union with aggressors, are unlikely to report occurrence of violence because of fear. For others, the shame associated with interviewers or neighbours getting to know that their husbands beat them can lead to concealing their experience of violence in the household. This is particularly likely with sexual violence. Survey designs are trying to minimise the level of under-reporting by ensuring more privacy and other techniques that increase rapport and allow the interviewer to ask more probing questions. It does seem however, that we are still at an early stage of knowing the actual extent of terror faced by women in the household. In fact, efforts towards liberating them through empowerment should consider strategies that address the fear of reporting violence. Empirical evidence that suggests higher incidence of domestic violence among women that were previously in union, relative to those “currently” in union, is evidence of under-reporting that is particularly attributable to the fear of further aggression. Women that are no longer in union or have previously divorced tend to be more confident to report experiences of domestic violence in their previous conjugal relationships.

**Box 4.2 Measurement of domestic violence**

One of the biggest challenges in research into domestic violence, especially using self-reported data, is determining whether incidence is under or over estimated. Understanding why people may overstate the number of times they were abused, in itself, provides a clue on the prevalence of violence, if not the intensity. While the count may be misleading if victims overstate the incidence of abuse, the occurrence may not be. The fact that a woman has been violently abused at least once is sufficient to determine the prevalence of violence in a society. Clearly, measuring domestic violence as a discrete variable such as the count of incidents of beating, sexual offence, etc., can in a way be considered an underestimation of its magnitude. This is because many abuses go unreported and because most abuse incidents are continuous rather than discrete events. The prolonged threat, pain and costly options that victims undergo between incidents of discrete measures of violence is mostly not accounted for. To capture the true extent of abuse, this continuous factor needs to be included. Frequency based measures of violence attempt to capture this continuous factor. But this is hard to implement, and even frequency measures do not come close to capturing the true intensity of violence, thus a more simplified measure such as the occurrence of violence, rather than its rate, is sufficient.

In addition, using the frequency of abuse as a measure of the rate of violence may not truly reflect the number of people at risk. For example, calculating the number of incidents per 1000 of the population is less likely to reflect the number of people at risk compared to the prevalence rate of the number of victims per 1000 of the population that experience violence. Similarly, because it is hard for anyone to give objective weights to different forms of violence or even to their counts, it is more plausible for one to use prevalence rather than frequency. Another advantage of using prevalence is that it is less susceptible to measurement error given that recalling any incidence of violence may be more accurately captured that recalling the number on incidents.

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**Source:** Authors
More comprehensive coverage of the incidence of violence would capture the fraction of women that have ever been victims of domestic violence. From our analysis, Figure 4.15 shows that between 15.7% and 57.8% of women are victims of either sexual, emotional and/or physical violence. On average, about 38% of women are victims of intimate partner violence. This average confirms the WHO (2013) figure of 36% incidence in Africa.

Unpacking the violence measure into its separate forms (emotional, physical and sexual), we observe a close correlation among the three forms of violence within countries. Figure 4.16 shows the level of each of the three forms of violence for each of the countries in the sample. Except for a few cases, countries that score highly in one form of violence tend to have high prevalence of other forms of violence. Splitting the pooled data from all countries into rural and urban, there does

41 The most available form of data on domestic violence is the binary indicator of whether a woman has ever been a victim or not. The responses to this variable are also grouped into forms of violence, including: Physical (beat, kick, push, throw something at, slap, etc.); Emotional (threaten, humiliate); and, sexual (forced sex, forced to have sex in certain ways). We generate a violence index using Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) that weighs and aggregates components of the three forms of violence.

**Figure 4.14 Country ranking in the index of domestic violence intensity**

Source: Author’s computation using DHS data
not seem to be any significant difference between the incidences of domestic violence across these subgroups. This shows that there are as many cases of domestic violence in urban settlements as there are in rural areas.

4.2.3 Consequences of domestic violence

Domestic violence has a number of instrumental effects beyond the intrinsic effect. In this sub-section, we explore the possible consequences of domestic violence on the health and wellbeing of women and children. Klasen (1999) and Lenze and Klasen (2013) note that gender inequality could prevent reduction in child mortality, in fertility, and expansion of education for the next generation. First, we look at the effects of domestic violence on the likely participation of women in household expenditure allocation decisions. In measuring consequences, we focus on a measure of a woman’s autonomy to make independent decisions on issues that affect her life and those of her children. We refer to this as autonomy within the household. It is composed of her level of participation

Figure 4.15 Percentage of women who have ever been victims of domestic violence

Source: Author’s computation using DHS data

Figure 4.16 Within-country correlation between three forms of violence

Source: Author’s computation using DHS data
in making purchases, cooking, visits, and health-care decisions. The hypothesis is that women who are abused by their partners will be less likely to be consulted as part of household decision-making. We try to draw some implications from this with bearing on women and on children. Secondly, we look at the possible effects on fertility decisions measured by the use of contraceptives and actual birth intervals. We claim that women going through terror in the household are less likely to be in control of their own reproductive decisions. If men in those households have higher fertility preferences one should observe contraceptive and fertility outcomes that are less aligned with the woman’s preferences. For this purpose, we estimate contraceptive-use and average birth-interval regressions with domestic violence as the key independent variable. Finally, child outcomes, such as nutrition, mortality and educational outcomes are evaluated as possible consequences of wife abuse. We use birth records from DHS data for this purpose.

Violence against women is associated with a significant reduction in the level of autonomy they enjoy within the household (Figure 4.17). Results show that women that have reported abuse cases are unlikely to participate in decisions regarding household purchases, decision over what to cook and about health care. They have less freedom to communicate and relate with others. Empowerment variables such as education, and whether a woman has access to an independent source of income plus the education level of the husband all significantly increase a woman’s level of autonomy within the household.

Comparing the effects of violence between the full sample and those in post-conflict contexts, violence against women has a much larger effect on the autonomy of women in post-conflict states. However, women’s education and employment in post-conflict states does not seem to have any lesser effect on their autonomy compared to those in countries with no recent experience of conflict. Though both male and female education enhance a woman’s autonomy within the household, the latter has a larger effect than the former.

The results of the contraceptive-violence relationship suggest that victims of domestic violence (particularly victims of sexual violence) are less likely to independently decide their own reproductive choices. Contraceptive use is significantly lower among this group and they are more restricted in household health care decisions than non-victims of domestic violence. We try to link this finding to child related outcomes such as birth spacing and some anthropometric measures using the weight deviations of children. Specifically, we look at the weight of children under five years measured by units of deviation from the mean weight of children under five in a country42. Principally, we are interested in the correlation between the interaction of violence and autonomy and the outcome variable, which is weight deviations. If women make decisions in the household (resource allocation), we expect violence against them to reduce child-related outcomes. On the other hand, if women are extremely limited in household decision-making, we expect violence to have an effect on them but only a limited effect on their children. The findings show that indeed violence against women is associated with adverse child-health outcomes such as low birth spacing between children, lower birth weights and lower infant weights.

Figure 4.17 Domestic violence and women’s autonomy

![Figure 4.17](image)

Mean level of Women’s Autonomy

Source: Authors

42 For all women with children under five, we compute the weight deviation for all their children. The reference weight is the mean weight of children under age five within the same country. This gives us a set of negative, zero and positive weight deviations for children under five. We then use these as the dependent variables and assess their correlates.
Violence against women who have some level of autonomy has negative consequences for children under-five years of age. The effect of violence on child outcomes depends on whether child health and nutritional decisions are presided over by a woman or not. For a woman that does not have any source of earning and limited autonomy, we observed that violence against her tends to have limited impact on child related outcomes compared to violence against a woman that earns or has some decision-making role in the household. Given the centrality of women’s role in the household, the consequences of violence against them may have other manifestations that are not explored in this report. This will include longer-term effects on the schooling and health outcomes for children born in violent homes.

4.2.4 Empowering women reduces violence against them

Next, we analyse the extent to which educational attainment and labour-force participation among women helps to avert violence against them. The data we compiled from African countries provides convincing association between the educational attainment of women and their freedom in the household. Women proceeding from primary to secondary education suffer less from violence against them by 20 percent. The reduction is 50 percent when women go beyond secondary education.

4.2.4.1 High education levels reduce the prevalence of domestic violence

Education can affect observed incidence of violence in two possible ways: First, literacy may be associated with increased probability of reporting experiences of violence. This argument is on the basis that educated people are aware of their rights and thus are more likely to report experience of violence in surveys. The second channel through which education and violence may be linked is the empowerment channel. Apart from knowing ones’ rights, education increases self-perceived value and opens a range of fall-back opportunities (such as employment) and redress channels in case of divorce. These fall-back options, often referred to as a woman’s threat point in bargaining, are crucial determinants of her welfare in or outside a union. The two effects predict a nonlinear relationship between a woman’s level of education and violence against her. For women with no education, lack of knowledge about their rights and the tendency to accept violence as a social norm can lead to under reporting of violence. However, as education levels increase, the empowerment effect would tend to reduce violence against women. In this way, illiteracy may be associated with low levels of violence (under-reporting). As women become more aware of their rights, say at primary education level, reported violence cases are likely to increase. At secondary level and beyond, the awareness effect will ensure more reporting but the empowering effect of higher education is likely to dominate.

Figure 4.18 presents the relationship between violence and educational attainment. Violence decreases with higher
education levels. The figure includes uneducated women—although it suggests that the “no education” reduces the level of violence, we argue the contrary: That the low incidence of reported violence observed in the data is driven by under-reporting of violence among uneducated women. Exposure to further levels of education significantly reduces the incidence of violence.

The transition from no education to primary education is associated with an increase in the probability of reporting violence. With further educational attainment beyond primary level, the confidence to report violence is maintained, if not increased. Therefore, the associated reduction in the reported cases of violence at higher levels of education cannot be attributed to under-reporting, rather, the reduction is an outcome of empowerment achieved through progressive educational attainment.

Figure 4.19 plots the incidence of violence against years of education attained by women and men. The payoff from education sets in when women complete at least primary education. Completing secondary education drives the expected level of violence to zero. While both have a reducing effect on violence, female education seems to have a higher effect than male education. This implies that the domestic violence returns to increasing education are higher for girls’ education than for boys’ education. Thus, closing the gender gap in education can be a powerful strategy in addressing violence against women. However, considering the rigid social institutions that act mostly against women’s empowerment, it may require focused efforts to improve educational attainment for women so that they achieve equal bargaining platforms with their male counterparts.

4.2.4.2 Women with good jobs are less likely to be victims of domestic violence

One of the key determinants of women’s empowerment is whether they have an independent source of income in the household. Employment outside the house may be more empowering compared to employment within the household. This is because male dominance in the allocation of resources can potentially affect women’s decisions on how to allocate within-household resources they generate. Women who are employed in the informal agricultural sector are not less likely to be victims of violence. This evidence suggests that empowerment initiatives that focus on employment creation in the informal agricultural sector may be fruitful, but not as effective as those focused on increasing women’s chances of getting formal employment.

Due to power asymmetries between men and women, intra-household allocation of resources, even if much of the input comes from women, may not achieve better outcomes for them. These asymmetries are compounded by the fact that most African women have limited possibilities in the ownership of productive assets such as land and other agricultural inputs (AfDB, 2015). In most cases, women’s only input, labour, attracts limited returns when combined with land, which is dominantly owned and controlled by men. Therefore, it is not surprising if women’s empowerment, measured by their employment in the agricultural sector, has limited influence in reducing the amount of violence they face. In our sample, only one-tenth of women own land that they can use independently for production, while more than 40% of the men owned land. It is therefore important to consider the place and sectors where women work as this will have considerable importance for their bargaining power within families. Women who depend on agriculture as a means of employment, but who do not actually own land for this purpose, are likely to be vulnerable in many respects.
There is a sizable literature demonstrating that female education and employment are important determinants of their bargaining power in the home. Women with limited levels of education (primary education), or who work in the home, are not associated with decreased violence. Women who work for themselves and those that are not employed face similar probabilities of being victims of spousal aggression. In contrast, women working for a third party, through formal employment, are less susceptible to partner abuse.
4.3 Concluding remarks

In Africa, women are very economically active, but their contribution to the economy is being held back by various constraints. For instance, women still suffer from gender gaps in education, although there has been much progress. Africa’s overall progress in access to health-care services has not translated into an equivalent improvement in the health status of women and girls. Maternal mortality in SSA is still a major health issue, with an estimated 510 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births (UN Women, 2014). Despite some improvements, this rate remains higher than the average level of maternal deaths in the developing world 15 years ago. Women are woefully under-represented in the formal economy, both in the public sector, and even more so in the private sector. This is especially the case at higher levels of state and corporate hierarchies. Women lack access to land and suffer unequal access to credit, agricultural inputs, and extension services. This negatively impacts their productivity. Finally, women are held back by the large amount of time they need to invest in doing household chores, such as fetching water and wood.

Yet, Africa has achieved a lot in narrowing gender gaps in several dimensions. Progress over the past 15 years occurred at the same time that the continent registered impressive growth and when governments and their development partners focused resources towards achieving the MDGs.

While this progress is substantive, the remaining gender gaps are still substantive barriers limiting women and girls from fully participating in Africa’s development. The main gaps are: Formal sector employment; school completion; health status given maternal mortality rates; and, freedom to make independent choices. Women dominate Africa’s share of employment in vulnerable activities, especially seasonal jobs. Political participation of women is still low in many African countries, but some countries such as South Africa, Rwanda, Namibia, Mauritius and Malawi are doing well. This low female participation results from a combination of unfavourable gender role ideologies, less-effective institutional frameworks and limited political will. Added to these challenges, domestic violence is highly prevalent in Africa, with nearly half of all married women in some countries reporting abuse from their intimate partner.

High prevalence of domestic violence places a large health burden on women and reduces their ability to work or engage in economic activities. Violence has direct consequences for women, but also indirect consequences for children born to those women. The trans-generational effects of intimate partner abuse range from distorted reproductive choices of women to resource allocation distortions that directly affect child-health outcomes. Contraceptive use is lower among victims of domestic violence than non-victims.

Knowledge of the prevalence and intensity of violence against women, and its associated economic and social consequences, is at an early stage. But what we already know speaks volumes. One of the biggest challenges that can potentially undermine Africa’s future growth prospects is violence against up to half of the continent’s population. The fate of this half determines the fate of 100% of the continent’s next generation. Undermining their role in today’s development translates into cutting the continent’s growth prospects tomorrow. Finally, our analysis has found that education, beyond secondary level, and employment in the formal sector empower women and reduce their vulnerability to violence from their intimate partners. However, women who work in the agricultural sector
but do not own agricultural land are more vulnerable to domestic violence.

Based on these gender findings, efforts should be deployed in many dimensions. Regarding women’s health, governments could promote reproductive health and family planning services to reduce health and economic burdens associated with maternity. On the employment side, implementation of affirmative action policies can increase women’s participation in the higher echelons of government and the private sector. Regarding access to assets such as land, governments could equalise women’s access to land through co-ownership clauses and opening up their ability to inherit and purchase land. Programmes targeting female farmers should also be promoted in order to improve their access to agricultural inputs, new technologies and credit. To free-up women’s time, it is important to improve their access to water and energy in rural areas. Finally, policymakers could increase awareness of domestic violence by providing courses at school to boys and girls on its impacts and by providing health services to the victims.

Finally, in charting the way forward, Africa can build on its achievements by maintaining the momentum it started over the last 15 years. The concerted support of multiple actors, as was the case during the MDG intervention period, could yield more progress while at the same time consolidating existing achievements. The priority of this issue means that the new Sustainable Development Goals have maintained a goal dedicated to addressing gender imbalances. They have also introduced gender specific targets for some of the other goals.
Chapter 4  Gender inequality: A double break on poverty reduction

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