

Gender and occupational choices in Africa: The role of time poverty and associated risks

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Presented at the FAO-IFAD-ILO Workshop on
“Gaps, trends and current research in gender dimensions of agricultural and rural
employment: differentiated pathways out of poverty”
Rome, 31 March - 2 April 2009



Motivations

- Need to better understand the role of gender in the literature on household occupational choices /income diversification
 - Empirical evidence shows that gender “matters”
 - But simplistic conceptualization of the household predominate
- *Claim 1*: Constraints and modalities of household production affect other productive spheres
- *Claim 2*: Impossible to study the role of household production (and spousal choices) in (West) African contexts within a unitary household model

Theoretical foundations

- Literature on rural household income diversification
 - Role of both choices and constraints
- Non-unitary household models and feminist economics
 - Limited resource pooling among the spouses and limited joint decision-making in West Africa and beyond
 - Household cooperation and conflict (Sen 1991; Carter and Katz 1997)
 - Bargaining among spouses does not lead to efficiency (Lundberg and Pollak, 1993, 1994, 1996, 2001); Udry (1996)

Evidence from Rural West Africa

- A mixture of cooperation and autonomy:
 - Household field (staple production): joint
 - Individual fields or off-farm activities: individual
- Limited resource pooling: budgets are 'segmented'
- Given this evidence the questions arise:
 - What are the implications of spousal autonomy in terms of gender related occupational choices?
 - How is equilibrium affected by rigid time constraints in household production and by uncertainty?

The conjugal contract model

- Spouses are involved in both individual and joint production
 - Three types of activities: SP (subsistence), IA (individual), HP (household)
- Spouses make strategic moves (since actions are interdependent)
- They can cooperate or not
 - If cooperation breaks down, M specializes in SP and F specializes in HP: this lowers both utilities
- **Result 1: if M cares about SP, he makes a transfer to F which benefits not only SP collectively but also F's IA**
- **Result 2: However, if M has great bargaining power the transfer is low (wife's specialization in HP is higher than she would like)**
- Equilibrium differs from the unitary household model

Time gender differentiated constraints

- Heavy constraints on the previous model:
 - Rigidities of gender social norms in HP leads to low/no substitution between M's transfer and F's time inputs
 - F is more specialized in HP: contribution to both SP and IA is lower than otherwise
 - M cannot increase the transfer to F even if he wanted to!!
- If a) there are time indivisibilities or b) returns to IA are uncertain, then:
 - F specializes in SP and HP even more intensely
 - Of all IAs, F shifts to low-return and low-risk types
 - M's focus on IA is enhanced (ability to reap benefits from specialization)

Implications and recommendations

- Women's inability to invest time in remunerative activities can be generated purely by rigid social norms regarding gender roles in household production
 - Different case from low access to inputs or wage inequalities
- Uncertainty amplifies differentiation in genders' occupational choices
- **R1: Need to look into the household & gender social norms when analyzing productive activities**
- **R2: Build options for saving F's time in HP (and enhance substitution) into programs for enhancing women's income-generating activities**