

# Editor's Preface

The international community has agreed that gender equality is one of the main topics in the development agenda. The Millennium Development Goal number 3, for example, is "promote gender equality and empower women". Considerable effort has been devoted recently to quantify and understand gender inequalities at the cross-country level, but most of the existing research concentrates on inequalities based on outcome measures such as education, health or participation, while the institutional basis of these inequalities is often overlooked. For policy action, however, understanding these institutional drivers of gender inequality seems crucial. This book makes a significant contribution in this regard.

In **part 1** of this book, Boris Branisa makes a twofold contribution to the discussion of gender issues and development. The first is related to the measurement and understanding of what Amartya Sen calls substantive freedoms. Under this approach, the success of a society is to be evaluated primarily by the substantive freedoms that people enjoy. In **essay 1** Branisa explores the measurement of social institutions related to gender inequality. These institutions are understood as long-lasting norms, values and codes of conduct that shape everyday life and determine role models that people try to fulfill and satisfy, and as such they are essential to understand gender roles. He uses variables from the OECD Development Centre's Gender, Institutions and Development database and proposes several composite measures of social institutions related to gender inequality. Five subindices combine variables that proxy one dimension of social institutions: Family code, Civil liberties, Physical integrity, Son preference and Ownership rights. The aggregation procedure is based on polychoric principal component analysis. The five one-dimensional measures are then combined to construct the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) which is a multidimensional measure of social institutions related to gender inequality. The aggregation of the dimensions follows the Foster-Greer-Thorbecke approach to poverty measurement. The SIGI and the five composite measures are helpful to understand the deprivation of women and allow ranking and comparing over 100 developing countries as well as to identify priority areas where action is needed in a given country. The essay also shows that these measures complement existing measures and indicators of gender inequality.

The second main contribution of **part 1** is related to another idea championed by Amartya Sen: Going beyond the intrinsic importance of freedom as the objective of development, one should also consider the instrumental effectiveness of freedom of different kinds to promote human freedom, as greater freedom means that people can exert more influence in their lives and at the societal level. In **essays 2 and 3**, Branisa examines some interesting empirical connections at the cross-country level between social institutions related to gender inequality measured by the composite indices proposed in essay 1, and relevant development outcomes. **Essay 2** reviews some of the existing theoretical literature such as household bargaining models and formulates hypothesis about the potentials effects of social institutions related to gender inequality on female education, child mortality, fertility, and governance measured as rule of law and governance. The empirical results show that among developing countries higher inequality in social institutions is associated with worst development outcomes, even after accounting for differences in religion, geography, political system, and the level of income. The focus of **essay 3** is the link between social institutions related to gender inequality, and corruption. The study contributes to the existing literature on the topic showing that when the opportunities of women to participate in social life are restricted in developing countries, the perceived level of corruption tends to be higher. This empirical result is robust, and holds when one accounts for other possible factors that influence corruption.

**Part 2** of this book is concerned with the evolution over time of another type of inequality which is also pertinent for most developing countries, namely inequality between regions. Branisa specifically deals with the question of regional convergence among departments in Colombia in the last quarter of the 20th century understood as whether departments that were lagging behind the national average have been able to catch up in that period. **Essay 4** presents a sound review of the concepts and of the main econometric approaches to measure convergence empirically, and explores the Colombian case discussing crucial data issues and focusing on the two existing yearly time series of consistent per capita income measures: gross departmental product and gross household disposable income. The results suggest no convergence if one relies on gross departmental product, and that only a very slow convergence took place if one observes gross household disposable income.

**Essay 5** examines convergence among departments in Colombia during a similar period, but concentrating on alternative non-income indicators. As suggested among others by Amartya Sen, it is important to go beyond income measures and focus on social opportunities which contribute to the overall freedom that people have to live as they choose. Branisa discusses relevant public policies and major reforms put in place in Colombia during the period, as well as data and measurement issues concerning social indicators, and empirically examines convergence using variables reflecting outcomes related to education, health and

nourishment. The main results show on one hand that there has been convergence in basic education. On the other hand, no robust evidence of convergence is found using health measures, which seems consistent with the results of **essay 4**.

Taken together, the essays in this book make an important contribution to the understanding of gender and regional inequalities and are of interest to scholars and policy-makers alike.

Prof. Stephan Klasen, Ph.D.

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