



Geography and Power Relations: Women



AFRICA



Women in Sub-Saharan Africa

- ◀ Much of Sub-Saharan Africa, especially rural areas, is dominated by women (population)
- ◀ Most rural-to-urban migrants are men
- ◀ **Domosh and Seager:**
 - ◀ *“...while women are left behind to tend farms and manage the household economy. Indeed parts of rural South Africa and Zimbabwe have become feminized zones virtually depopulated of men.”*



Heavy Responsibilities

- ▶ **Women have many responsibilities with few rights and little say**
 - ▶ **Produce 70% of region's food, with almost no aid from modern technology**
 - ▶ **Walk to acquire water from nearest working pump gets longer as water supplies decrease**
 - ▶ **Firewood cut at ever-greater distances from villages**
 - ▶ **Struggle for survival as men leave for towns and often marry other wives and have other children**



Finances

Women become head of households

- ▶ Difficulty attaining bank loans
 - ▶ Rural tradition dictates that money not be lent to women
- ▶ Might want to acquire title to land, but cannot
 - ▶ Land titles not awarded to women

Overworked, Underappreciated

- ▶ Young girls become trapped in cycle of poverty and overwork
- ▶ Little money for school – money goes to boys first
- ▶ Little girls go with mother to fields as soon as they can walk and carry things
 - ▶ 12 hours/day, 7 days/week
- ▶ “men’s crops” – men trade in what women produce (e.g. tea)
- ▶ 1970s: Kenya tried to increase productivity on tea plantations by handing out bonuses – to men not women



Move Toward Equality

- ▶ 1990s: women began lobbying for greater representation in govt (southern and eastern Africa)
- ▶ Uganda: set quota that women must hold at least 20% of legislative seats
- ▶ S. Africa: established constitution (post-apartheid) with universal suffrage
 - ▶ Major political parties reserve % of seats won for women
- ▶ Rwanda: women hold highest proportion of legislative seats – 50%+
 - ▶ Unbalanced sex ration after civil war
 - ▶ Constitution recognizes equality of women and set quota of 30% in all govt decision-making bodies

The background is a vibrant red color, overlaid with a complex pattern of overlapping triangles. The triangles are in various shades of red, orange, and yellow, creating a dynamic and textured effect. Some triangles are solid, while others are outlined in white. The overall composition is abstract and modern.

INDIA



Dowry Deaths

- ▶ Thousands of girls in India are betrothed through arranged marriages
 - ▶ **Betrothed:** promised in marriage
- ▶ In extreme cases, disputes over the dowry have led to death of the bride
 - ▶ **Dowry:** price to be paid by the bride's family to the groom's father
- ▶ In other cases brides are brutally punished (e.g. burned, severely beaten) for father's failure to pay
- ▶ Practice is not declining



Legal Fail

- ▶ Power imbalance between genders cannot simply be legislated away
- ▶ Legal aid offices set up by govt entities
- ▶ **Family Courts Act:** created network of family courts to hear domestic cases, including dowry disputes
- ▶ Judges tend to be older men whose objective is to “keep the family together”
- ▶ Hindu culture attaches great importance to the family structure – courts operate on this principle



Cultural Shifts?

- ▶ India's booming economy and growing number of educated women and men is impacting marriage customs in urban areas
- ▶ Love marriages on the rise
- ▶ Online dating on the rise
- ▶ Divorces on the rise



Complicated Statistics

- ▶ Some stats point to improving conditions for women, while others don't
- ▶ India still gives preference to males
 - ▶ 2011 census: 940 girls to 1000 boys
 - ▶ Many pregnant women undergo gender-determining tests and elect abortions when the fetus is a girl
 - ▶ Female infanticide common in some areas
- ▶ **Solution:** Power relations must shift at the family, local, regional, and national scales