



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 with a complex geometric pattern of overlapping triangles in various shades of red, orange, and yellow. Some triangles are solid, while others are outlined in white. The pattern is dense and covers the entire page.

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