

Correlation Between Economic Growth & Women's Rights

Swara Seshadri¹ and Chad Marsh[#]

¹Lake Washington High School

[#]Advisor

ABSTRACT

The following paper outlines the correlation between economic growth and sustainability and women's rights in many countries throughout the world and how this can have an impact on the women around the world. It also looks at the issue of women's rights and women empowerment from three different perspectives in order to understand why women empowerment is not encouraging and isolate the root of the issue. Finally, it ties the perspectives together and shows how economic sustainability could be reached through better women empowerment and why each perspective should play a role.

Introduction

Imagine increasing the global gross domestic product by 26% (approximately 28 million USD). In theory, this seems quite unachievable, however the solution is well within reach. If women and men had an equal split in the labor markets, this 26% increase could be present by 2025. If this significant of an increase could take place so easily, it poses an important question. How does empowering women correlate help reach economic sustainability and what are solutions to the challenges that are obstructing this goal?

Review of Literature/Methodology

To begin my research, I needed to define the term economic sustainability in a measurable manner. Economic sustainability can mean different things to many different people and for this paper and the context of my research I defined economic sustainability as meeting the goals of the United Nations' (UN) 2030 Sustainable Agenda. The United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015 and consisted of seventeen goals ranging from universally ending poverty, protecting the planet, and more. The 2030 Sustainability Agenda aimed to address and fix each of these goals in the 15 years after it was adopted. Meeting each of these goals is the definition of economic sustainability in terms of this paper.

Next, I needed to identify which of the sustainability goals would be most affected by women's rights. To do this, I needed to conduct research on the current research discussing the correlation between women's rights and overall economic growth. But first, I researched the progression of women's rights through the years and what the formula of economic growth was to provide adequate context for my research. Using a YouTube video by Crash Course US History, I was able to piece together how women's rights progressed over the years. I learned about women's efforts during the war and Susan B Anthony's fight for the right to vote. The trend showed that as technology advanced, the movement for women's rights become more prominent. However, I needed to corroborate the trend shown in this video with other studies.

In the Annual Review of Economics, Volume 4 (2012), pages 339-372, by Matthias Doepke, Michele Tertilt and Alessandra Voena, discuss the economics and politics of women's rights. On page 342, figure 1, a

scatter plot comparing the GEM (an index made by the United Nations to measure women's empowerment) and the GDP per capita of many countries, depicts the strong connection between women's rights and economic growth. Countries like Yemen or Bangladesh, which had GEM factors of less than 0.2, also had GDP numbers less than \$5000. However, countries such as the United States or Norway, which had GEM factors higher than 0.7, had GDP per capita that was greater than \$35,000. The correlation coefficient of the scatter plot was 0.8, meaning that the graph indicated a significant connection between women's rights and economic development.

In 2021, this was corroborated by David J Ranz, a writer for The Economic Times, who took a closer look at India's economy and lack of women's empowerment. In India, women's labor force participation had fallen from 35% in 1990 to 25% in current times despite the economic growth India experienced. This trend is different from the ones discussed in the Annual Review of Economics. However, Ranz discussed how if gender parity were to be reached in India, the GDP could increase by as much as 27%. Not only does boosting women's empowerment help the country's economy, it would also help other groups that would potentially disagree with giving more rights to women such as men. If women were adequately represented in the workforce, wages would be raised for everyone, even men.

If this form of women's empowerment benefited everyone and boosts economic growth significantly, it is surprising that there are many challenges in the way of achieving equality. This issue can be viewed from many perspectives but the ones I will discuss are from the perspective of men, women and the government.

Discussion/Discourse Analysis

Men

From the beginning of time, across the world, men have held the power in most relationships in women. They hold more power in the government, which will be touched on later and have more rights overall. Because they have grown up with this form of privilege, many of them believe that women do not deserve rights and with the use of modern technology such as social media, these opinions can be shared and influence children growing up. One prominent example in today's time would be Andrew Tate. Tate is a widely known celebrity who posts a variety of sexist and degrading comments on his platforms. One such example is when he tweeted that "if [a woman] put [her]self in a position to be raped, [they] must bare some responsibility." These opinions, while they do not directly affect women's rights, influence other people's and children's minds through the power of social media. This can be very harmful to the women's rights movement as these children would eventually be the people to make decisions in the future. However, men such as Andrew Tate, should actually focus on empowering women because they benefit from it as well.

According to The Economic Times, if women were empowered in the workforce, wages would increase as a whole and so would economic growth. Raquel Fernandez, who wrote an article for the Journal of Economic Growth, also discusses why men should be in favor of women's empowerment. Fernandez writes that "although men in general benefited from a patriarchal society in which women enjoyed few economic and political rights, they also suffered from the system's welfare consequences for their daughter." This is because under the patriarchy, there is often an implicit tax placed on a father's efforts to increase opportunities for his daughter rather than for his son. This lack of women empowerment directly affects men in many aspects and therefore instead of hindering empowerment, men should join the fight for equality.

Women:

Although rights for women directly benefit women, many women have been influenced from childhood to conform to society's expectations and now have the same sexist mindset as those who raised and influenced them. This is a struggle that has no real solution because of the fact that the sexist mindset has been so deeply ingrained into them. Because many of these women were raised in parts of the world that do not accept

that women can have anything more than a traditional role in a household. In her novel, Melinda Gates discusses how in India, a poor woman could give her child medical care because the head of the family, her father-in-law, believed that she needed to stay home and cook for the family. Gates states “she offered her father-in-law no resistance, even to save the life of her child.” (116) If women were able to make their own decisions then women like this one in India would be able to stand up for their rights.

The Government:

This discourse community closely relates the one about men because currently across the world, men make up the majority of most governments. Women are extremely lacking in political empowerment and so therefore, a majority of decisions are made by men in the government. One of the most recent and prominent hindrances to women’s rights was the overruling of the Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court Case. The overturning of this case essentially destroyed the federal legal right of women to get an abortion and left the decision up to the state governments. This decision actually had a large impact on the United States economy. CNN wrote an article about this issue and interviewed different people. In one interview with Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, Yellen said that “Roe v. Wade and access to reproductive health care, including abortion, helped lead to increased labor force participation... [which] increased their earning potential.” Thus, the government should actually support women’s rights because it would boost women’s earning potential and therefore improve the economy overall.

Conclusion

Based on the research, I was able to isolate that advocating for women’s rights played a significant role in achieving Goal 1 (ending poverty), Goal 2 (making food secure for everyone), Goal 3 (ensuring health to everyone), Goal 5 (achieving gender equality), Goal 8 (promoting full and productive employment), and Goal 10 (reducing inequalities overall). By helping to meet these 6 goals, advocating for women’s rights plays a significant role in reaching economic sustainability. By explaining how women’s rights increase wages, create more opportunities for women, and boost economic growth, many of the obstacles that women face when fighting for their rights can be removed.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor for the valuable insight provided to me on this topic.

References

- “Andrew Tate.” *Twitter*, Twitter, <https://twitter.com/cobratate>.
- Dahlum, S., Knutsen, C. H., & Mechkova, V. (2022). Women’s political empowerment and economic growth. *World Development*, 156, 105822–. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.105822>
- Doepke, M., Tertilt, M., & Voena, A. (2012). The Economics and Politics of Women’s Rights. *Annual Review of Economics*, 4(1), 339–372. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-economics-061109-080201>
- “Empowering Half of the Workforce.” *Economic Times Blog*, 14 Feb. 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/blogs/et-commentary/empowering-half-of-the-workforce/>.
- Fernandez, R. (2014). Women’s rights and development. *Journal of Economic Growth* (Boston, Mass.), 19(1), 37–80. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10887-013-9097-x>

- Gates, Melinda. "The Silent Inequality." *The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World*, Flatiron Books, New York, 2021.
- Green, John. "Women's Suffrage: Crash Course US History #31." *YouTube*, YouTube, 26 Sept. 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGEMscZE5dY&ab_channel=CrashCourse.
- "Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development | Department of Economic and Social Affairs." *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>.
- "Women's Economic Empowerment." *OECD*, <https://www.oecd.org/development/womens-economic-empowerment.htm>.
- Tappe, Anneken. "The Economic Consequences of Overturning Roe v. Wade Will Be Enormous, Experts Warn | CNN Business." *CNN*, Cable News Network, 24 June 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/24/economy/economic-impact-roe-wade-overturn/index.html>.
- UNWomen. "A Global History of Women's Rights, in 3 Minutes." *YouTube*, YouTube, 16 Jan. 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_UjYOfmkn8&ab_channel=UNWomen.
- Thelwell, Kim. "How Women's Rights Drive Economic Development." *The Borgen Project*, Kim Thelwell <https://Borgenproject.org/Wp-Content/Uploads/Logo.jpg>, 9 July 2020, <https://borgenproject.org/womens-rights-drives-economic-development/#:~:text=As%20more%20women%20enter%20the,greater%20investment%20and%20job%20creation>
- "The Formula for Economic Growth | Intellections." *YouTube*, YouTube, 27 June 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4G4AiuWOSk&ab_channel=PolicyEd.
- "Viewpoint: What If Women Ruled the World?" *BBC News*, BBC, 8 Mar. 2013, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-21661744>.