



SHIFTING GENDER NORMS: AN IMPERATIVE FOR A SKILLS AND JOBS REVOLUTION

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OPENING REMARKS



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Shifting Gender Norms for Skills and Jobs

September 2025

Rachael Pierotti



GENDER
INNOVATION
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Unequal access to skills and jobs

Occupational gender segregation

- Concentration of men and women in different types of jobs
- Contributes to gender differences in earnings
- Consequence of gender differences in access to training and skills, including for jobs in priority sectors for future economic growth



Occupational gender segregation

Among informal sector workers in Conakry, Guinea, what word was most commonly used to describe women working in male-dominated trades?

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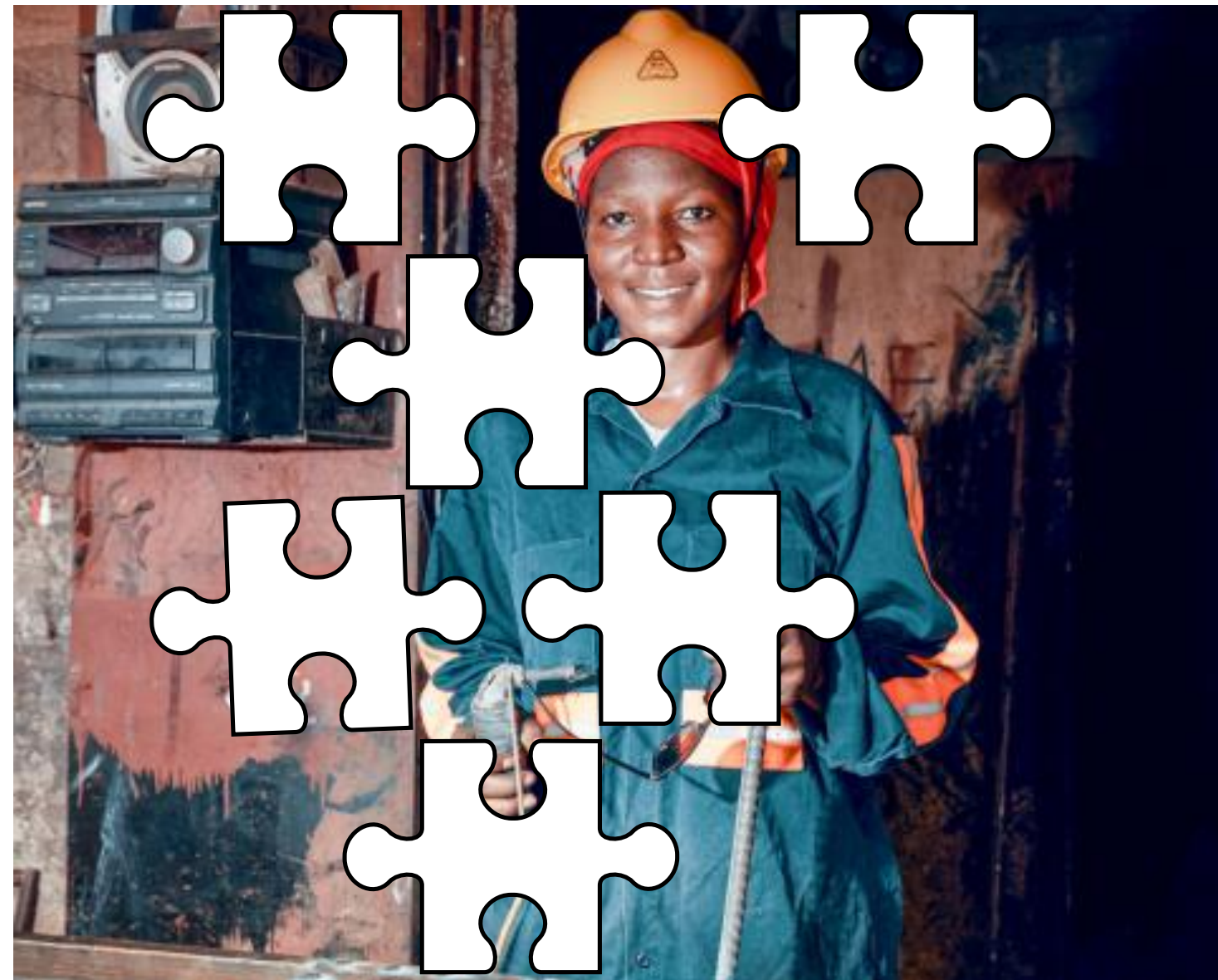
Brave

Occupational gender segregation

Why so few women in male-dominated trades?

Common explanations:

- “Women don’t have time.”
- Avoidance of dirty work.



Occupational gender segregation

Why so few women in male-dominated trades?

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- Avoidance of dirty work.

Missing pieces:

- Paternalism and harassment
- Capital requirements



“You have to work hard to show those people that even if you have work at home, you have children, you have your husband, but you can also work like men do.”
-Female painter

Thank you!

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[Africa Gender Innovation Lab](#)



Photo by: Chadi Tawassou

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ADMIRER IN THEORY, PUSHED OUT IN PRACTICE: CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN PURSUING WORK IN MALE-DOMINATED SECTORS IN GUINEA, CONAKRY

Authors: Rachael Pierotti, Maria Emilia Cucagna, Isabel Pike, Marie Soukaye Mbeye¹

KEY MESSAGES

- Women business owners in Conakry, Republic of Guinea operating in male-dominated sectors of the economy earn substantially more than women running businesses in sectors with a high concentration of female owners. This echoes research by the Africa Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) in other contexts: [Breaking Barriers: Female Entrepreneurs Who Cross Over to Male-Dominated Sectors](#) and [Profiting from Parity: Unlocking the Potential of Women's Business in Africa](#).
- Recent qualitative research by GIL reveals that both men and women express favorable attitudes toward women working in male-dominated sectors. They described such women as exceptionally brave and virtuous. This challenges the notion that social disapproval is a major barrier for women in these fields.
- While domestic responsibilities and personal preferences are commonly cited as reasons for the under-representation of women in male-dominated sectors, these factors overlook critical issues. Most prominently, these justifications ignore constraints linked to the startup capital requirements for businesses in male-dominated sectors and omit discussion of the paternalism and harassment faced by women working in male-dominated spaces.
- Effective policies to increase women's participation in higher-earning, male-dominated sectors must address both entry barriers, such as access to capital, and retention challenges, like hostile work environments. Without tackling these issues, occupational gender segregation and its resulting wage gap will persist.

¹ Nelly Alloum contributed to the preparation of this policy brief.

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/africa-gender-innovation-lab>

ABOUT THE AFRICA GENDER INNOVATION LAB

The Africa Gender Innovation Lab (GIL) conducts impact evaluations of development interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa, seeking to generate evidence on how to close gender gaps in earnings, productivity, assets, and agency. The GIL team is currently working on over 80 impact evaluations in more than 30 countries in Africa with the aim of building an evidence base with lessons for the region.

The impact objective of GIL is increasing take-up of effective policies by governments, development organizations, and the private sector to address the underlying causes of gender inequality in Africa, particularly in terms of women's economic and social empowerment. The Lab aims to do this by producing and delivering a new body of evidence and developing a compelling narrative, geared towards policymakers, on what works and what does not work in promoting gender equality.

Breaking the Cycle: Ending School Violence to Unlock Girls' Potential

Lelys Dinarte-Diaz

Economist, Development Research Group
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Breaking the Cycle: Ending School Violence to Unlock Girls' Potential

- Restrictive gender norms fuel tolerance of violence
- Girls face harassment, fear, and unsafe schools
- Violence pushes girls out of school → lost skills & future jobs

Safe schools are a prerequisite for girls to learn, thrive, and work.

A Field Tale: After School Programs in El Salvador

Intervention:

- After-School Program (clubs), 20 weeks, 2x/week
- Run by trained *community volunteers* (low-cost and scalable) from Glasswing International

Results:

- ▼ Violent behaviors (in/out of school)
- ▼ Approval of antisocial behaviors
- ▲ SES, school engagement, academic performance
- 🧠 EEG data: improved emotion regulation



From Safer Schools to Gender-Equitable Futures

- **Safety:** Reduce violence → remove barrier for girls' learning
- **Skills:** Build socioemotional + cognitive foundations
- **Norms:** Challenge expectations, expand aspirations

Invest in safe, psychology-based programs → unlock girls' education and economic opportunities.

LEAS | LEARNING TO EMPOWER
ADOLESCENT GIRLS AT SCALE

Thank you!

