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Do attitudes of men and women towards gender equality affect women’s economic empowerment?

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Abstract

The United Nations have identified women’s economic empowerment as a critical component for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Changing attitudes towards gender equality has attracted the attention of policymakers and development practitioners as an important driver for improving women’s economic empowerment indicators. Studies however have mixed results on women’s economic empowerment indicators, depending on policies, laws, and institutions. Most of these studies focus on women’s attitudes, particularly the wife in the household. Moreover, the studies measure women’s economic empowerment in terms of labour force participation indicators such as wage employment, which are not common, particularly in rural areas where most women live. Using nationally representative time use survey data, this paper examines the impact of attitudes of men and women couples towards gender equality on women’s time in market work and unpaid work, in Uganda. It uses an instrumental variable approach to account for potential reverse causality between attitudes and time use. We find that women have more gender-equal attitudes than men. Results of multivariate Tobit regression show that gender equality attitude of men (egalitarian attitude) is positively and significantly associated with women’s time in market work. Similarly, gender equality attitude of men is negatively and significantly associated with women’s time in unpaid work. However, we find no significant relationship between the gender equality attitude of women and their time in market work and unpaid work. We also find that personal time leisure, socialisation, and self-care are associated with women’s time spent in market and unpaid work. Policies that aim to improve women’s economic empowerment indicators should focus on changing men’s attitudes towards equality.

Keywords: Attitudes, gender equality, Uganda , women’s economic empowerment