Equality between men and women is more than a matter of social justice; it’s a fundamental human right. It also makes good economic sense. When women have equal access to education and participate fully in business and economic decision-making, they are a key driving force against poverty.

Yet, women currently represent about 70 percent of the world’s poor, comprise two-thirds of the global illiterate population, are more likely to hold vulnerable jobs, and frequently earn lower wages than men.

To be effective, any agenda aimed at promoting socio-economic development should aim to promote gender equity. Furthermore, increasing women’s participation in the design of development policy agendas is crucial to ensure the equal and accurate representation of their needs.

PEP’s research and capacity building model contributes to both aims simultaneously. Not only are nearly 50 percent of PEP-supported researchers women, the research PEP supports also contributes new and contextualized knowledge in favor of gender equity and women’s empowerment.

48% PEP researchers are women

27% PEP research focuses on gender

458 female researchers in 57 countries

32% female researchers in low-income economies or fragile/conflict situations

77 projects focus on gender issues in 35 countries

35% gender projects in low-income economies or fragile/conflict situations
PEP findings
Exploring a variety of gender issues worldwide

PEP’s unique Grant Plus mechanism provides manifold support to developing country researchers. Offering training and mentorship in analytical techniques and policy engagement, the program empowers local researchers to conduct high quality, policy-oriented research at home.

PEP currently has four global thematic research groups. Thanks to the contribution of world-leading field experts linked globally through the PEP networks, each group provides support and training in a specific research method or approach.

- Community-based monitoring systems
- Macro-micro policy modeling
- Microeconomic analysis
- Experimental research

These approaches allow PEP researchers to analyze a broad range of policy issues related to poverty and sustainable development, including matters of gender equity and women’s empowerment.

Some common trends have emerged from the findings of these projects, summarized in the following boxes.

**Teen girls choose education over childbearing**

- **Egypt**: Providing education to disadvantaged girls increases desired age at first birth.
- **Chile**: Informing students about loans and scholarships for post-secondary education increases desired age at first birth.
- **Colombia**: Providing a cash transfer conditional on school performance and re-enrolment is linked to a decrease in teenage pregnancy.

**Gender discrimination in credit access?**

- **Cameroon**: Women face significant restrictions to providing collateral when applying for loans, due to men’s traditional rights to property.
- **Nigeria**: Credit access is more restricted for SMEs, and most female-owned businesses fall into this category.
- **Senegal**: Discrimination against women for senior roles in business, i.e. positions with responsibility for applying for financial services.
- **Bangladesh**: The constraints rather come from within the household. Despite being the recipients of entrepreneurial loans, women often allow men in their households to use their loans, while they allocate their own time to household responsibilities.
The power of microcredit for women

- **Nigeria, Benin:** Women who use microcredit for entrepreneurship are significantly more empowered.
- **Bolivia:** Women experience increased household decision-making in municipalities with access to microfinance.
- **Cameroon:** Loosening credit constraints would significantly increase female sector productivity and job creation.

Supporting female empowerment through business training

**Peru**

- Business training courses for women led to increased sales and earnings, which in turn helped reduce gender inequity.
- Female microfinance clients who took training courses were better at repaying the loans.
- A peer-to-peer training program improved female financial participation and social capital.

Gender disparities at home and in work

- **China, Sri Lanka:** Discrimination against women linked to lower pay and longer unemployment periods, despite displaying more desirable labor market characteristics than men.
- **Cameroon:** Lower education levels among women contribute to gender wage disparity.
- **Bangladesh, India:** Bargaining positions between husbands and wives linked to earning power.

Community-level facilities can ease women's poverty in rural Africa

**Kenya, Niger**

- 95% of multi-dimensionally poor women in Kenya live in rural areas.
- The poorest women are the most deprived of access to water, sanitation and shelter – common in rural areas.
- Improving access to electricity, sanitation facilities, and clean water can help reduce women’s asset and health poverty.
- Higher levels of education are linked to a lower probability of being poor.
PEP impact
Empowering women for sustainable development

Improving female empowerment through microcredit schemes in Nigeria

Findings from a PEP-supported study into the impact of a rural microcredit scheme targeting female entrepreneurs in Ekiti State, Nigeria, showed that the direct beneficiaries are significantly more empowered (economically, socially, and at home). It also contributes to improving welfare and reducing vulnerability in their households.

The evidence was taken up almost immediately to influence the design of two new female-targeted microfinance programs in the state. Soon after, the federal government asked the researchers to advise on the design of a national program for women’s empowerment.

Removing credit constraints for female entrepreneurs contributes to economic growth in Cameroon

PEP researchers in Cameroon found that women’s restricted access to credit—mainly due to difficulty of providing collateral, as traditionally only men can own property—has repercussions on the national economy. Their findings suggest that loosening these constraints would significantly increase productivity, job creation and GDP.

These findings were taken up to feed directly into the World Bank’s Memorandum of the Cameroon Economy. The researchers were also the only local experts invited to participate in a special high-level advisory meeting, co-organized by the World Bank Mission and Cameroon authorities, to discuss adopting policies and measures to promote development in Cameroon and achieve the country’s emergence by 2035.

Building and promoting local female researchers’ expertise leads to their increased participation in national policy processes

51% of PEP-supported female researchers experience a significant career-promoting event as a result of their PEP project.

37% of these events lead to their increased involvement in policy processes.

Female researchers in Mongolia become national experts following PEP project

PEP support for a project in Mongolia resulted in the first locally-led randomized control trial (RCT) in the country. The team of three women (including the team leader) and two men produced high quality evidence to support prolonging the national vocational training program (VTP). The team’s findings have already had a direct impact on policy, with the Mongolian government committing to and improving the VTP.

The success of this project has led to two of the female team members becoming national references and key experts on this type of research. As the only local researchers with the expertise to conduct RCTs in the country, they have been solicited to collaborate with various institutions and to advice on using this approach in other contexts. They were also invited to present their findings at several international conferences.