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WHICH SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS MATTER MOST FOR WOMEN'S EARNINGS? NEW INSIGHTS FROM SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Evidence on gender-specific returns to socio-emotional skills in developing economies is lacking. To inform the selection of socio-emotional skills in policy design, a new study mobilizing data from 17 African countries with 41,873 respondents examines gender differences in ten self-reported socio-emotional skills and their relationship with education and earnings.

KEY MESSAGES

- **Men report higher levels of socio-emotional skills than women, except for self-control, even after accounting for positive self-concept.** Prevailing gender norms and lack of access to educational opportunities potentially contribute to the reported gap in socio-emotional skills.
- **Education and socio-emotional skills are positively correlated for both men and women.** However, higher levels of education are associated with higher gender gaps in interpersonal skills. Thus, closing the educational gender gap might not fully address the socio-emotional skills gender gap.
- **Socio-emotional skills are associated with higher earnings for both men and women.**
 - Intrapersonal skills (positive self-concept, emotional regulation, self-control, perseverance, personal initiative problem-solving and decision-making) are associated with higher income for both men and women.
 - Women's earnings also increase with their interpersonal skills (empathy, expressiveness, interpersonal relatedness, and teamwork), while men's earnings are not significantly correlated with these skills.
- **Findings from our sample suggest that women in Sub-Saharan Africa could benefit from training programs designed to improve their socio-emotional skills, especially interpersonal skills.**

GENDER INNOVATION LAB

The 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 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.

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MOTIVATION

Socio-emotional skills play an important role in shaping labor market outcomes such as earnings or job type. As such, socio-emotional skills trainings have emerged as a promising tool to improve labor market outcomes, with the potential to reduce the existing gender gap. However, the question of which skills matter most for women's economic empowerment, especially in the context of developing countries, remains largely unanswered. Yet the structure of labor markets and social norms differ greatly from the Western countries where the stylized facts related to socio-emotional skills have been established.

WHAT WE DID

We analyzed 10 socio-emotional skills (see definitions in Figure 1) in surveys conducted in 8 Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries (Benin, the Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, and Togo) and under the Future of Business Survey, which includes 15 SSA countries.

In our total sample of 41,873 individuals, 42.7% of the respondents are women; most are adults in both urban and rural areas, and the average age is 36 years old.

WHAT WE FOUND

WOMEN HAVE LOWER SELF-REPORTED SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS LEVELS THAN MEN

- **Men report higher levels of socio-emotional skills than women, looking at both aggregate and disaggregated socio-emotional skills.** In fact, except for self-control, women report lower socio-emotional skills levels than men for all skills considered in the study (see Figure 2). Our estimates show that the gender gap in overall socio-emotional skills is equivalent to the socio-emotional skill associated with 5.6 years of education. These findings are robust to controlling for positive self-concept, to address the potential for women to underestimate their skills.
- **The study distinguishes between intrapersonal and interpersonal skills and finds that the gender gap is even greater for intrapersonal than interpersonal skills.** Additionally, we find that intrapersonal skills are more widely measured than interpersonal skills. We hypothesize that gender norms could partly explain these gender differences in socio-emotional skills.

FIGURE 1: DEFINITION OF 10 SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

INTRAPERSONAL	INTERPERSONAL
<p>Positive Self Concept: Identifying and interpreting one's own thoughts and behaviors and evaluating one's strengths and weakness and knowing your preferences, values and biases</p>	<p>Empathy: Understanding another's viewpoint or thoughts and have emotional concern for another's situation or experience</p>
<p>Emotional Regulation: Maintaining or changing one's own emotions by controlling one's thoughts and behavioral responses</p>	<p>Expressiveness: Explaining ideas in a way that others will understand and openly express one's opinion</p>
<p>Perseverance: Sustaining effort despite setbacks</p>	<p>Interpersonal Relatedness: Taking actions intended to build trust and benefit others, initiating and maintaining relationships and being respectful, encouraging and caring towards others</p>
<p>Personal Initiative: Developing long-term goals and putting these goals into action under one's own volition</p>	<p>Teamwork: Taking other's perspective, listen and communicate in groups of two or more people, identifying situations involving group problem-solving and decision-making, and organizing and coordinating team members to create shared plans and goals</p>
<p>Problem Solving: Approaching a problem by gathering information, generating a number of solutions and evaluating the consequences of these solutions before acting</p> <p>Self-Control: Focusing one's attention, staying on task, breaking habits, restraining impulses and keeping good self-discipline</p>	

EDUCATION MIGHT NOT BE ENOUGH TO CLOSE THE GENDER GAP IN SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

- Schooling is positively correlated with socio-emotional skills development, as higher levels of socio-emotional skills are found among men and women with higher levels of education. This gap is mainly driven by the fact that women without formal schooling report lower levels of competence in 3 out of 6 intrapersonal skills: perseverance, personal initiative, and problem-solving and decision-making. Yet, these women hold an advantage over men regarding self-control and expressiveness.
- We also find that gender differences in socio-emotional skills increase as education level increases. This holds for each interpersonal skill, along with emotional regulation and self-control (6 out of 10 socio-emotional skills).
- These findings imply that education might not fully overcome gender inequalities in terms of socio-emotional skills level and may even widen inequalities for some socio-emotional skills. Thus, closing the gender gap in education would only close about 17% of the gender gap in socio-emotional skills.

SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS ARE LINKED TO HIGHER EARNINGS

- Accounting for demographic and educational characteristics, women in our sample earn 56% less than their male counterparts. Given that men have significantly higher levels of socio-emotional skills, one might be interested in the relationship between socio-emotional skills and earnings.
- We find that socio-emotional skills are associated with higher earnings for both men and women, but the type of socio-emotional skills driving this relationship differs by gender (see Figure 3).
- Intrapersonal skills are associated with higher income for both men and women. However, a high level of positive self-concept is more strongly correlated with income for men than for women, while women's earnings increase more as perseverance increases.
- Women's earnings also increase with their interpersonal skills, while men's earnings are not significantly correlated with these skills. Thus, expressiveness and teamwork correspond to higher earnings for women, even though these two skills are the lowest reported ones among educated women.

FIGURE 2: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS

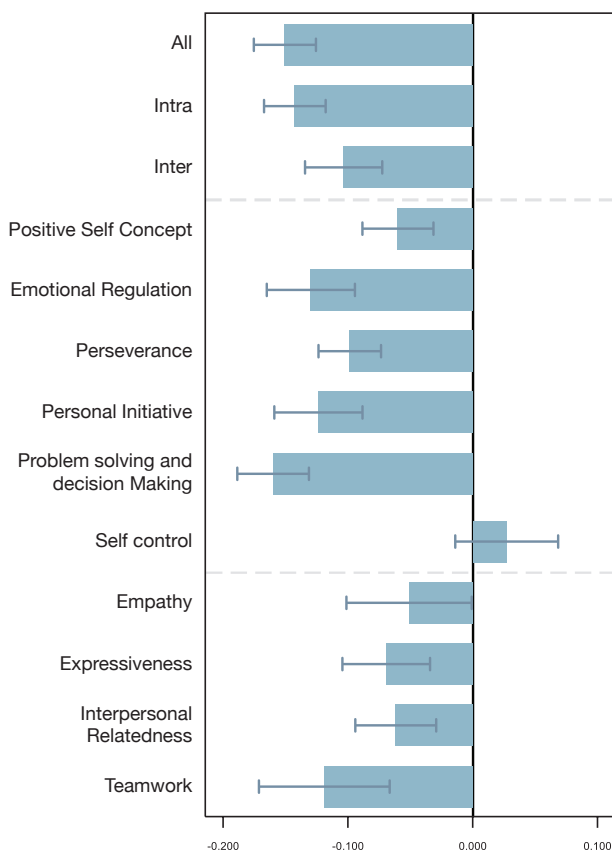
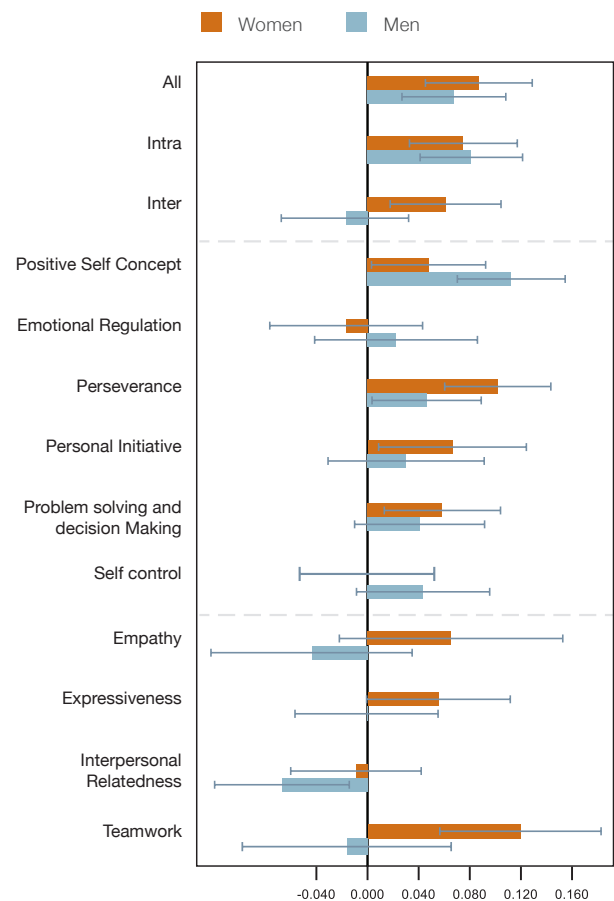


FIGURE 3: CORRELATION WITH EARNINGS





These findings suggest that the current education system may not allow women to acquire, during their schooling, the socio-emotional skills that could benefit them the most in terms of earnings once they enter the labor market.

EDUCATED MEN AND WOMEN HAVE THE HIGHEST CORRELATION BETWEEN SOCIO-EMOTIONAL SKILLS AND EARNINGS

- While labor market outcomes improve as intrapersonal skills rise for both educated and uneducated men, education for men heralds a stronger positive correlation between earnings and intrapersonal skills, mainly by indicating a switch from a negative to a positive association with expressiveness and interpersonal relatedness.
- Socio-emotional skills are not significantly associated with higher earnings for women without education. On the contrary, earnings are positively correlated with both intrapersonal and interpersonal skills for women with the highest education levels.
- Overall, the positive link between social-emotional skills and earnings increases with education, and this is especially true for women. Yet the channels through which education plays a role seem to differ between men and women, as while education is associated with a higher positive correlation between earnings and interpersonal skills for men, it is associated with a higher positive correlation between earnings and intrapersonal skills for women.

CONCLUSION

Evidence from the existing literature shows that socio-emotional skills positively influence labor market outcomes. Findings from our sample suggest that women in Sub-Saharan Africa could benefit from training programs designed to improve their socio-emotional skills, as women earn on average 54% less than men and report lower levels of socio-emotional skills.

Educational attainment, which likely contributes to the increase of socio-emotional skills for both men and women, might not be enough to eliminate gender differences in socio-emotional skills, since even among the most educated individuals, women still have lower levels of socio-emotional skills than men.

Research on the relationship between socio-emotional skills and labor market outcomes should be deepened to improve the design of future programs teaching socio-emotional skills in Sub-Saharan Africa. Our results suggest that public interventions seeking to equip women with interpersonal skills (e.g., teamwork, expressiveness, and interpersonal relatedness) may provide an effective pathway to reduce gender disparities in the labor market.

FOR MORE INFORMATION,
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