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Intergenerational Mobility and Interpersonal Inequality in an African Economy

Sylvie Lambert, Martin Ravallion and Dominique van de Walle¹

Abstract: How much economic mobility is there across generations in a poor, primarily rural, economy? How much do intergenerational linkages contribute to current inequality? We address these questions using original survey data on Senegal that include a sub-household measure of consumption for cells within the household. While intergenerational linkages are evident, we find a relatively high degree of mobility across generations, associated with the shift from farm to non-farm sectors and greater economic activity of women. Male-dominated bequests of land and housing bring little gain to consumption and play little role in explaining inequality, though they have important effects on sector of activity. Inheritance of non-land assets and the education and occupation of parents (especially the mother) and their choices about children's schooling are more important to adult welfare than property inheritance. Significant gender inequality in consumption is evident, though it is almost entirely explicable in terms of factors such as education and (non-land) inheritance. There are a number of other pronounced gender differences, with intergenerational linkages coming through the mother rather than the father.

Keywords: inheritance, land, mobility, inequality, gender

JEL: D31, I31, O15

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