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WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE AGRICULTURAL HOUSEHOLD:
BARGAINING AND HUMAN CAPITAL

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Note: Center Discussion Papers are preliminary materials circulated to stimulate discussions and critical comments.

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Abstract

This paper reviews the methods and empirical findings from economic analyses of women's contribution to social welfare and the determinants of their human capital. To understand better women's roles in agricultural households, three themes have gained prominence in the economics literature. First is the conceptualization of the unified family as coordinator of production and consumption over the lifecycle. Second is the role of separability of production and consumption decisions in the agricultural household that depends on the equivalence of hired and of family labor and the existence of competitive factor markets. Third, is the exploration of individualistic Nash-bargaining or Pareto efficient collective coordination within the family that preserves the distinct preferences of individuals to be expressed in behavioral variation across families. The changing bargaining power of men and women is traced primarily to the increasing investment in women's human capital, in the forms of nutrition, health, schooling, mobility and family planning. This reduction in the gender gap in human capital is shown to be closely related to declines in mortality, fertility, and population growth in most studied populations and may importantly affect the intrahousehold distribution of resources.