

The Fourth Fuwa Award Comments

Recipient: Abu S. Shonchoy (Professor, Florida International University)

Prof. Shonchoy has made a significant contribution to the economic literature on women's empowerment in the developing world by making research for evidence-based policymaking. His research covers financial inclusion, skills training, infrastructure, and education, all of which are closely related to gender empowerment.

Prof. Shonchoy has published extensively in international peer-reviewed journals, including the Journal of Public Economics, Journal of Development Economics, American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, World Economic Review, and World Development, as well as inter-disciplinary journals such as Nature Scientific Reports, to name a few.

I would like to highlight Prof. Shonchoy's articles, which have a particular focus on gender issues. First, a joint paper with Jonathan Morduch, Jean Lee, and Saravana Rabindran titled, "Narrowing the Gender Gap in Mobile Banking," Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, has shown evidence from two connected field experiments in Bangladesh designed to encourage the adoption and use of mobile banking by poor, illiterate migrants who live in Dhaka and send money back to their extended families. Despite large differences between female and male migrants in income and education, this study shows that a training program led to similarly large, positive impacts on mobile banking use by female migrants, substantially narrowing the gender gap although the increases in adoption did not lead to similar patterns in usage. Taken as a whole, the results show the possibility to narrow gender gaps in technology use through targeted interventions, but the results also show the persistence of gender gaps in the broader impacts of the technology.

Second, Sijia Xu, Abu S. Shonchoy, and Tomoki Fujii (2022) "Assessing Gender Parity in Intrahousehold Allocation of Educational Resources: Evidence from Bangladesh," World Development addresses issues around gender parity in education quality. They employ nationally representative household surveys from Bangladesh, a country that offers a unique setting in South Asia with the Female Stipend Programs (FSPs), a nationwide gender-targeted conditional cash transfer program. They find the complex interplay of intrahousehold decisions and underscore the importance of minding the gender gap in the quality of education and implementing complementary policies to address it in developing countries.

Finally, but not least, Lee, Jean N., Jonathan Morduch, Saravana Ravindran, Abu Shonchoy, and Hassan Zaman. 2021. "Poverty and Migration in the Digital Age: Experimental Evidence on Mobile Banking in Bangladesh." American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 13 (1): 38-71 has experimentally introduced mobile banking to very poor rural households and family members who had migrated to the city. They have tested whether mobile technology can reduce inequality by modernizing traditional money transfer methods. One year later, for active mobile banking users, urban-to-rural

remittances increased by 26 percent of the baseline mean. Rural consumption increased by 7.5 percent, and extreme poverty fell. Rural households engaged in less borrowing and more saving, sent additional migrants, and increased consumption during the lean season. Meanwhile, urban migrants saw a reduction in poverty and boosted their savings, albeit at a cost, with reports of deteriorating health. Notably, the treatment did not significantly affect the overall labor supply of migrants, yet the empirical evidence reveals a substantial impact on the labor supply of female garment workers. This indicates that the use of mobile banking contributes to the empowerment of women in Bangladesh.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that Prof. Shonchoy received the prestigious Albert Berry Prize for the best paper in Development Economics at the 2016 Canadian Economic Association (CEA) Conference. He is also an esteemed Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) affiliate professor and a fellow of both Institute of Labor Economics (IZA) and Global Labor Organization (GLO).

In conclusion, Prof. Abu Shonchoy surely deserves to be the recipient of the 2025 Fuwa Award.

References:

Narrowing the Gender Gap in Mobile Banking (with Jonathan Morduch, Jean Lee, and Saravana Rabindran). *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*. [Volume 193, 2022, 276-293]

Assessing Gender Parity in Intrahousehold Allocation of Educational Resources: Evidence from Bangladesh (with Tomoki Fujii and Sijia Xu). *World Development*. [Volume 151, March 2022, Article number 105730]

Poverty and Migration in the Digital Age: Experimental Evidence on Mobile Banking in Bangladesh (With Jonathan Morduch, Jean Lee, Hassan Zaman and Saravana Rabindran). *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics* [Volume 13, Issue 1, 2021, Pages 38-71]

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