This dissertation focuses on the relationship between gender equality and economic development, broadly defined. Since the seminal work of Ester Boserup (1970), gender equality is widely understood as being both an instrument for and a consequence of economic development. The first three chapters of this thesis revolve around two fundamental questions. What are the consequences of gender inequality for economic development? (Chapter 1.) And what are its causes—i.e., why do we observe gender inequality in all societies, although to different extents? (Chapters 2 and 3.) As argued in the thesis, social and cultural norms on gender roles will contribute a great deal to how we think about these issues. In the final chapter (Chapter 4), I investigate an episode of rapid change in social norms, in a context of mass emigration. Even though that essay does not deal with gender equality directly, it suggests that migration may be a powerful vehicle for cultural change in developing countries. A short description of each chapter follows. In the first chapter, co-authored by Stephan Klasen, we review theories where gender equality is instrumental for economic development. The vast majority of theories reviewed suggest that gender inequality is a barrier to development, particularly over the long run. Among the many plausible mechanisms through which inequality between men and women affects the aggregate economy, the role of women for fertility decisions and human capital investments is particularly important. In the second chapter, co-authored by Stephan Klasen, Janneke Pieters, and Le Thi Ngoc Tu, we investigate the determinants of labor force participation of urban married women, since the early 2000s, in eight developing and emerging economies: Bolivia, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Jordan, South Africa, Tanzania, and Vietnam. Using large household and labor force surveys, we build a unified empirical framework that allows for comparative analyses across time and space. We find that the coefficients to women’s characteristics differ substantially across countries, and this explains most of the between-country differences in participation rates. In the third chapter, co-authored by Amy C. Alexander, Stephan Klasen, and Christian Welzel, we argue that part of these between-country structural differences are rooted in a society’s distant past. Reviewing the literature on the deep historic roots of gender inequality, we theorize and provide evidence for a trajectory that (1) originates in a climatic configuration called the "Cool Water" (CW-) condition, leading to (2) late female marriages in preindustrial times, which eventually pave the way towards (3) various gender egalitarian outcomes today. The CW-condition is a specific climatic configuration that combines periodically frosty winters with mildly warm summers under the ubiquitous accessibility of fresh water. It embodies opportunity endowments that significantly reduce fertility pressures. The resulting household formation patterns empowered women and reduced gender inequality. The existence of cultural persistence does not necessary imply that societies are trapped in paths pre-determined by their history. There are moments of rapid and widespread change, where long-held norms and customary social behaviors suddenly collapse. International migration is one of those forces that transfer norms across countries. In the fourth chapter, co-authored by Lisa Sofie Hoeckel and Tobias Stoehr, we provide evidence for one such instance of widespread social change caused by international migration: a reduction in petty corruption in the education system of the origin country.