

Assessing Development- Designing Better Indices of Poverty and Gender Equity in Fiji

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Abstract

This paper explores gender and feminist aspects of an ongoing multi-year, multi-country, interdisciplinary research project, that seeks to develop a new measure of deprivation, that is genuinely gender-sensitive and responsive to the expressed interests and views of poor women and men. The rationale for engendering the measurement of poverty and deprivation, and the ways in which feminist research approaches inform the research methodology and methods will be discussed. Key findings to date regarding the gendered dimensions of poverty and hardship will be presented in this paper, and what these suggest as potential dimensions of a new gender-sensitive measure of deprivation that can be used to construct poverty indices and gender equity indices. The paper presents findings from two phases of fieldwork from Fiji which was conducted as part of this international research project. Based on these two phases of research, it is hoped, that future academic research into poverty measurement and social valuation, will lead towards the design of an individual level of measure of multidimensional deprivation. This individualised level measure of deprivation can be used for two purposes. The first is to identify those who should be categorised as poor. The second is to construct population level indices that reflect the level of poverty and gender inequity in that population. The paper also aims to contribute more broadly to our knowledge of how people with experience of poverty think it should be defined and measured. It is hoped that the gender perspective will contribute to widening the concept of poverty by identifying the need to measure poverty in a way which accounts for its complexity and multidimensionality.

Keywords: *gender, poverty, measurement, feminism*

INTRODUCTION

For over twenty years, an accepted wisdom has been that poverty “wears a woman’s face”. It is surprisingly difficult to substantiate claims about the supposed feminisation of poverty. Even counting heads is not easy. Resources for data-collection are often scarce; it may be difficult to count people who live in remote places; some people may try to avoid being counted; perhaps because they lack proper documents; and authorities may not wish to disclose true poverty statistics, because they do not want to acknowledge policy failure or needs for services. However, independent of problems with obtaining timely and sex-disaggregated data, substantive disagreements about the numbers of poor people stem also from the fact that various agencies measure poverty by different standards. The problem is not simply that they set the poverty threshold at different levels; more fundamentally, they measure poverty using different “currencies” or indicators. Such limitations come either from the concept of poverty used or from the methodology or measurement, which mostly relies on the following issues: the conventional use of a monetary poverty line as an objective category, the treatment of poverty as a static condition primarily associated with material deprivation and the focus on household aggregate data which ignores intra-household differences concerning resources and wellbeing. Various standards have varying strengths and weaknesses, but there is reason to believe that none of them measures gendered aspects of poverty reliably.

When a gender perspective is incorporated into the analysis, such limitations become even more prominent. Classical views assume the household to be a *black box*, within which the incoming resources are pooled and equally allocated and shared among household members (Pahl, 1983). Gender studies have stressed that poverty is gendered, as women and men experience poverty in distinctive ways. Poverty is a situation of deficit of well being, and to analyse poverty among women requires the analysis of the extent to which and the ways in which women are more likely to be poor than men. This paper describes and presents empirical findings on one aspect of the work of a transnational feminist research project, based in Canberra, Australia, whose goal is to produce a better standard or metric for measuring poverty across the world (www.genderpovertymeasure.org). I am a team member on this project for Fiji based fieldwork, which is motivated by the realisation that, until we have a dependable measure, we cannot know in what sense, if any, poverty might be feminised. We cannot determine the numbers of the poor, the proportion of women among them, and whether that proportion is rising, falling or stable. Is it even possible that poverty might hold different meanings for men and women? We cannot find answers to these questions until we have a trustworthy standard for measuring poverty. An improved measurement of poverty and gender equity can address these shortcomings.

WHY ENGENDER THE MEASUREMENT OF POVERTY AND DEPRIVATION?: THE CONTRIBUTION OF GENDER AND FEMINIST ANALYSES

No single measure can capture the diverse and complex reality of poverty. All measures and their associated indicators, no matter how multi-dimensional, inevitably make choices about what is important to measure. These choices also have material consequences for addressing poverty, as highlighted in the *Istanbul Declaration: towards an equitable and sustainable future for all*, adopted

at the Global Human Development Forum, 23 March 2012: 2-3

We manage what we measure—and, in turn, what we measure affects what we do. It is therefore vital that we measure progress towards sustainable development in a more comprehensive manner. Measures are required that go beyond GDP to capture a fuller picture of human development, and emphasize sustainable and equitable outcomes.

The need for a ‘fuller picture of human development’ is particularly acute in relation to global poverty measurement. Dominant one-dimensional, income-based approaches and newer multidimensional approaches (Alkire & Santos, 2010) are yet to reflect key insights from feminism and gender and development regarding the close links between gender, poverty and deprivation.

Following Boserup’s (1970) insights, there was awareness that ‘the historical processes that had been given the name of “development” had a differential impact on men and women, but much more knowledge and details were needed to fully understand them’ (Beneria, 2003: xii). Growing claims about the strong relationship between gender and poverty, in both developing and developed countries, resulted in two distinct concerns: that there needed to be increased attention on women’s poverty; and that decreasing women’s poverty was necessary for development and growth.

Globally, claims about feminisation of poverty usually fall into one of five categories.

1. Women are disproportionately poor.
2. Women are increasingly represented among the poor
3. Female-headed households are poorer than their male counterparts.
4. Female-headed households are the poorest of the poor. (Chant, 2007)
5. Poverty is feminised—that is, poor people more generally are increasingly subjected to forms of exploitation that are characteristically feminine.

However, despite anecdotal, qualitative, or small-scale quantitative evidence that some or all of these claims might be true, it is not currently possible to substantiate to what degree, and in what sense, global poverty is feminised. UNDP’s 2005 claim that women make up 70% of the poor, and other more recent positions (two-thirds, 60%, the large majority) cannot be substantiated (Marcoux, 1998, Chant, 2007). Chant (2007: 334) argues that traditional narratives of women and poverty are based on weak conceptual foundations and non-existent empirical data. Nonetheless, the narrative of feminisation of poverty persists.¹ Concern for the “feminisation of poverty” over time has been an important theme in Fiji’s poverty research as well. Narsey (2007) noted that women in Fiji do 52% of the total work in the economy, but receive only 27% of the total income. It has also been highlighted in the 2002–03 HIES that around 13% of households were headed by females (Narsey, 2006). The fact that the only group of women identified as vulnerable to greater risks of poverty under the auspices of the “feminisation of poverty” thesis are female heads of household is arguably a detraction from other issues such as age, ethnicity, and gender relations within the household.

One contributing factor is the lack of gender-sensitive poverty data. Developing a measure of poverty that is capable of revealing whether, and if so, in what sense and to what extent, poverty is feminised, is critical to understanding who is poor, in what ways, and what needs to change for them to move out of poverty. Making gender central to our analysis of deprivation should influence how poverty is best conceived and measured. The standard of poverty evaluation is highly masculine in that the sphere of income generation is historically masculine and non-monetised care work is historically feminine. It misses many gendered deprivations (such as physical security and leisure time) and burdens (such as responsibility for care work) that are very common among poor people, as well as the value of non-market economic contributions to households which can significantly influence the level of available resources (and thus whether individuals in the household are in effect poor or not poor). There is also strong distributional emphasis in this formulation, with Chattier (2011) observing that analysing poverty and vulnerability requires opening up the household so as to assess how resources are generated and used, how they are converted into assets, and how the returns from these assets and also income earned are disturbed among household members.

Where gender research has perhaps made the most significant inroads within this general call to embrace perspectives of poor people is highlighting the multidimensionality of poverty in addressing issues of power and agency. An important concept here is that of “trade-offs”, which rest on the observation that tactical choices may be made between different material, psychological and symbolic aspects of poverty (see Chant, 1997b; Kabeer, 1997). In other words, some women prefer to cope with financial hardship rather than pay the price that maintenance can bring with it, such as having to live with an abusive husband (Chattier, 2008). On the other hand, women who choose to leave their husbands may have to make substantial financial sacrifices in order to do so. This not only means doing without male earnings, but in cases where women move out of the conjugal home, forfeiting property and other assets such as neighbourhood networks in which considerable time, effort, or resources may have been invested (Chattier, 2008). Although these actions may at one level lead to exacerbation of poverty and the price of women’s independence may be high (see Jackson, 1996; Molyneux, 1998), the benefits in other dimensions of women’s lives may be adjusted to outweigh the costs. Women also claim to experience less stress and to feel better able to cope with material hardship because their lives are freer of emotional vulnerability, dependence, subjection to authority and fear (Chant, 1997a, 1997b).

The critical point here is that even if women are poorer in terms of low or not being able to earn *income* on their own than they are as wives or partners in male-headed households, they may *feel* they are better off and, importantly, less vulnerable (Chant, 1997a: 41). These observations underlie the general argument that poverty is constituted by more than income. It encompasses strong perpetual dimensions, and is better conceived as a package of assets and entitlements within which the power, inter alia, to manage expenditures, to mobilise labour and to gain access to social and community support are vital elements (Sen, 1990, 1999). In addition, the lives of poor women may be characterised not only by low incomes but also by hardships related specifically to their gender, such as sexual vulnerability, excessive burdens of work and culturally assigned caretaking responsibilities. Therefore, when poverty is measured primarily in income or consumption terms, it is impossible for such gendered inequalities to come into view.

This research project aimed to move beyond household measures of poverty to identify a tool for measuring poverty at the individual level which, among other things, would allow for revealing gender disparity. The decision to treat intra-household distribution as relevant, by using the individual as the unit of analysis, is central to the feminist nature of the research. The household is a key and persistent site of exploitation, inequality, discrimination, violence and disempowerment for women. Household-level measurement makes it impossible to assess the extent of poverty among women and between men and women within the household. This makes it more compelling to disaggregate households for the purposes of measuring inequitable intra-household distribution of resources and the phenomenon of “secondary poverty” which stem from observations. Empirical work on inequalities in income and consumption within households has fueled a rich conceptual vein of research which has discredited the idea that households are unitary entities operating on altruistic principles and replaced this with the notion that they are arenas for competing claims, rights, power, interests and resources (see for example, Catagay, 1998; Kabeer, 1994; Sen, 1990). This perspective requires scrutinising what goes on inside households rather than accepting them as unproblematised, undeconstructed “black boxes” or as naturalistic entities governed by benevolence, consensus and joint welfare imperatives (see also Chatter, 2011; Chant, 2006). As argued by Muthwa:

Within the household, there is much exploitation of women by men which goes unnoticed when we use poverty measures which simply treat households as units and ignore intra-household aspects of exploitation. When we measure poverty ... we need measures which illuminate unequal access to resources between men and women in the household (1993, p. 8).

Acknowledging the need to avoid essentialising constructions of “female altruism” and “male egoism”, studies conducted in various parts of the world show that many male household heads do not contribute all their wage to household needs, but keep varying proportions for discretionary personal expenditure (see Beneria & Roldan, 1987; Chatter, 2008; Kabeer, 1994; Young, 1992). Men’s spending is often on non-merit goods such as alcohol, tobacco, kava, and extra marital affairs, which not only deprives other household members of income in the short term, but can also exact financial, social and psychological costs down the line (Hoddinott & Haddad, 1991). For example, where men become ill or are unable to work as a result of prolonged drinking, the burden for upkeep falls on other household members, who may be called upon to provide health care in the home or to pay for medical attention (Chant, 1997a).

As part of the call to look inside households and to consider material deprivation in conjunction with differential control over and access to resources, this paper will now provide a background to methodology and methods used in different phases of this research project.

THE INFLUENCE OF FEMINIST RESEARCH APPROACHES ON METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This research project is especially concerned to develop a metric that is gender-sensitive, revealing aspects of poverty that are related systematically to gender. However, gender is always lived out in the context of particular social groupings, so a genuinely gender-sensitive metric

must recognise the ways in which gender disparities in material well-being are affected by other systematic factors such as age, marital status, religion, ethnicity and disability. It is important to reveal disparities along these dimensions both for their own sake and for the sake of achieving a poverty metric that is genuinely gender-sensitive.

As noted above, the rationale for any poverty standard should be plausible not only to professional economists and practitioners of development, but also to the people whose life situations are to be measured via that standard. The research project aimed at synthesising and integrating the various experiences and perspectives on poverty held both by poor women and men and by professional poverty experts. In order to move toward integration, this research developed a three-phase approach, described below, which utilises both qualitative and quantitative research methods as well as conceptual analysis.

PHASE ONE

In order to avoid reinventing the wheel, we began with a review of the professional knowledge contained in the vast multidisciplinary literature on gender and poverty, gender and development and gender-sensitive measures of poverty. We simply did not go out and engage in undirected conversation with random people whom we regard as poor. We then undertook fieldwork designed to uncover what the poorest people in some very poor countries think poverty consists in/of?. We carried out fieldwork in six countries - Angola, Fiji, Indonesia, Malawi, Mozambique, and the Philippines- with three sites in each country. In each country, local teams collected data at three sites: a poor urban community, a poor rural community and a marginalised community.² The sites that were identified as marginalised varied significantly by country, but often included displaced persons, distinct ethnic groups, squatter settlements, or groups largely excluded from the provision of state services.

The research in Fiji began with a qualitative approach to learning about specific groups' experiences and conceptions of poverty. We were interested especially in differences that might exist between the perceptions of women and men who were otherwise similarly situated. Participants were selected by gender and age, using three age groups - young people in the early stages of life (in age-based terms, approximately between 13 and 18 years), adults in the middle stage of life (covering the primary productive and reproductive years), and older people in the later stages of life, giving at least six groups per site. That is, eight male and female participants were selected from each of the three age groups in each of the three communities for focused group discussions. The aim with different age groups was to gain insights into how poverty is understood over the life cycle. In addition, we sought to include people from a range of life situations, such as married, widowed or single, pregnant or not, able-bodied or living with a disability, from a large or a small household. Also, participants were selected from a range of poverty levels, from the very poor to those who had experienced poverty but were no longer poor. In addition, one male and one female participant from each of the three age groups from three communities were identified for in-depth interviews as well. A total of 162 individuals with a mix of 52 males and females from each of the three chosen sites were selected for the first phase of study.

Data was collected from three sites representing three types of communities: a poor urban community (iTaukei), a poor rural community (Fiji Indian) and a highly marginalised community (squatter settlement- with mixed groups of iTaukei and Indian participants). In fact, when selecting the sites using a purposive sampling technique, we had to ensure good representation from two major ethnic groups in Fiji, that is, iTaukei and Fiji Indians so that the case studies could relate back to national statistics on poverty. Communities were also chosen to represent a good balance between urban and rural locations and the two major ethnic groups, but the findings from these communities are not nationally representative.

Phase one research used mixed methods which comprised of guided group discussions, a poverty ladder (participants were asked to rank different levels of poverty and to describe what constitutes poverty at each level), household mapping (participants were asked to identify how resources within the household are allocated to various members), and semi-structured interviews with group ranking and discussion. It is important to note that all group activities asked about factors that constitute poverty generally, rather than asking participants about their own personal circumstances. The same group of participants (from each of the different age and gender groups) participated in all four methods in all communities.

In the first phase, participatory exercises with groups and individuals (key informant interviews, individual interviews) allowed us to explore how individuals conceive poverty and related hardships, and the extent to which their age and gender influenced their perception of these concepts. The approach and methods for Phase One enabled us to 'hear women's voices' (Reinharz, 1992) and 'listen carefully to how women informants think about their lives and men's lives' (Harding, 1997, p. 161). Sex-specific focus groups, almost always facilitated by people of the same sex, helped to maximise voice. Using three age cohort groups - young people in their early stages of life, adults in their middle stages of life (covering the primary productive and reproductive years), and older people in their later stages of life - recognised different interests at different life stages and power differences between sexes and age groups. Asking both sex-specific focus groups whether there were any differences in poverty and hardship for both women and men provided an opportunity for participants themselves to reflect on and identify gendered differences.

PHASE TWO

In 2012, fieldworkers returned to the same communities (rural, urban and marginalised) with a questionnaire developed from the information provided in Phase I.³ The researchers asked people to assess the appropriateness and relative importance of various items proposed as dimensions of poverty and its concomitant hardships. This phase was intended to elicit information in a more quantitative form, seeking to identify with greater clarity the preferences and priorities of participants over a range of deprivations. The second phase was gender (and otherwise) sensitive in two ways. First, we carried out structured individual interviews with 300 participants, allowing disaggregation of responses by gender, age, and other factors like employment status, and relationship status, which revealed systematic gender and/or other variations in the priorities of participants. Second, we included for consideration in the list of necessities items that are

frequently discounted or excluded from measurement, but may be of particular importance to women—such as leisure time, sexual rights, and reproductive rights.

PHASE THREE

We intend to draw on both Phase One and Two, in combination with other thinking and research on the subject, to construct a gender-sensitive poverty measure for the third phase. In the third phase, we will take our pilot metric back to the same participants to test whether they find that it captures their present understandings of poverty and its hardships. However, only key findings from phase one and phase two research in Fiji will be presented in this paper.

KEY FINDINGS FROM PHASE 1: PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

COMMON FINDINGS

Participants unsurprisingly held a wide range of views and many diverse opinions were realised on how best to understand poverty. However, a common core of findings emerged from each of the research sites. First, poverty is understood to be scalar- there are different levels and degrees of poverty, sometimes characterised by very different features. Second, poverty is understood to be multidimensional- although employment, income and wealth were all widely identified as key components of a life free from poverty, nearly all participants identified dimensions related to social relations and individual agency that were deemed as constitutive of poverty. These included the more familiar dimensions of health, education, sanitation, and shelter, but also less commonly recognised dimensions including voice in one's community, access to contraception, freedom from violence, and the ability to have control over one's decision making. Finally, participants rejected simple narratives regarding the intra-household distribution of deprivation – for example, that women and children tended to be more deprived than male adults. A common theme across sites is not just the availability (or lack thereof) of certain goods and services, but the quality and price of these goods and services and the regularity and security of access. For example, in rural communities, youth participants argue that it was the quality and variety of food that allowed one to identify others as poor. Uncertainty surrounding the security of one's home and possessions, or access to goods and services, is central to the experience of poverty for many participants.

GENDERED NARRATIVES

Qualitative findings from Phase one revealed that poverty affects men, women, boys and girls, but it is experienced differently by people of different ages, ethnicities, family roles and gender, although the precise details varied from one site to another posing difficulty for quantification. But there was no simple story about how gender, age, and generation influence the distribution of resources within the household, or the dimensions participants consider most important. In fact, some participants were more likely to mention or prioritise certain dimensions, and these were linked to gender roles and responsibilities and to life experiences. Due to women's social and cultural gender roles, and culturally constructed subordination, they face disadvantageous

conditions which accumulate and intensify the already numerous effects of poverty. For example, when it comes to gender, the resources on which women may draw upon are often being circumscribed by rules, norms and practices, which limit their access to and control over resources. A few participants in rural Naleba noted husbands or male members of households prohibiting women's mobility affecting their access to jobs in Labasa town centre. Other constraints noted by participants across all the communities included lack of access to land and property, and in some cases, this also extended to public goods and services such as education and health.

In majority of the cases, women's dependency or lack of autonomy within the household, though not synonymous with income poverty, affects their economic self-sufficiency and decision-making capacity. For instance, adult females from Naleba noted that women's life is harder because they lack freedom and they cannot go anywhere on their own free will. Youth females from Nausori highlighted that girls have a lot of pressure by parents to do what is right and wrong and have a lot of restrictions. But having a good job, with a fixed source of income, is more significant for adult males who are the breadwinners of the family and must earn money to put food on the table. Hence, gender inequalities within family contexts can cause differentiated access to resources and opportunities, particularly in poor households.

Furthermore, the division of labour by sex within households is still quite rigid. This study makes visible gender and generational differences that exist within households. Across different ethnic groups, the research found that the division of labour by sex assigns women to domestic work and limits their access to material and social resources and economic and social decision-making. Participants across the communities noted confinement of women to childbearing and childrearing duties, which put them at greater risk of poverty because they have relatively limited material assets and also more limited social and cultural assets. The consequences of this disparity persist throughout a woman's life, in diverse forms and in different areas and social hierarchies of age and kinship. The limitations placed on women and girls by the division of labour by sex, and the social hierarchies based on this division, shape social inequalities within three closely-linked systems: the labour market, the social protection/ welfare system and the household.

When participants were asked whether poverty is the main component for making life hard, and were there important hardships that are not related to poverty, many of them described a gendered nature of hardships being faced due to poverty. For example, women argued that they both bear greater responsibility for childcare when resources are scarce, and feel worse when they are unable to provide for their children. While men have more freedom of mobility and life is easy for them, it becomes difficult when they are unemployed and do not have a good source of income to support their family. Men in Nausori noted that not having enough land for subsistence farming and having to fulfil the Fijian cultural and traditional obligations of church and village made life difficult for men. Both men and women often identified different opportunities for responding to hardships related to poverty. For example, a female participant from Nausori noted that when times are difficult men can find short-term casual labour, but women are limited in their options (for reasons such as mobility, education or social constraints) and often must turn to prostitution. It was noted by young males in Nausori that life is difficult for girls because they

do not have access to a lot of jobs in Nausori town apart from sales assistant type jobs. While there is limited data available on the number of sex workers in Fiji, including child workers, anecdotal evidence from the field, and other sources, did reveal that the number of women and girls engaging in sex work is rising and feeds on the desperation arising out of unemployment and poverty.

DIFFERENCES ACROSS SITES

There is an unsurprising difference between the responses of participants in rural and urban areas, although it only appears in a few dimensions. Most prominently, rural participants are more likely to highlight the importance of land, both ownership and access. Urban participants also discussed property and property rights, but reference to these issues was less common in comparison to rural sites. In the urban and marginalised sites, participants were much more likely to discuss issues not present in other sites—dangerous, degraded, and polluted environment, social exclusion and a lack of citizenship, disrespect and threats to property.

DIFFERENCES ACROSS PARTICIPANTS

Elderly participants appear slightly more likely to highlight the importance of social relations, and in particular the existence of others upon whom one can depend to provide support, as dimensions of deprivation. They are also less able to cope when immediate infrastructure, including shelter and roads, are not adequate, whereas younger participants are less affected by these deprivations. Middle age participants are perhaps most affected by the burdens of caring for and supporting others for whom they have responsibility. Women and men both note the difficulty in providing food for their families, finding adequate work and income, protecting the family from hardship and deprivation. But, as noted above, their responsibilities differ, with women more commonly responsible for education, health, and work in the home. Young participants are perhaps the most likely to express concern over education, especially its quality and availability. They also highlight concern for a lack of decent employment opportunities, and the risks and likelihood of being exposed to crime, sex work, or sexual exploitation, especially for women.

KEY FINDINGS FROM PHASE TWO: STRUCTURED QUESTIONNAIRE

Phase One provided rich information on deprivations that women and men consider part of poverty and hardship. From this first phase, 25 dimensions of poverty were identified, following a workshop with academics, project staff and researchers from each of the six countries to review results and identify commonalities and differences. Phase two saw research teams return to all sites to clarify participants' priorities among the 25 aspects of life, and identify a manageable number of dimensions that could be appropriately justified. Participants then ranked their top 15 priorities and identified any important dimensions they thought were missing from the list. As in phase one, research groups were divided by age and sex to create comfortable spaces in which an/ the individual could contribute.

Researchers also reviewed potential dimensions in light of insights from gender and development literature. Some dimensions were found to be inter-related and could be captured in a single dimension; some others were included because of their capacity to reveal gender disparity; while considered hardships were assessed as less relevant or less supported in the data collected.

In Phase Two, Fiji research team asked participants about their priorities among 25 dimensions derived from Phase One results across the six countries. Researchers briefly described circumstances or issues at or near the 'top' and the 'bottom' of a dimension, so participants would have a common idea of the range of life circumstances the dimension covered.⁴ In describing circumstances at the bottom and at the top of a particular dimension, the intention was for participants not to focus on the extent of potential inequality in a particular dimension as a factor in determining their preferences, but to roughly illustrate the range of life circumstances that are covered by the dimension.

After each dimension was explained, the participant was then asked whether this dimension is: (i) essential; (ii) important; (iii) not very important; or (iv) completely unimportant to a life free from poverty and hardship. Then the participants were asked to select 5 most important dimensions that should be used for assessing whether a person's life is free from poverty and hardship. Once they had selected these five, they were then asked to rank them in priority order from 1 to 5. The participants were then asked to select the next 5 most important dimensions, and to rank these from 6 to 10. The participants were then asked to select the next 5 most important dimensions and to rank these from 11 to 15. Once this initial ranking of the top 15 dimensions was completed, the participant was given the opportunity to review the overall ranking and to make changes if he or she wished.

Finally, participants were asked whether any dimension, that was not on the list of dimensions presented to them in the interview, was important to an assessment of whether someone's life was free from poverty and hardship. Researchers probed suggestions to see whether they did not in fact fall within the listed dimensions.

The following analysis is based on data from three sites (urban, rural, highly marginalised) in Fiji and around 100 participants per site (approximately 50 men and 50 women, spread over three age cohorts) – with a total sample of 300 participants for Phase Two research.

HIGHLY RANKED DIMENSIONS

Table 1 below shows that over 90% of the participants identified water, shelter, food, education, health care, family relationships, environment, location of services, and freedom from violence as essential or very important dimensions in their conceptualisation of poverty.⁵ About 80% of the participants noted cooking fuel, voice in the community, family planning, information and communication, participation in community and personal care as essential or very important dimensions that would dissociate them from poverty. Overall, essential items such as water, shelter, food, education, health care, family relationships and clothing seem to be the most common dimensions ridding participants of poverty.

Table 1: *Essential Dimensions with top 15 ranking*

Dimension	Essential or very important (%)	Top 5 (%)	Top 10 (%)	Top 15 (%)
Water	98.7	61.9	83.1	95.4
Shelter	96.0	66.9	84.9	94.2
Food	97.0	72.4	86.6	93.7
Education	98.3	43.4	82.2	91.5
Health Care	97.7	23.8	71.1	89.3
Toilet	98.0	33.5	72.1	86.5
Family Relationships	99.7	29.6	58.5	82.6
Environment	99.3	14.6	49.1	78.3
Clothing	78.9	27.7	57.7	75.9
Cooking Fuel	81.3	21.4	50.7	73.3
Electricity	78.7	19.6	45.2	70.6
Location Services	94.0	11.0	32.4	65.4
Voice in Community	87.0	9.1	28.3	60.2
Family Planning	86.0	13.3	35.2	58.5
Information and Communication	85.7	5.3	27.7	58.1
Property	73.0	13.5	28.0	52.8
Participation in Community	83.0	11.5	22.3	51.8
Personal Care	86.0	6.6	24.2	49.8
Violence	91.7	5.1	17.1	41.2
Free Time	80.7	1.0	7.6	35.7
Freedom of Movement	73.3	3.4	10.8	32.3
Debt/Assets/Credit	49.0	3.0	13.0	26.5
Sexual Autonomy	52.5	1.0	7.8	19.1
Disruptive Behavior	76.0	0.7	2.6	10.4
Discretionary Items	14.7	1.0	2.0	7.0

In terms of the gendered differences, more women than men identified water, shelter, food, toilet facilities, cooking fuel, electricity, location of services, information and communication, personal care and freedom from disruptive behaviour in their top 5 ranking of dimensions (see Table 2). More men than women selected education, health care, family relationships, environment, clothing, voice in the community, family planning, property and participation in the community in their top 5 ranking list. Even in the top 10 ranking, more women than men identified shelter, food, toilet facilities, environment, cooking fuel, electricity, voice in the community, and personal care. However, more men than women ranked water, education, health care, clothing, property and participation in community as their top 10 ranking.

Table 2: Gendered Differences in Top 15 ranking

Dimension	Top 5 Female (%)	Top 5 Male (%)	Top 5 Diff (% points)	Top 10 F (%)	Top 10 M (%)	Top 10 Diff (% points)	Top 15 F (%)	Top 15 M (%)	Top 15 Diff (% points)
Water	63.9	59.9	4.0	82.3	83.8	-1.5	95.6	95.1	0.5
Shelter	69.6	64.1	5.5	86.7	83.1	3.6	96.8	91.5	5.3
Food	77.2	67.6	6.0	88.0	85.2	2.8	94.3	93.0	1.3
Education	43.0	43.7	-0.7	78.5	85.9	-7.4	89.9	93.0	-3.1
Health Care	21.5	26.1	-4.6	69.6	72.5	-2.9	90.5	88.0	2.5
Toilet	37.3	29.6	7.7	75.9	68.3	7.6	89.2	83.8	5.4
Family Relationships	24.7	34.5	-9.8	56.3	60.6	-4.3	84.2	81.0	3.2
Environment	10.8	18.3	-7.5	50.3	47.9	2.4	79.0	77.5	1.5
Clothing	27.2	28.2	-1.0	51.9	63.4	-11.5	72.8	78.9	-6.1
Cooking Fuel	25.9	16.9	9.0	57.6	43.7	13.9	81.0	65.5	15.5
Electricity	20.9	18.3	2.6	48.1	42.3	5.8	72.8	68.3	4.5
Location Services	12.0	9.9	2.1	32.3	32.4	-0.1	65.2	65.5	-0.3
Voice in Community	8.2	9.9	-1.7	30.4	26.2	4.2	55.1	65.2	-10.1
Family Planning	8.9	17.6	-8.7	31.6	38.7	-7.1	57.0	59.9	-2.9
Information and Communication	7.0	3.5	3.5	27.8	27.5	0.3	57.0	59.2	-2.2
Property	10.1	16.9	-6.8	21.5	34.5	-13.0	44.9	60.6	-15.7
Participation in Community	8.2	14.8	-6.6	18.4	26.1	-7.7	43.7	59.9	-16.2
Personal Care	8.9	4.2	4.7	32.9	15.5	17.4	60.1	39.4	20.7
Violence	3.8	6.3	-2.5	16.5	17.6	-1.1	43.0	39.4	3.6
Free Time	1.3	0.7	0.6	8.9	6.3	2.6	42.4	28.9	13.5
Freedom of Movement	3.2	3.5	-0.3	8.9	12.7	-3.8	26.6	38.0	-11.4
Debt/Assets/Credit	2.5	3.5	-1.0	13.3	12.7	0.6	24.7	28.2	-3.5
Sexual Autonomy	0.6	1.4	-0.8	6.3	9.2	-2.9	17.7	20.4	-2.7
Disruptive Behavior	1.3	0.0	1.3	3.8	1.4	2.4	9.5	11.3	-1.8
Discretionary Items	1.3	0.7	0.6	1.9	2.1	-0.2	6.3	7.7	-1.4

In comparing gender differences across the three locations, in urban community more men than women ranked water, shelter, family r/ships, clothing, voice in the community, family planning, property ownership, participation in community, freedom of movement, sexual autonomy, and discretionary items as essential or important items to ease them from poverty (see Table 3). However, in the rural community more women than men ranked water, shelter, family r/ships, environment, family planning, personal care, freedom from violence, access to debts/assets/credit and discretionary items as essential or important items. In the marginalised community, more men than women noted water, education, health care, family relationships, environment, voice in the community, family planning, property ownership, participation in community, freedom of movement, access to debts/assets/credit and freedom from disruptive behaviour as highly ranked dimensions.

Table 3: Gendered Ranking of Dimensions across Locations

Dimension	Urban F (%)	Urban M (%)	Rural F (%)	Rural M (%)	Marg. F (%)	Marg. M. (%)	Urban (%)	Rural (%)	Margin alized (%)
Water	96	100	95.9	88.2	94.9	97.6	98	92.05	96.25
Shelter	96	98	98	86.3	96.6	90.2	97	92.15	93.4
Food	94	92	95.9	96.1	93.2	90.2	93	96	91.7
Education	94	94	83.7	86	91.5	92.7	94	84.85	92.1
Health Care	94	88	91.8	94	86.4	87.8	91	92.9	87.1
Toilet	90	72	85.7	90.2	91.5	90.2	81	87.95	90.85
Family Relationships	90	92	81.6	56.9	81.4	97.6	91	69.25	89.5
Environment	83.7	80	85.7	74.5	69.5	78	81.85	80.1	73.75
Clothing	58	70	81.6	88.2	78	78	64	84.9	78
Cooking Fuel	72	48	79.6	78.4	89.8	70.7	60	79	80.25
Electricity	70	64	77.6	84.3	71.2	53.7	67	80.95	62.45
Location Services	64	64	63.3	68.6	67.8	63.4	64	65.95	65.6
Voice in Community	66	70	57.1	62	44.1	63.4	68	59.55	53.75
Family Planning	64	70	51	45.1	55.9	65.9	67	48.05	60.9
Information and Communication	58	54	53.1	68.6	59.3	53.7	56	60.85	56.5
Property	48	60	36.7	66.7	49.2	53.7	54	51.7	51.45
Participation in Community	38	64	59.2	64.7	35.6	48.8	51	61.95	42.2
Personal Care	52	30	67.3	51	61	36.6	41	59.15	48.8
Violence	42	40	51	39.2	37.3	39	41	45.1	38.15
Free Time	54	30	24.5	25.5	47.5	31.7	42	25	39.6
Freedom of Movement	30	46	14.3	15.7	33.9	56.1	38	15	45
Debt/Assets/Credit	14	20	42.9	39.2	18.6	24.4	17	41.05	21.5
Sexual Autonomy	16	28	10.2	17.6	25.4	14.6	22	13.9	20
Disruptive Behavior	6	10	4.1	5.9	16.9	19.5	8	5	18.2
Discretionary Items	10	14	6.1	5.9	3.4	2.4	12	6	2.9

The following are the t-test results which show that overall more men than women ranked property and participation in community as essential dimensions while more women than men ranked cooking fuel, personal care and free time as essential.

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Men>Women

Property ownership

Participation in community functions

Women>Men

Cooking fuel

Personal care

Free time

Socially accepted roles and responsibilities of women and men influence prioritising of dimensions in a number of ways. Those dimensions that are particularly important to women, or men, given current gender roles and responsibilities, are prioritised. For example, significantly more women than men prioritise cooking fuel, personal care and free time as important for determining whether a person experiences poverty and hardship, or not.

Phase One and Two results show that many participants associated ‘poverty’ with material poverty, which they viewed as something shared widely, and often evenly, between men and women. However, participants nearly universally noted that the *content* of deprivation could differ by age and gender. The differential content of this deprivation was largely determined by different social roles and individual needs. When we asked about *hardships* faced by men and women, the gender differences were much clearer and they were closely linked to gender roles and responsibilities. There were significant gender differences in the kinds and levels of control men and women have over decisions that affect their lives. For instance, taking the most commonly cited dimensions, a lack of employment or income was often seen as a problem experienced more by men across all sites and ethnic groups, whereas a lack of food was seen to affect women more, as they were responsible for providing food and other day to day requirements to the household, including water, sanitation and firewood for example. Sometimes the same deprivation would be identified by men and women, but for different reasons. For example, bad roads and infrastructure were identified by rural men as obstacles to market access and productive outputs; women were more likely to highlight the limits to mobility and safety from bad, unlit roads.

Poverty has been traditionally conceived as “lack of access to resources, productive assets and income resulting in a state of deprivation. Empirical evidence in this research confirms that poverty is a multidimensional concept due to the lack of resources in various domains of social life, which constrains the possibility of realising one’s full potential in society. Here, gender proves to be a powerful variable considering the evidence of gender differentiation in the context of hardship dynamics, which is often mediated by either the gender system or the wider culture and social settings.

TENTATIVE LIST OF DIMENSIONS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE NEW MEASURE

Based on the participatory exercises in Phase one and two, individual deprivation was measured in the following dimensions: financial status, nutrition, water, shelter, health care, education, energy, sanitation, control over decision making and access to supportive personal relationships, adequate clothing and decent personal care, freedom from violence, contraception, a clean environment, voice in the community, adequate leisure time and decent work status. Weight was given to whether indicators in each dimension could be populated from existing data collection efforts, but the team decided not to be limited by the lack of data, so that current data limitations are not perpetuated into the future. The research team also reviewed recent poverty measurement innovations and assessed what a new measure was needed to do in order to improve on existing approaches. From the findings in phase two across the six countries, fifteen areas were identified for inclusion in a new gender sensitive multidimensional measure of poverty, which is called *Individual Deprivation Measure* (IDM). A pilot study measuring poverty using the IDM has

recently been completed in the Philippines using the above dimensions, but due to funding constraints the measure was not tested in the remaining 5 countries, Fiji, Angola, Indonesia, Malawi, and Mozambique.

CONCLUSION: NEW MEASURE OF POVERTY

The findings in this paper show that poverty is not only about money but also about factors such as power differences which determine access to resources and opportunities. The poor almost never talk about income, but they do frequently refer to assets they consider important. The set of assets they handle is diverse: physical, human, social and ecological, and these assets comprise a wide range of tangible and intangible resources, both material and social, that individuals, households and communities use during moments of crisis (Narayan, Chambers & Petesch, 2000, p. 49). The data provides grounded demonstration that monetary incomes are: for many of the poor in Fiji, only a parcel of a much wider set of possible assets.

There is often disagreement over what constitutes poverty in the relevant discourses on poverty. The disagreement lies because the concept is indeterminate and because it relies on evaluative as well as empirical judgments. If poverty is taken to be an essentially contested concept, it is to be expected that people's understandings of what it means to be poor will vary, just like their understandings of health or justice. Such disagreements are not merely matters of idiosyncratic individual opinion; typically, they also involve systematic differences in public community standards. In all communities, prevailing conceptions of poverty will be shaped by customary ideas about what is necessary for supporting life and for social respectability. This means that it makes no sense to seek a single best metric capable of identifying poverty at all times and in all places. Different poverty standards must be developed in different contexts to measure poverty among diverse populations for different purposes. The flaws identified in existing standards suggest some necessary conditions that must be met by a morally acceptable metric designed to measure poverty at the global level today.

The fact that conceptions of poverty are variable and contested does not mean that proposed poverty standards are therefore always arbitrary, in the sense of incorrigible, or subjective, in the sense of depending entirely on personal perceptions. A poverty measure may be taken as objectively justified when it is supported by open, accessible argumentation based on the best available evidence and valid inferences. This is not to say that the reasons in favour of the proposed metric must be absolutely compelling, beyond reasonable disagreement. Such an aspiration is not appropriate for a concept that is essentially contested. Proposed global poverty metrics must be credible to multiple constituencies. My argument so far has emphasised that morally acceptable poverty metrics must be credible to those people whose material situations will be used for assessment. No metric will be plausible to people if it is not responsive to their conceptions of what constitutes a decent life. Therefore, a morally acceptable metric cannot disregard the cultural values and conceptions of material necessity and social decency that prevail in diverse communities.

At the same time, a metric cannot be used to measure poverty on a transnational scale if it is restricted to items that are associated with poverty in only a few cultural contexts. In order to be

both plausible and practical, a global poverty metric must have a sufficiently universal meaning that people across the world recognise it as continuous with their understandings of poverty and do not dismiss it as relativist, subjectivist, or not poverty at all. It is obviously quite a challenge to develop a standard of poverty measurement that is intelligible, plausible, and credible both to economic experts and to people from very diverse cultural backgrounds. It is only worth undertaking this challenge because impoverished people across the world increasingly participate in an integrated economic order and are coming increasingly to share common understandings of material necessity and social respectability.

Recognising that the meanings of poverty are contested does not imply that the suffering and hardships that poverty produces are not real and urgent. A second necessary condition for a morally acceptable global poverty metric is that it must be capable of revealing the deprivations suffered by those who really are materially worse-off in the present global order. In doing so, it will reveal the true extent of material inequality. People suffer from different deprivations and even similar privations do not affect everyone in the same way, depending on how they are situated. People's needs vary according to innumerable factors such as gender, age and health, and also according to economic contexts in which they live. The metric should, so far as possible, take account of differences in people's particular needs and in their social/economic situations.

This research is especially concerned to develop a metric that is gender-sensitive, revealing aspects of poverty that are related systematically to gender. However, gender is always lived out in the context of particular other social groupings, so a genuinely gender-sensitive metric must recognise the ways in which gender disparities in material well-being are affected by other systematic factors such as age, marital status, religion, ethnicity, and disability. It is important to reveal disparities along these dimensions both for their own sake and for the sake of achieving a poverty metric that is genuinely gender-sensitive. One way in which existing poverty metrics have sometimes obscured disparities in material well-being is by measuring the average poverty of groups. This obscures inequalities among individuals within those groups. Especially but not only for measuring gendered poverty, it is important for the unit of assessment to be individuals rather than larger groups such as countries, ethnic groups, or even households.

The gendered dimensions over poverty and hardship identified through the initial phases of this research project are not simply 'inputs' to a new measure. They are information for decision-making. More generally, the initial phases point us to the areas of life that are particularly important from a policy and programming perspective if we are to tackle poverty and hardship in ways that meet the needs, interests and priorities of women and men. We hope the research will result in a new measure. But it has already produced much more than this.

The results from Phases One and Two clearly demonstrate that gender-blind measures of poverty are failing to reveal important gendered dimensions of poverty and hardship and the different priorities of poor men and poor women across the life course. This is of political importance as the global development community is focusing towards 2015 and beyond. While it would not be difficult to construct a framework and indicators that would be more gendered than the current Millennium Development Goals, our objective should be more ambitious – developing a new global framework that genuinely reflects the widespread high-level acknowledgement, that

addressing gender inequality is central to the achievement of sustainable development.

Traditional methods of assessing poverty do not help reveal inequities between women and men nor within the household. Given the gendered nature of poverty, and the widely acknowledged links between gender inequality and poverty, this is a limitation and anomaly that cannot be justified. As we work towards 2015 and a new global framework and targets for the period beyond, we need to see engendering poverty measurement as central to taking the agenda forward.

The gendered approach employed in this paper contributed at both conceptual and methodological levels. In conceptual terms, it provided for a more comprehensive understanding of poverty, and supported an integrated and dynamic approach which acknowledged the multidimensional and heterogeneous aspects of poverty not captured in typical household income-based measurement of poverty. The gender perspective allowed us to highlight the material, symbolic and cultural components as those which influence power relationships, which in turn determine gendered access to resources (material, social and cultural). It is hoped that findings from this study will lead to the review of more conventional measurement methods, and an exploration of “gendered alternatives” thus making a significant contribution to the ongoing debate on poverty definitions and measurement. This is a complex area in which examples of best practices to date are limited, but this should not detract from confronting the challenge. As indicated in this paper, for example, the private sphere of intra-household relations is often a major obstacle to women’s assertion of power and access to well-being. Yet, the household is one of a series of interconnected sites in society at large. Recalling Kabeer’s (1999) cautionary observations on strategies for female empowerment, it is clear that men’s responses and reactions are a vital part of the picture in gendered meanings, conceptualisation and measurement of poverty.

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Though the paper draws on the project’s work, all errors remain the authors’.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ “A woman’s face remains the picture of poverty,” Dr Noeleen Heyzer, U.N. under-secretary-general and executive secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, at the 2010 launch of the third joint report of the United Nations and the Asian Development Bank on achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific; <http://www.ipsnews.net/2010/02/development-asia-iso-poverty-still-has-a-womanrsquo-s-facersquo/>
- ² For the purpose of this study, a marginalised community is defined as one that is not only poor, but also excluded, powerless, or subject to systematic discrimination in some distinctive way. We recognise that many communities will not easily fit into one of the three categories (rural-urban-marginalised) though all communities have many distinguishing features and some will fall on a continuum between urban and rural. All marginalised communities across the six countries were also shaped by their urban-rural status, and identifying a community can be difficult in countries where most communities face systematic deprivation. In the context of Fiji, an urban squatter settlement was selected as a marginalised community for study using purposive sampling.
- ³ The summary results of this exercise are available in the document “Phase 1 Review”, to be posted on www.genderpoverty.com.
- ⁴ For example, the dimension ‘water’ was described as: ‘Water (personal and household use): Some people have sufficient good quality water whenever they want for all their needs including drinking, cooking, and washing. Others never have enough water, so they’re often thirsty, unable to cook or to wash. Water that is available is dirty and unhealthy, often causing sickness.’
- ⁵ The percentages following each dimension represent the percentage of respondents who included the dimension in their ranking of the top 15 dimensions for determining whether a person’s life is free from poverty and hardship.

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