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6 Advancing the scope of gender and poverty indices: an agenda and work in progress

Thomas Pogge

The World Bank's International Poverty Line (IPL) and the Human and Gender-Related Development Indices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) guide – and often misguide – the efforts of policymakers in governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and international agencies. Political actors use such indices as proxies for the values they purport to measure: devoting certain resources toward effecting the largest achievable reduction in the poverty index, for example, on the assumption that they will thereby have brought about – or be perceived to have brought about – the largest achievable reduction in what makes poverty objectionable. Insofar as an index fails to track, money and human effort go to waste.

This chapter marks the beginning of a major research effort, funded by, among others, the Australian Research Council, Oxfam, and the International Women's Development Agency. Our objective is to reflect critically on how gender equity, development, and poverty have been – and on how they ought to be – measured and tracked across a plurality of diverse natural and social environments. The immediate motivation for this project is dissatisfaction with current ways of measuring poverty, development, and gender equity.

Tracking poverty as the number or proportion of people living below some IPL

The best-known poverty index is a crude headcount index pioneered by the World Bank (hereafter, the Bank), which reports simply, for any population, the percentage of persons living below some international poverty line. This IPL is defined in US dollars of a certain base year – currently US\$1.25 per person per day in 2005. Purchasing power parities (PPPs) are used to convert this amount into 2005 currency of any other country, and this country's consumer price index (CPI) is then used to convert the result further into local currency of any other year. In this way, the local cost of the consumption of any person in any country and year can be compared with the IPL.

This procedure has six flaws. First, it indefensibly prioritises people living just below the IPL. Moving such people to just above the IPL is the cheapest and easiest way of reducing the poverty headcount. But why should only moves which cross the IPL count as progress? There evidently is no good reason for ignoring changes in people's economic situation when these occur entirely below the IPL or slightly above it.

Second, the Bank's exclusive focus on income and cost of consumption ignores many other poverty-relevant aspects of a person's situation. Someone who survives by working in a cold climate, which requires additional expenses for staying warm, is poorer than another who can earn the same income without having to bear such extra costs. Also, any plausible measure of poverty must take account of necessary labour time – including here also unpaid work on family food production, housekeeping, and child rearing, which is very predominantly performed by women and girls.

Third, the IPL's US-dollar-denominated starting point is not grounded in any rigorous analysis of the level of resources needed to meet basic human requirements. The current IPL comes to roughly US\$10 per person per week in 2009 – or US\$42 per month or US\$500 per year (see Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). A US resident evidently cannot locally purchase even her most minimal requirements so cheaply. This may appear to be no problem because dollars buy more where very poor people actually live. But this thought cannot save the Bank's chosen IPL, because the Bank converts all local currency amounts not at market exchange rates but at PPPs. And the Bank cannot say that, while US\$500 annually per person is too little in the US, the PPP equivalent of US\$500 in less developed countries is adequate. Making this claim, the Bank would be undermining its entire method, which assumes that PPPs provide suitable conversion rates for comparing incomes and consumption expenditures of poor people worldwide. It is also implausible to claim that a higher IPL would make the eradication of poverty unaffordable: in 2005, the aggregate shortfall of the 1.4 billion people living below the IPL amounted to merely 0.17 per cent of the global product – or about US\$76 billion per annum or one-ninth of US military spending (see Center for Defense Information, 2008). If the IPL had been twice as high, fully 3.08 billion people would have been counted as poor – yet even their aggregate shortfall from the higher IPL would have amounted to only 1.13 per cent of the 2005 global product (Pogge, 2010: s. 3.4).

Fourth, the use of general consumption PPPs introduces massive distortions because PPPs are influenced by the prices, in all countries, of many commodities that are not needed to avoid poverty. Thus, the purchasing power assigned to poor-country currencies may be greatly inflated by the inexpensiveness there of services (such as maids and drivers), which poor people neither need nor consume.

Fifth, a CPI is based on the consumption pattern of a country, which differs greatly from that of its poor households. In the CPI, prices of cars and computers may play a much larger role than prices of rice and beans; but for the poor the former are irrelevant and the latter all-important. Food prices have more than doubled in the 2006–08 period, with devastating effects on the poor; but these effects are invisible as long as their spending keeps pace with their national CPI.

Sixth, the Bank's method is not robust with respect to base year. When a year other than 2005 is used to relate all currencies to one another, then the poverty ranking of persons across countries and years is observed to change substantially (Pogge, 2010: s. 4.2). This is unsurprising because PPPs and CPIs are based on very different (international versus national) consumption patterns and thus involve very different notions of equivalency.

The six flaws combine to make existing estimates of the extent, distribution and trend of global income poverty highly unreliable.

Tracking development through the HDI and gender equity through the GDI

The UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI) is meant to measure the degree of development a population enjoys. It is calculated as the average of three components, each normalised to a scale of 0–1. These components are: the national population's *life expectancy at birth*, its *level of education* (adult literacy and school enrolment), and its *gross domestic product (GDP) per capita*. Each country receives a score in each of these

components, and its overall score is the geometric mean of these three scores (UNDP, 2007).

The Gender Development Index (GDI) is calculated in the same way. The difference between the HDI and GDI is the inclusion of gender inequality. To do this, the HDI is divided by a gender inequality index. Each subpopulation is given a score for HDI purposes. The GDI is then calculated by dividing the HDI by the gender inequality index. The male and female scores are then multiplied together and the harmonic mean is taken to get the GDI.

The HDI/GDI method is based on the assumption that income is the primary determinant of development. Yet there is no rigorous justification of the index composition. The indices imply that the primary determinant of development is income, with regard to development, the indices are not their plausibility.

The HDI and GDI have a general problem is that they use the same standards of achievement for all countries. The poverty headcount index (though headcounts focus on the global population) is a measure of individual human development. The HDI/GDI is shared by all countries and therefore the poor countries themselves.

The shift in focus from income to human development, which, together with the HDI, is averaged across a nation. The HDI and all information is as irrelevant. This is because the difference between men and women is a plausible conception cannot be celebrated years of age that slightly.

Analogous thought related to class, 'race' and 'gender'. The HDI uses the same standards for all countries, while the GDI uses the male and female scores. The HDI is completely. Thus, the HDI is concentrated at the top of the income being widely. The HDI is an increase in per capita development, regardless of whether the increase or is left behind.

components, and its overall HDI score is then the average of those three scores (UNDP, 2007).

The Gender Development Index (GDI) uses the same three components weighted in the same way. The difference is that each of the component scores is marked down for any gender inequity. To do this, the population is divided into its male and female subpopulations. Each subpopulation is then scored just like the entire population would be scored for HDI purposes. The GDI then uses, in each component, the harmonic mean of the male and female scores. When the male and female scores in some component are equal, then the harmonic mean is simply this equal score. The more unequal they are, the more the harmonic mean sinks below the average, reflecting a penalty for gender inequity.

The HDI/GDI method usefully recognised some development dimensions other than income. Yet there is no reflective justification of its crude aggregation (through normalisation of the index components and the weights then assigned to them). For example, the indices imply that certain trade-offs between income and life expectancy are neutral with regard to development, but these implications are not explored and examined for their plausibility.

The HDI and GDI are gravely defective in other ways as well. The first and most general problem is that both indices are focused on countries and also marketed as standards of achievement for countries. This is a step backward from the World Bank's poverty headcount measure which is focused mainly on the *global* poverty count (though headcounts disaggregated by country and region are also provided). This focus on the global poverty count rightly suggests that what matters is the impoverishment of *individual human beings* and that the responsibility of avoiding such impoverishment is shared worldwide. The HDI and GDI, by contrast, focus on the ranking of countries and thereby sustain the common view – well liked in affluent states – that poor countries themselves bear primary responsibility for their underdevelopment.

The shift in focus away from individuals is most obvious in the first and last components which, together, constitute two-thirds of both indices. Life expectancy is simply averaged across a national population, or across its male and female subpopulations, and all information about its distribution within such (sub)populations is discarded as irrelevant. This is implausible, because inequalities in life expectancy – not merely between men and women, but generally – must be considered relevant for any morally plausible conception of development. Thus an increase in a society's life expectancy cannot be celebrated as development when it derives from a gain to the rich beyond 80 years of age that slightly exceeds losses to the poor under 50.

Analogous thoughts apply also to the last component – more so, because inequalities related to class, 'race', or religion tend to be much greater in income than in life expectancy. The HDI uses gross domestic product per person, which averages over an entire country, while the GDI uses average earned income per person computed separately for the male and female subpopulations. In both cases, internal inequalities are disregarded completely. Thus, the HDI is indifferent between a society's income being heavily concentrated at the top with the poor majority living in life-threatening poverty and this income being widely dispersed with no one compelled to endure severe poverty. A given increase in per capita GDP is considered by the HDI to make the same contribution to development, regardless of whether the vast majority of the population is sharing in this increase or is left behind.

GDI

sure the degree of three components, al population's *life* enrolment), and its ore in each of these

Similarly, what matters for the GDI is the average earned income of females relative to the average earned income of males. It makes no difference to gender-related development, as the GDI conceives it, whether overall gender income parity exists because employment opportunities and pay packages of men and women are roughly equal across all social strata or because male income advantages in the lower nine-tenths of the socio-economic distribution are balanced by female advantages in the top tenth. This is obviously morally implausible.

More importantly, this total neglect of distribution also provides perverse incentives. When policymakers are concerned to improve their country's HDI, they will seek to enlarge its GDP without regard to whether the additional income goes to the rich or to the poor. They may emulate the example of Angola, which achieved huge gains in per capita GDP between 2001 and 2007 by expanding crude oil production, without worrying whether the extra income was earned by foreigners or embezzled by a small ruling clique. Likewise, insofar as policy makers are concerned to reduce their country's gender inequity penalty, they will seek to shift the income distribution in favour of females – but again without regard to whether the additional income goes to rich or to poor women. The GDI thus encourages such policymakers to boost their country's GDI score through policies that double to US\$200 000 the incomes of 10 000 women executives if this is even slightly more convenient to them than it would be to achieve the same US\$1 billion female income boost by doubling to US\$2000 the incomes of 1 million female domestics. The GDI here values doubling an affluent woman's income *100 times* more highly than doubling a poor women's income – even though poor women have more at stake, in terms of both human needs and gender disadvantage. This evidently wrong conclusion arises from the GDI here giving equal weight to each unit of income rather than to each woman.

The shift in focus away from individuals manifests itself also in how the HDI and GDI aggregate information across the three index components. They do so by first aggregating within each component indicator across the population, and then aggregating the results across these components. This renders both indices insensitive to how different aspects of disadvantage are correlated. This is problematic because disadvantages persons suffer are typically more burdensome and always morally more problematic when they aggravate than when they mitigate one another.

The GDI inherits these problems. And it adds an additional one by discarding information about whether gender inequities aggravate or mitigate each other. The GDI calculates the gender inequity penalty separately in each component and simply adds up the penalties – regardless of whether women are disadvantaged in all three components, say, or each gender is disadvantaged in some.

In order to promote development, governments, international agencies, and NGOs should, other things being equal, prioritise the neediest. Yet, in order to pinpoint those who are in greatest need overall, any multidimensional index must be constructed to aggregate in the opposite order: aggregating first intra-personally across the component indicators, and then aggregating the results across the population.

Toward new indices of development, poverty and gender equity

Today's leading indices of development, poverty and gender equity suffer from one or more of the following deficiencies:

1. Lack of a moral dimension: gender inequity being seen as a former as being a
2. False universalism: assuming that anyone may suffer from gender inequity affect persons ac
3. Bias towards the rich:
 - (a) a focus on the rich: women in p
 - (b) implausible: deprivation thereby imp
4. Lack of integration: without any guiding programmes and

Because indices thus important to explore project our research

We have two broad issues correctly required to provide support group members are aggregation is perfect been holistically assessed income, education, with the age and gender person has access to these interdependencies an increase in literacy care goes to children students or to children ginalised, enhanced

The second idea sound conception of different aggregative ment, can be defined a group can be defined male/female ratios

Obviously, these show in general terms support plausible j (WTO) globalisation

1. Lack of a moral rationale, which results in some aspects of development or gender inequity being selected in preference to others without a sound justification of the former as being of greater constitutive or instrumental importance.
2. False universality – a focus on deprivations (for example, income poverty) that anyone may suffer combined with relative neglect of deprivations that differentially affect persons according to gender, age, and environment.
3. Bias towards the better-off, which manifests itself in
 - (a) a focus on indicators that are relevant mostly to the more privileged, such as women in parliament or women in higher education, which matter but are less important than gender inequities burdening much larger numbers of more disadvantaged women and girls, and in
 - (b) implausible aggregation that ignores correlations among different aspects of deprivation, for instance, or compares male and female income totals and thereby implicitly gives much greater weight to income inequalities at the top; and
4. Lack of integration, as when several partial indices are presented side by side without any guidance for how to resolve conflicts among them about the ranking of programmes and policies.

Because indices thus flawed provide faulty guidance and incentives to policymakers, it is important to explore the possibility of constructing better indices. This is the point of the project our research group is commencing with NGO personnel from five countries.

We have two broad ideas that serve as a starting point. First, handling distributional issues correctly requires a holistic measure of individual deprivation. An index is supposed to provide summary information about a group. To do so, it must track how group members are doing. This purpose is much better served when the interpersonal aggregation is performed last, after the relevant aspects of each person's situation have been holistically assessed. This is so because the value of any good we might measure – income, education, healthcare, leisure, participation, security, and so on – varies widely with the age and gender of the person who has it and also with the other goods this person has access to. If individual lives are what ultimately matters, then we must attend to these interdependencies. A credible index of development must be sensitive to whether an increase in literacy goes to landowners or the landless, an improvement in medical care goes to children or to the aged, an increase in enrolment to privileged university students or to children in slums, an increase in life expectancy to the elite or to the marginalised, enhanced physical security to males or to females.

The second idea is that a holistic measure of individual deprivation, grounded in a sound conception of basic human needs or requirements or capabilities, can serve within different aggregation exercises. Thus, the poverty of a population, or its level of development, can be defined as the mean level of individual deprivation. And gender inequity in a group can be defined as the mean difference across population fractiles (averaging over male/female ratios as calculated for each fractile).

Obviously, these ideas, as illustrated in Figure 6.1, are rough and preliminary. But they show in general terms at least how better indices might be specified – indices that would support plausible judgements about whether, for instance, World Trade Organization (WTO) globalisation has fostered development or fuelled a 'feminisation of poverty'.

Figure 6.1 New indices based on a holistic measure of individual (dis)advantage

Select bibliography

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7 Methodology of poverty measurement

Sharon Besheer

This chapter seeks to provide a multidimensional definition of poverty in which income-based measures are not the sole focus. The second section explores the opportunity to capture the experience of women and men through multidimensional measures of poverty. It might conceptualise a new poverty, capable of reflecting the

Shortcomings of income-based measures

Definitions and measures of poverty based on income-based measures, particularly those criticised as failing to reflect the reality of income remains a dominant feature of the Millennium Development Goals. However, a degree of arbitrariness in the selection of indicators and the intensity of the parameters over time and across countries is problematic. The dimensions of poverty measurement differ from a 'male standard'.

Two assumptions underpin the current thinking. First, there is a focus on financial autonomy and the extent and nature of those earnings. While relevant to the position of those with heavy communal, kinship or having limited control over their own resources.

Second, and related to the first, is the assumption of equal benefits. Access to resources may result in low earnings around the role of women, which is more significant in the

Figure 6.1 New indices based on a holistic measure of individual (dis)advantage

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- Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) 'Consumer Price Index', available at: www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm (accessed 31 January 2010).
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Shortcomings of income-based measures

Definitions and measures of poverty based on income-based measures, particularly those that are based on a single income measure, are criticised as failing to reflect the complexity of poverty. The income measure remains a narrow measure of poverty. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have a degree of arbitrariness in their definition of poverty. The MDGs, in their focus on income, fail to capture the intensity of poverty. The MDGs also fail to capture the multidimensional nature of poverty. The MDGs differ from a 'male' perspective in that they fail to capture the experience of women and men.

Two assumptions underpin the MDGs. First, there is a belief that income is the primary determinant of poverty. While women may have financial autonomy, the extent and nature of their earnings are not captured by the MDGs. While the MDGs are relevant to the position of women, they are not heavy communal, and they are not having limited control over their own lives.

Second, and related to the first, is the assumption that income-based measures can capture the experience of poverty. Income-based measures may result in low estimates of poverty, and they may not capture the role of poverty in the lives of individuals and communities.

Contents

<i>List of figures</i>	xiii
<i>List of tables</i>	xiv
<i>List of boxes</i>	xv
<i>List of contributors</i>	xvii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xxv
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xxvii

1 Gendered poverty across space and time: introduction and overview <i>Sylvia Chant</i>	1
--	---

PART I CONCEPTS AND METHODOLOGIES FOR GENDERED POVERTY

2 Strategic gendering: one factor in the constituting of novel political economies <i>Saskia Sassen</i>	29
3 Subjectivity, sexuality and social inequalities <i>Henrietta L. Moore</i>	35
4 Power, privilege and gender as reflected in poverty analysis and development goals <i>Gerd Johnsson-Latham</i>	41
5 Gender into poverty won't go: reflections on economic growth, gender inequality and poverty with particular reference to India <i>Cecile Jackson</i>	47
6 Advancing the scope of gender and poverty indices: an agenda and work in progress <i>Thomas Pogge</i>	53
7 Methodologies for gender-sensitive and pro-poor poverty measures <i>Sharon Bessell</i>	59
8 Multidimensional poverty measurement in Mexico and Central America: incorporating rights and equality <i>Anna Coates</i>	65
9 Gender, time poverty and Amartya Sen's capability approach: evidence from Guatemala <i>Sarah Gammage</i>	71
10 Why is progress in gender equality so slow? An introduction to the 'Social Institutions and Gender' Index <i>Denis Drechsler and Johannes Jütting</i>	77
11 Diamonds are a girl's best friend? Experiences with the Gender Action Learning System <i>Linda Mayoux</i>	84

PART II DEBATES ON THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY', AND FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

- 12 The 'feminisation of poverty': a widespread phenomenon? 95
Marcelo Medeiros and Joana Costa
- 13 Poor households or poor women: is there a difference? 101
Gita Sen
- 14 Globalisation and the need for a 'gender lens': a discussion of dichotomies and orthodoxies with particular reference to the 'feminisation of poverty' 105
Tine Davids and Francien van Driel
- 15 Towards a (re)conceptualisation of the 'feminisation of poverty': reflections on gender-differentiated poverty from The Gambia, Philippines and Costa Rica 111
Sylvia Chant
- 16 Post-adjustment, post-mitigation, 'post-poverty'? The feminisation of family responsibility in contemporary Ghana 117
Lynne Brydon
- 17 Female-headed households and poverty in Latin America: state policy in Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic 123
Helen I. Safa
- 18 Gender, households and poverty in the Caribbean: shadows over islands in the sun 129
Janet Momsen
- 19 Poverty and female-headed households in post-genocide Rwanda 135
Marian Koster
- 20 Between stigmatisation and survival: poverty among migrant and non-migrant lone mothers in the Netherlands 141
Annelou Ypeij
- 21 Lone mothers, poverty and paid work in the United Kingdom 147
Jane Millar
- 22 Urban poverty and gender in advanced economies: the persistence of feminised disadvantage 153
Fran Tonkiss

PART III GENDER, FAMILY AND LIFECOURSE

- 23 Gender and household decision-making in developing countries: a review of evidence 161
Agnes R. Quisumbing
- 24 Linking women's and children's poverty 167
Ruth Lister
- 25 Reducing the gender gap in education: the role of wage labour for rural women in Mozambique 173
John Sender

- 26 Understanding women's and poverty 26
Sarah Ashwin
- 27 Gender, poverty and 27
Jane Falkingham
- 28 Urban poverty and family life or 28
Carolyn H. W.
- 29 Youth, gender and 29
Gareth A. Jones
- 30 Sexuality, poverty and 30
Alice Evans
- 31 Ghettoisation among Gambia 31
Stella Nyanteh
- 32 Poverty and gender with p 32
Isabella Abo
- 33 Gender, urban poverty 33
Penny Vera-S
- 34 Poverty, gender and 34
Monica Bud
- 35 Gender, poverty and 35
Jane Falkingham

PART IV GENDER AND COMMUNITIES

- 36 Assessing poverty in communities 36
Janet Hunt
- 37 Gender and communities in Mexico's Pro 37
Mercedes Go
- 38 Gender, poverty and movements 38
Helen I. Safa
- 39 The gendered poverty in Latin America 39
Cathy McIlw
- 40 Latino immigration and 40
Cecilia Menj
- 41 Culturing poverty among South 41
Claire Alexan

Y', AND	26	Understanding the gender dynamics of Russia's economic transformation: women's and men's experiences of employment, domestic labour and poverty	178
95		<i>Sarah Ashwin</i>	
	27	Gender, poverty and transition in Central Asia	184
101		<i>Jane Falkingham and Angela Baschieri</i>	
'dichotomies of poverty'	28	Urban poverty, heteronormativity and women's agency in Lima, Peru: family life on the margins	190
105		<i>Carolyn H. Williams</i>	
ty':	29	Youth, gender and work on the streets of Mexico	195
		<i>Gareth A. Jones and Sarah Thomas de Benítez</i>	
t,	30	Sexuality, poverty and gender among Gambian youth	201
111		<i>Alice Evans</i>	
ation of	31	Ghettoisation, migration or sexual connection? Negotiating survival among Gambian male youths	207
117		<i>Stella Nyanzi</i>	
te policy in	32	Poverty and old age in sub-Saharan Africa: examining the impacts of gender with particular reference to Ghana	215
123		<i>Isabella Aboderin</i>	
ver	33	Gender, urban poverty and ageing in India: conceptual and policy issues	220
129		<i>Penny Vera-Sanso</i>	
nda	34	Poverty, gender and old age: pension models in Costa Rica and Chile	226
135		<i>Monica Budowski</i>	
and	35	Gender, poverty and pensions in the United Kingdom	232
141		<i>Jane Falkingham, Maria Evandrou and Athina Vlachantoni</i>	
		PART IV GENDER, 'RACE' AND MIGRATION	
	36	Assessing poverty, gender and well-being in 'Northern' indigenous communities	241
ence of		<i>Janet Hunt</i>	
153	37	Gender and ethnicity in the shaping of differentiated outcomes of Mexico's <i>Progres-a-Oportunidades</i> conditional cash transfer programme	248
		<i>Mercedes González de la Rocha</i>	
es: a review	38	Gender, poverty, and national identity in afrodscendent and indigenous movements	254
161		<i>Helen I. Safa</i>	
167	39	The gendered exclusions of international migration: perspectives from Latin American migrants in London	260
		<i>Cathy McIlwaine</i>	
for rural	40	Latino immigrants, gender and poverty in the United States	266
173		<i>Cecilia Menjivar</i>	
	41	Culturing poverty? Ethnicity, religion, gender and social disadvantage among South Asian Muslim communities in the United Kingdom	272
		<i>Claire Alexander</i>	

42	Gender, occupation, loss and dislocation: a Latvian perspective <i>Linda McDowell</i>	278	57	Renegotiating to housing m <i>Sophie Mills</i>
43	Gender, poverty and migration in Mexico <i>Haydea Izazola</i>	284	58	Gender issue <i>Sheela Patel</i>
44	Migration, gender and sexual economies: young female rural-urban migrants in Nigeria <i>Daniel Jordan Smith</i>	290	59	Gender, pove <i>Katie Willis</i>
45	Internal mobility, migration and changing gender relations: case study perspectives from Mali, Nigeria, Tanzania and Vietnam <i>Cecilia Tacoli</i>	296	60	Moving beyo from low-inc <i>Caroline Mo</i>
46	Picturing gender and poverty: from 'victimhood' to 'agency'? <i>Kalpana Wilson</i>	301	61	Conceptual a lessons from <i>Rachel Slater</i>
PART V GENDER, HEALTH AND POVERTY				
47	Poverty gender and the right to health: reflections with particular reference to Chile <i>Jasmine Gideon</i>	309	PART VII GEN	
48	Maternal mortality in Latin America: a matter of gender and ethnic equality <i>Anna Coates</i>	315	62	Gender, wor <i>Diane Perron</i>
49	New labyrinths of solitude: lonesome Mexican migrant men and AIDS <i>Matthew Gutmann</i>	321	63	The extent an <i>Janneke Plan</i>
50	Gender, poverty and AIDS: perspectives with particular reference to sub-Saharan Africa <i>Catherine Campbell and Andrew Gibbs</i>	327	64	Women's wo economy <i>Ruth Pearson</i>
51	Gender, HIV/AIDS and carework in India: a need for gender-sensitive policy <i>Keerty Nakray</i>	333	65	Gender, pove <i>Shahra Raza</i>
52	Women's smoking and social disadvantage <i>Hilary Graham</i>	339	66	Women's em <i>James Heintz</i>
PART VI GENDER, POVERTY AND ASSETS				
53	Household wealth and women's poverty: conceptual and methodological issues in assessing gender inequality in asset ownership <i>Carmen Diana Deere</i>	347	67	Gender and c <i>Stephanie Ba</i>
54	Gender, poverty and access to land in cities of the South <i>Carole Rakodi</i>	353	68	Fraternal cap <i>Sharad Char</i>
55	Power, patriarchy and land: examining women's land rights in Uganda and Rwanda <i>Kate Bird and Jessica Espey</i>	360	69	Economic tra <i>Amy Y.C. Li</i>
56	Gender, livelihoods and rental housing markets in the Global South: the urban poor as landlords and tenants <i>Sunil Kumar</i>	367	70	Gender, pove <i>Katherine Br</i>
			71	Informality, <i>Marty Chen</i>
			72	The empowe sub-Saharan <i>Kate Meaghe</i>
			73	A gendered a economy: cas <i>Paula Kantor</i>
			74	Gender and c <i>Javier Pineda</i>

ve	278	57 Renegotiating the household: successfully leveraging women's access to housing microfinance in South Africa	373
	284	<i>Sophie Mills</i>	
-urban		58 Gender issues and shack/slum dweller federations	379
	290	<i>Sheela Patel and Diana Mitlin</i>	
ase study		59 Gender, poverty and social capital: the case of Oaxaca City, Mexico	385
	296	<i>Katie Willis</i>	
	301	60 Moving beyond gender and poverty to asset accumulation: evidence from low-income households in Guayaquil, Ecuador	391
		<i>Caroline Moser</i>	
		61 Conceptual and practical issues for gender and social protection: lessons from Lesotho	399
		<i>Rachel Slater, Rebecca Holmes, Nicola Jones and Matšelis Mphahlele</i>	
PART VII GENDER, POVERTY AND WORK			
ular	309	62 Gender, work and poverty in high-income countries	409
		<i>Diane Perrons</i>	
ethnic	315	63 The extent and origin of the gender pay gap in Europe	415
		<i>Janneke Plantenga and Eva Fransen</i>	
nd AIDS	321	64 Women's work, nimble fingers and women's mobility in the global economy	421
		<i>Ruth Pearson</i>	
ence to	327	65 Gender, poverty and inequality: the role of markets, states and households	427
		<i>Shahra Razavi and Silke Staab</i>	
	333	66 Women's employment, economic risk and poverty	434
		<i>James Heintz</i>	
	339	67 Gender and ethical trade: can vulnerable women workers benefit?	440
		<i>Stephanie Barrientos</i>	
		68 Fraternal capital and the feminisation of labour in South India	446
		<i>Sharad Chari</i>	
		69 Economic transition and the gender wage gap in Vietnam: 1992–2002	452
		<i>Amy Y.C. Liu</i>	
odological	347	70 Gender, poverty and work in Cambodia	458
		<i>Katherine Brickell</i>	
	353	71 Informality, poverty, and gender: evidence from the Global South	463
		<i>Marty Chen</i>	
Uganda	360	72 The empowerment trap: gender, poverty and the informal economy in sub-Saharan Africa	472
		<i>Kate Meagher</i>	
South:	367	73 A gendered analysis of decent work deficits in India's urban informal economy: case study perspectives from Surat	478
		<i>Paula Kantor</i>	
		74 Gender and quality of work in Latin America	484
		<i>Javier Pineda</i>	

- 75 Gender inequalities and poverty: a simulation of the likely impacts of reducing labour market inequalities on poverty incidence in Latin America 490
Joana Costa and Elydia Silva

PART VIII GENDERED POVERTY AND POLICY INTERVENTIONS

- 76 Gender, poverty and aid architecture 497
Gwendolyn Beetham
- 77 Brand Aid? How shopping has become 'Saving African Women and Children with AIDS' 504
Lisa Ann Richey
- 78 Sweden to the rescue? Fitting brown women into a poverty framework 510
Katja Jassey
- 79 Poverty alleviation in a changing policy and political context: the case of PRSPs with particular reference to Nicaragua 516
Sarah Bradshaw and Brian Linneker
- 80 Gender-responsive budgeting and women's poverty 522
Diane Elson and Rhonda Sharp
- 81 Reducing gender inequalities in poverty: considering gender-sensitive social programmes in Costa Rica 528
Monica Budowski and Laura Guzmán Stein
- 82 Is gender inequality a form of poverty? Shifting semantics in Oxfam GB's thinking and practice 535
Nicholas Piálek
- 83 Tackling poverty: learning together to improve women's rights through partnership – the case of WOMANKIND Worldwide 541
Tina Wallace and Ceri Hayes
- 84 Millennial woman: the gender order of development 548
Ananya Roy

PART IX MICROFINANCE AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

- 85 The housewife and the marketplace: practices of credit and savings from the early modern to modern era 557
Beverly Lemire
- 86 Money as means or money as end? Gendered poverty, microcredit and women's empowerment in Tanzania 563
Fauzia Mohamed
- 87 Capitalising on women's social capital: gender and microfinance in Bolivia 569
Kate Maclean
- 88 'A woman and an empty house are never alone for long': autonomy, control, marriage and microfinance in women's livelihoods in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia 575
Caroline Sweetman

- 89 Gender and poverty: the destiny of women 579
Iman Bibars
- 90 Women's empowerment and poverty-alleviation 585
Joanne Sharp
- 91 Impacting women's poverty: the Linkage Project 591
Ranjula Bali
- 92 Microcredit and poverty: 'impact para' 597
Supriya Gari
- 93 Gender and poverty: the case of Irene Banda 603
Irene Banda
- 94 The impact of entrepreneurship on poverty: the case of Bart Casier 609
Bart Casier
- 95 Methodological issues in microfinance programmes 615
Yoko Fujikake

PART X NEW IDEAS AND APPROACHES

- 96 Women, poverty and the state: the case of Mitch in Nicaragua 621
Sarah Bradshaw
- 97 Decentralisation and poverty: the case of South Africa 627
Jo Beall
- 98 Poverty, entitlement and the state: the case of Southern Africa 633
Sumi Madhok
- 99 Contradictions of poverty: the case of privatisation in African towns 639
Faranak Mirza
- 100 Gender, neoliberalism and institutionalisation: the case of Venezuela 645
Amy Lind
- 101 Who does the work? The case of linking women's livelihoods to the state 651
D. Alissa Trepo
- 102 Poverty, religion and the state: the case of Claire Bricker 657
Claire Bricker

pacts of Latin America	490	89 Gender and poverty in Egypt: do credit projects empower the marginalised and the destitute? <i>Iman Bibars</i>	581
ENTIONS		90 Women's empowerment: a critical re-evaluation of a GAD poverty-alleviation project in Egypt <i>Joanne Sharp, John Briggs, Hoda Yacoub and Nabila Hamed</i>	587
	497	91 Impacting women through financial services: the Self Help Group Bank Linkage Programme in India and its effects on women's empowerment <i>Ranjula Bali Swain</i>	594
en and	504	92 Microcredit and women's empowerment: understanding the 'impact paradox' with particular reference to South India <i>Supriya Garikipati</i>	599
amework	510	93 Gender and poverty in microfinance: illustrations from Zambia <i>Irene Banda Mutalima</i>	606
the case	516	94 The impact of microcredit programmes on survivalist women entrepreneurs in The Gambia and Senegal <i>Bart Casier</i>	612
	522	95 Methodologies for evaluating women's empowerment in poverty alleviation programmes: illustrations from Paraguay and Honduras <i>Yoko Fujikake</i>	618
ensitive	528		
Oxfam	535		
		PART X NEW FRONTIERS IN GENDERED POVERTY RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS	
s through	541	96 Women, poverty and disasters: exploring the links through Hurricane Mitch in Nicaragua <i>Sarah Bradshaw</i>	627
	548	97 Decentralisation, women's rights and poverty: learning from India and South Africa <i>Jo Beall</i>	633
ENT		98 Poverty, entitlement and citizenship: vernacular rights cultures in Southern Asia <i>Sumi Madhok</i>	638
vings	557	99 Contradictions in the gender-poverty nexus: reflections on the privatisation of social reproduction and urban informality in South African townships <i>Faranak MirafTAB</i>	644
redit and	563	100 Gender, neoliberalism and post-neoliberalism: re-assessing the institutionalisation of women's struggles for survival in Ecuador and Venezuela <i>Amy Lind</i>	649
ce in Bolivia	569	101 Who does the counting? Gender mainstreaming, grassroots initiatives and linking women across space and 'race' in Guyana <i>D. Alissa Trotz</i>	655
onomy,	575	102 Poverty, religion and gender: perspectives from Albania <i>Claire Brickell</i>	661

xii *Contents*

103	Sexuality, gender and poverty <i>Susie Jolly and Andrea Cornwall</i>	667
104	Masculinity, poverty and the 'new wars' <i>Jane L. Parpart</i>	674
	<i>Index</i>	681

Figures

6.1	New indices
9.1	Time poverty
10.1	Construction (SIGI)
10.2	Discriminat non-agricult
11.1	Example of from Uganc
25.1	Ratio of sor principal res and non-sep
35.1	Percentage o pension (UH
52.1	Cigarette sn
61.1	Impact path
71.1	Segmentatio poverty risk
71.2	Poverty risk
75.1	The contrib poverty redu
90.1	Location of
93.1	Developmen
95.1	Schematic n Improving I

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