

How is Gender Relevant to Economic Development and Poverty Reduction?

The integration of gender into research can feel like a new challenge for researchers in Higher Education (HE). The international development sector has, however, been learning about the ways that gender is relevant, in all aspects of poverty alleviation and development, for several decades.

As part of the University of Edinburgh [genderED](#) project [Integrating Gender into GCRF Bids: Getting to Sufficiency](#) we have produced several thematic summaries describing how gender is relevant to different development themes, such as the environment or economic development. These guides are intended to support HE researchers who are tackling these challenges for the first time. This document provides a simplified and abridged summary of over four decades of learning that has taken place within the development sector, about the **relevance of gender in economic development and poverty reduction**. It aims to provide a starting point for **researchers who are unused to considering how their work could contribute to overseas development and poverty reduction, or including gender issues in their own work**. In addition to providing a simplified introduction it provides some links to more detailed resources.

The Limitations of Growth Led Economic Development Policies

Early development research and policy assumed that economic growth provided a route out of poverty (Sweetman, 2005; Kabeer, 2015). Empirical evidence has however shown this to be incorrect. Although these approaches led to a rapid growth in income 95% of the world's population they have *also led to increases* in inequality and women's poverty (Ruckert, 2010; Kabeer, 2015, p. 189). Between 1988-2008 the income of bottom 5% of the world' population has not progressed (Milanovic, 2012). In fact, evidence shows that such interventions have actually contributed to the intensification of women's poverty and widening inequalities between the richest and poorest (Ruckert, 2010; Milanovic, 2012).

This phenomenon has led development practitioners to argue for an analysis of the reasons that growth and wealth has been inequitably distributed and a focus on the absolute poorest (Kabeer, 2015; Cochrane and Rao, 2019). Tackling these questions requires an engagement with complex realities 'on the ground.' Analyses that take this ground up perspective have highlighted **women's over representation amongst the world's poorest and have shown the role of gender inequality in the maintenance of absolute poverty** (Sweetman, 2005). Understanding the role of gender in poverty on the ground requires unpacking several dynamics.

Gender and Poverty: Six Key Dimensions

1. Women's role in unpaid care work is one of the most important drivers of their poverty. Often, societies, and the state, expect women and girls to perform care without reward or recognising it as work (Action Aid, 2013; Rawthorne, 2017). However, undertaking this kind of labour intensive work such as carrying water, food or firewood and caring for children and relatives, prevents women from undertaking paid work and in many cases accessing education or training which could enable them to earn more (Action Aid 2013).

2. Analyses of income distribution within households have also shown that we cannot assume income is equitably distributed within households. In fact, women often have little access to any kind of cash resources or capital within their household and are, as individuals, very poor (Sweetman, 2005; Kabeer, 2015).

3. When women do undertake paid work **discrimination often means they are paid less. In addition, women are less likely to access skilled work on account of inequalities in their education** (see below) (Esplen, 2009). They are also disproportionately likely to work within informal sectors of the economy (Women and Development Unit, 2004; Kabeer, Milward and Sudarshan, 2013; Monga, Lin and Mwabu, 2015)

4. Families with limited resources often invest more in the education of boys than girls (CARE international, n.d.; DFID, 2005). Educating children incurs an opportunity cost for families when it results in girls performing less unpaid labour in the home as a result of attending school (CARE international, n.d.) An education can also reduce girls' marriage prospects and raise dowry payments to unaffordable levels. Combined with the prospect of higher salaries for men these factors mean that families often choose to prioritise investment in their sons' education expecting a higher return on investment (DFID, 2005).

5. Analysis also shows asymmetry in men's and women's control over resources and their agency in making economic decisions (Oduro and van Staveren, 2015). Families sell women's possessions before men's and **women's consumption of food, education and healthcare reduces in times of economic crisis** (Agarwal, 1990; Kabeer, 2015). Studies have also shown that women become more vulnerable to violence and exploitation or are compelled to move into very risky sectors of the economy, such as sex work, during economic crises. These coping strategies have long lasting impacts on women's health and resources, curbing their ability to move out of poverty aftershocks (Kabeer 2015).

6. Stereotypes, social norms, taboos and formal laws can limit the kinds of work women can access (Oduro and van Staveren, 2015). This can prevent women from working in more profitable sectors of agriculture, whilst those who do attempt to move into non-traditional sectors such as construction, ICT or skilled manufacturing, can in some countries be blocked by their husbands and/or experience harassment and discrimination (Buskins and Webb, 2009; Oduro and van Staveren, 2015). Women are often also excluded from trade unions. This diminishes their access to networks and their power to influence and benefit from collective bargaining (Food and Agricultural Organisation, 2015). **As a result, female-headed households experience the most intense poverty and are most likely to be trapped within it** (Chant, 2003).

Added together, these insights from the ground help us to understand why gender should be taken into consideration in economic development and poverty reduction interventions. They shows us that economic development policies seeking to boost economic growth, for example through the introduction of technologies or the intensification of trade, **cannot be expected to benefit people of different genders equally**. Rather, interventions must take account of **the ways that people of different genders have different levels of access to and control over resources**. For this reason, international frameworks for development such as the Sustainable Development Goals emphasise that policies seeking to eradicate poverty and to 'leave no-one behind' need to tackle gender inequalities in order to achieve their end goals (UN Women, 2019). This is why development practitioners argue

that it is necessary to tackle gender inequality in order to eradicate poverty (World Bank, 2009; UN Women, 2018, 2019; Oxfam, 2019).

Macro Perspectives: Gender, Economic Development and Policy

Building on the insights drawn from this perspective on the ground, economists focusing on gender inequalities and their reduction have developed macro level feminist economic perspectives. These emphasise that gender mediates individual's experiences within the economy (Waring, 1988; Nelson, 2006; Elson, 2017; Fineman, 2019). The entrenched tendency to simultaneously devalue and exploit (unpaid) care work and occupations or activities stereotypically understood as feminine, plays a key role in maintaining these inequalities (Elson and Çağatay, 2000; Nelson, 2006). Feminist economists have developed concepts, policies and modelling techniques that incorporate these gendered realities into economic analyses (Sen, 1985; Balakrishnan, Elson and Patel, 2010; Monga *et al.*, 2014; Rai, Hoskyns and Thomas, 2014).

These approaches often entail re-considering the boundaries of traditional economic metrics (e.g. the productive versus the reproductive economy) and incorporating an analysis of care or 'social reproduction' in the functioning of economy. Examples of concepts and methodologies drawing on these perspectives include calculations of the return on investment that comes from investing in social infrastructure such as childcare facilities and staff (Elson and Sharp 2010, Stotsky 2016); measuring the depletion of an economy's social reproductive capacities (Rai et al 2014); or modelling the variables shaping the relationship between growth and women's economic welfare (Monga *et al.*, 2014; Kabeer, 2016).

Gender Budgeting (or Gender Responsive Budgeting) is one of the best-known policy models to emerge from these analyses and has been adopted in many developing countries (Budlender, Debbie and Hewitt, 2002; Elson and Sharp, 2010). Gender Budgeting entails analysing government or organisational spending to see whether taxation burdens and benefits from public spending are divided equally between men and women. Often these analyses find that burdens fall disproportionately on women. For example 'structural adjustment' programmes of the 1990s and austerity policies implemented after the 2008 financial crisis, cut or privatised the public services that women rely on to reduce their social reproductive responsibilities and access paid work (Seguino, 2010; Bjornholt and McKay, 2013). Gender Budgeting analyses can re-shape governments' economic priorities so that people of all genders are taxed and benefit from public spending equally.

In this way, policy planners can incorporate gender equality considerations into any area of programmatic policy, ranging from industrial policies such as national energy policies, (ICUN Global Gender Office 2018), infrastructure planning (UN Habitat 2012), science and technology strategies (EASTCO 2017, FAWE 2016), education and training (Action Aid, 2016; Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE), 2016) or agriculture (David, 2015).

Policy planners can also design initiatives specifically targeting women. Key issues to consider include: re-distributing and properly rewarding care work; enabling equal access to education and health care; and challenging pay discrimination and harassment at work. These steps are regarded as providing women with more of the *capabilities* to live economically sustainable lives (Sen, 1985; see also Cochrane and Rao, 2019) .

Project-Level Perspectives

For smaller initiatives such as a GCRF or Newton Fund project that might, for example, focus on the introduction of a new app or agricultural technology, taking gender into account requires an initial analysis of how gender hierarchies and social norms apply in the target society or community. **The development sector** provides a model of best practice to structure this kind analysis, called gender sensitive situational analysis (Feed the Future USAid, no date; UN Women, 2014; DFID PPA Learning Partnership Gender Group, 2015; Oxfam, 2019). These models are premised on an awareness that the effects of gender hierarchies will vary across different countries and cultures.

GCRF/Newton Fund projects can use this kind of analysis to avoid the pitfalls of early growth focused development interventions (discussed above) that unwittingly exacerbated gender inequalities because they did not address the complex ways that gender inequalities mediate access to the benefits of economic growth and technology (David, 2015; UN Women, 2016).

Best practice models of gender sensitive situational analysis (see below) involve the active participation of local communities in the identification of project priorities and activities at an early stage in planning. This helps project planners to understand the imposition of externally devised goals that may be inappropriate for local context in the target community.

These consultation processes can include participatory analyses during the planning stages of a project in order to develop **collective goals and accountability within communities**. This can help to ensure that the benefits of any given development intervention, **are shared equitably, lifting people of all genders and whole communities out of poverty**. Gender sensitive situational analysis tools often make a distinction between people's short-term **practical** needs (e.g. access to shelter or rest) and their **strategic** needs (e.g. long-term routes out of poverty, access to education).

Useful Links: Examples of Participatory Situational Analysis Tools

1. Bridge Gender and Development Research Information, Institute for Development Studies. n.d. [The Harvard Analytical Framework for Gender Sensitive Analysis and Planning](#)
2. Bridge Gender and Development Research Information, Institute for Development Studies. n.d. [The Mosner/DPU Framework](#)
3. UNDP, Learning & Information Pack: [Gender Analysis](#) (2001).
4. ACDI/VOCA: [Gender Analysis, Assessment and Audit Manual and Toolkit](#) (2012)
5. Bridge Gender and Development Research Information, Institute for Development Studies. n.d. [The Gender Analysis Framework](#)

These kinds of tools enable a thorough analysis to underpin the planning of a project **and the identification of project aims that incorporate attention to gendered poverty. They can also help projects to devise actions to ensure projects do not exacerbate existing inequalities**. However, the models developed within the development sector assume high levels of existing relationships and prior knowledge of development frameworks.

The University of Edinburgh's Toolkit 'Developing your GCRF Gender Equality Statement', available on our [website](#), draws on this best practice in the development sector and provides a simplified structure and a four step process specifically tailored to the requirements of UKRI's Gender Equality Statement. It helps PIs identify relevant gender differences in divisions of labour, access to resources, and access to decision-making, and applies these insights directly to the UKRI Gender Equality Statement.

Additional Resources

- Oxfam (2017) An Economy that Works for Women: [Achieving Economic Empowerment in an Increasingly Unequal World](#)
- Women's Economic Empowerment [Action Aid](#) (n.d)
- UN Women (2017) [The UN Women Gender and Economics Training Manual](#)
- [Feminist Economics](#) – peer reviewed academic journal of feminist economics. Available through the university library catalogue.
- Gender and Development – [peer reviewed academic journal](#) focusing on development policy and practice. Available through the university library catalogue.

Attributions

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