

Gender and poverty as a feminist foreign policy priority

Opportunities to accelerate action

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AFFPC ISSUE PAPER SERIES. ISSUE NUMBER 10. February 2023

This issues paper is dedicated to the late Sylvia Chant, who named household-level measurement as a barrier to evidence related to the 'feminization of poverty.' Her work underpinned the commitment of the author and International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) to change the way that poverty is measured so that its gendered dimensions are visible. As IWDA worked with othersⁱ to create an alternative quantitative measure of poverty, Chant's focus on the "feminization of responsibility and obligation – women's increasing liability for dealing with poverty (responsibility), and their progressively less choice other than to do so (obligation)"ⁱⁱ informed the inclusion of voice, unpaid work and time use as dimensions of gender-sensitive measurement of multidimensional poverty.

Introduction

Feminist foreign policy places gender equality as the central goal of foreign policy, with gender as an essential analytical tool for understanding power, its distribution and use. It provides a framework for bringing attention to global and regional structures, processes and ways of thinking that scaffold and sustain patriarchal systems and gender unequal outcomes, as well as to feminist alternatives. This framework reshapes, reorders and enlarges what counts as a foreign policy concern.

Foreign policy is enacted through a variety of institutions, mechanisms, conventions, agreements, frameworks, norms and sites of engagement. Objectives and commitments are realised in practice to the extent that they are implemented concretely. Feminist foreign policy similarly requires a focus on ideas, issues and the architecture through which objectives and commitments can be progressed.

Over time, gaps in policy implementation become more visible, revealing patterns of focus and neglect, along with political, institutional and architectural inadequacies. In relation to gender equality and development, the last three decades have seen significant, virtually universal and repeated commitments to gender equality at global, regional and national levels. However, implementation and resourcing of these commitments has been limited, and nowhere matched what is required to realise them. This problem of "policy evaporation" has been evident for some time. For example, a 2005 review of the operationalisation of gender equality commitments and obligations in the context of international efforts for poverty eradication in nine OECD

countriesⁱⁱⁱ identified progressive implementation gaps in moving from legal and policy framework to budget allocations to programming and implementation, and measurement of impact.^{iv} Kilby and Crawford's 2011 review of subsequent global and regional experience and the Australian context added to the evidence.^v

Improving the circumstances of women and girls experiencing poverty has been a consistent focus and declared priority since the first United Nations World Conference on Women in 1975 (see Annex). Despite this, limited progress has been made in addressing the relationship between gender and poverty globally, or reforming the social and economic systems, structures, institutions and processes that link them. The lack of individual-level poverty data, rather than household-level data, is a fundamental barrier to evidence about gender and poverty. As UN Women notes, without this data it is not possible to determine "if women are, across the board, more likely to live in poverty than men,"^{vi} or how people's circumstances vary by gender, age, disability and intersections of these. The growing number of countries with a declared feminist foreign policy (FFP) or feminist international assistance policy (FIAP), and emergent architecture connecting them, bring opportunities for change.

This Issues Paper argues that action to support individual-level, gender-sensitive poverty measurement, and in turn improve our understanding of linkages between gender and poverty, should be a feminist foreign policy priority. It considers the lineage of global discussions about gender inequality and poverty, and the significant and persistent gap between commitment and action. It identifies the lack of gender-sensitive poverty measurement and data as a foundational constraint to visibility, analysis and action. It notes existing commitments and recommendations that support change, and opportunities in the short to medium term. It outlines the benefits of shifting poverty measurement standards towards individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement. Finally, it provides policy recommendations for countries with a declared or substantively aligned FFP or FIAP to accelerate action to achieve this.

Data and measurement as barriers to evidence and change

The linkage between gender inequality and poverty has been a concern within the global development agenda for some time; yet action to address the concern has been limited, especially given the significance of the issue and the priority it has been accorded.

Gender-insensitive measurement is part of the problem. What is not measured is rendered invisible in data. This limits the evidence informing priorities and influencing action. And it makes change towards gender equality more difficult, contributing to the reproduction of gender inequality.

The problematic nature of rendering gender invisible in data is clearly illustrated in the example of poverty measurement. Here, both *what* is measured and *how* it is measured act to perpetuate a gender-insensitive picture of poverty. Dominant approaches to assessing poverty, including the International Poverty Line (IPL) and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI), focus poverty assessment at a household level. The lack of individual-level focus prevents accurate disaggregation, hiding the influence of gender, age, disability and other characteristics, as well as the ways they intersect. Additionally, key groups are completely missing from some survey data used to construct the MPI.^{vii} For example, despite recognition that “gendered labour market and life course patterns lie at the roots of women’s disadvantage in old age,”^{viii} the exclusion of women 50 years and older from the key surveys means the circumstances of this cohort, which has experienced the cumulative impact of gender inequality, are not influencing related poverty estimates.

Household-level measurement also systematically ignores differences between individuals inside households. In particular, treating the household as a single entity hides unequal access to resources between men and women in the household, a key site of inequality.^{ix} Kanbur estimates that around one-third of total inequality lies within households. Ignoring these differences is no small problem. It understates overall inequality by around one-third, and over-estimates the extent to which GDP growth translates into poverty reduction.^x This can contribute to a disconnect between improvements indicated by official poverty data and ground-level perceptions.^{xi}

Further, household-level measurement of poverty ignores gender in what is measured, assessing poverty as though it were the same for women and men. This defines out and discounts dimensions that are particularly salient in women’s experience of poverty, such as sanitation, time-use, family planning and voice/agency. And it limits understanding of differences in women’s and men’s experiences of poverty and their resources to respond to it.^{xii}

Gender-insensitive measurement of poverty, therefore, masks the nature, scope and scale of poverty and who experiences it. Measurement that so fails to assess its intended target cannot be considered fit for purpose. Yet continued routine use in itself communicates adequacy. This slows measurement innovation and constrains efforts to understand and address the linkage between gender inequality and poverty as a global policy concern.

Two inter-related mechanisms are at work: methodological exclusion, or exclusion by design; and political inattention. These reinforce each other. Lack of gender data constrains

the evidence available to advocates inside government to promote increased action and priority. It also limits the evidence available to civil society and others to track implementation of global, regional and national policy commitments and promote action and accountability.

Improving measurement has been identified as central to understanding and addressing linkages between gender inequality and poverty since at least 1995 (see *Addressing the core question: Is poverty feminising? And how would we know?* below). And yet, within the gender data and poverty data communities, priority continues to be given to making the most of existing data.^{xiii} This is important and valuable, but not a substitute for addressing the underlying issue: the need for individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement that ensures gender shows up in routine poverty data and can be comprehensively analysed.

From critique to change: inclusive measurement by design

For some time, it was reasonable to assume that the key constraint was lack of a feasible alternative measure of poverty. However, this was resolved with the development of the Individual Deprivation Measure, now Equality Insights, a robust and feasible methodology for individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement of multidimensional poverty.^{xiv} Grounded in feminist principles, rights and capabilities, and lived experience of poverty, this measure has now been reviewed^{xv}, audited^{xvi}, tested through use in seven countries, and iteratively adapted.^{xvii}

The gendered impacts and disruptions of COVID-19 have highlighted the biases embedded in economic systems and structures as well as the social norms that help keep these in place.^{xviii} The combined effects of global stressors – the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and inflation – have led to an increase in the estimated numbers of people living in extreme poverty for the first time in a generation.^{xix} However, data limitations mean there is much we do not know about those affected: “the limited availability of data is leaving many questions unanswered.”^{xx} This limits understanding of contributing factors and mechanisms, and evidence to shape reform. It also underlines the systemic implications of gender-insensitive household-level poverty measurement that cannot be readily analysed to explore the influences of gender, age, disability and other characteristics.

At a time when governments and multilateral institutions face the conflicting demands of reduced resources and increased needs, it is particularly important to have individual-level, gender-sensitive data on poverty and inequality that are accurate and inclusive. Capturing the nature and extent of challenges faced by particular groups is critical to informed, effective and responsive action that addresses lived realities. In this context, continuing to fund household-level measurement as the primary approach to assessing global poverty undermines the effectiveness of poverty reduction efforts and contributes to perpetuating gender-based inequality.

Addressing the core question: is poverty feminising? And how would we know?

A key motivation for a central focus on gender inequality and poverty in the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 and in subsequent global fora was the understanding that poverty was feminising i.e., that women are poorer than men, and that the problem is worsening over time.

Sylvia Chant was at the forefront of feminist argument that inadequate measurement of poverty in fact made it impossible to know whether or not this was the case. Problems included lack of empirical substantiation, sparseness of data, inadequate specification of the core concept, and various conceptual and methodological weaknesses from a gender perspective. Effective measurement of poverty requires “a more holistic conceptual framework to encapsulate gendered privation, encompassing capabilities, livelihoods, subjectivities and social exclusion.” In other words, measuring the gendered dimensions of poverty requires reconceptualising poverty itself to encompass a wider range of considerations, and measuring at the individual-level in order to capture gender differences in inputs as well as outcomes. For Chant, a core concern was to understand the “feminisation of responsibility and obligation” – “women’s increasing liability for dealing with poverty (responsibility), and their progressively less choice other than to do so (obligation).”^{xxi}

IWDA’s findings using a ground-breaking individual-level, gender-sensitive measure of multidimensional poverty (see *From critique to change: inclusion by design*, above) in two provinces in the Solomon Islands in 2020 confirm the relevance of reconceptualising poverty and its measurement to capture its gendered dimensions. Overall, women spent around 70% more time on unpaid work and care than men, regardless of paid work status. Women who had not done paid work in the previous 7 days did 38 more minutes per day of unpaid and care work than women who had done paid work. By contrast, men who did no paid work spent six more minutes on unpaid care work, relative to the men who were engaged in paid work.^{xxii}

Gender	Paid work status	Mean hours of unpaid work and care
Women	Paid work	4 hours 31 mins
	No paid work	5 hours 9 mins
Men	Paid work	2 hours 42 mins
	No paid work	2 hours 48 mins

The World Bank, the custodian agency for poverty measurement, has recognised the foundational limitations of household-level measurement of poverty and the need for individual-level measurement^{xxiii} in order “to provide a satisfactory answer to the question that everyone seems to skirt, but to which they would like to know the answer: How many women are poor?”^{xxiv} The World Bank has recognised the need for better insight into within-household differences given evidence that resources are not shared equally within poor households,^{xxv} and that masking potential differences among household members creates problems for targeting assistance programs. Poor people are missed because they are hidden in non-poor households. And the effectiveness of interventions that do reach households are reduced “because they do not address the needs and constraints of the poorest individuals.”^{xxvi} The World Bank has also provided clear support for multidimensional poverty measurement, recognising that being poor goes beyond “inadequate consumption or a lack of income”, and that “an expanded, multidimensional understanding shows poverty as a much broader, more entrenched problem.”^{xxvii}

In a context of near universal commitment from nation states to achieve gender equality, end poverty and reduce

inequalities, and the identification of data limitations as a fundamental constraint, there remains notable opportunity to progress gender-sensitive poverty measurement.

Towards change: a problem with a solution^{xxviii}

Key global institutions have recognised the limitations of household-level measurement of poverty. The benefits in shifting poverty measurement standards towards individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement include:

- Increased measurement accuracy;
- Increased visibility of lived experience;
- Increased evidence of the circumstances of particular groups, including older women;
- A stronger evidence base for targeted gender-responsive responsive action, advocacy and accountability demands; and
- Increased ability for policy makers to meet people where they are.

Responsive and inclusive social and economic systems that connect to lived realities are important for quality (particularly effectiveness and efficiency) and for social stability and legitimacy.^{xxix} For countries and advocates working to advance feminist foreign policy, addressing this foundational system constraint is strategic, enabling and possible. Gender equality is recognised as integral to development and realising rights, including ending poverty. In this context, treating gender as integral to *measurement* of poverty and to producing related evidence is more than a matter of effectiveness and coherence. It also functions as an indicator of the capacity of institutions and systems to realise global commitments to end gendered poverty and achieve sustainable development.

Measurement *should* recognize and help make visible the gendered and intersectional nuances of poverty. To do otherwise discounts women’s experience of poverty, and makes efforts to reduce poverty less effective. Inaction can no longer be justified by a lack of alternative, as tools and approaches now exist to produce individual-level, gender-sensitive poverty data.

Leadership to improve evidence on multidimensional poverty and inequality is consistent with long-standing global commitments and priorities. The UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2024 will focus on extreme poverty, providing an opportunity for a transformative shift in approach on poverty measurement so that routine data reveals rather than hides the relationship between gender and poverty.

Reframing gender-insensitive poverty measurement: from technical issue to strategic priority

Feminist foreign policy offers a framework to elevate these considerations from technical matters to foundational political and structural issues. The critical mass of countries with a declared or substantively aligned FFP or FIAP offers an opportunity to normalise gender equality as integral to global systems and structures. Successfully progressing this agenda will require consideration of inter-related institutional, financial and political constraints.

Institutional constraints: Current household-level approaches to poverty measurement are widely used, with institutional disincentives to change. Highlighting opportunity costs can support the case for change. Privileging existing data and what it shows over what it

hides makes improving data about gender inequality and poverty more difficult, by allocating scarce funding for statistics to data that cannot be readily disaggregated.

Financial constraints: funding for statistics generally^{xxx} and gender statistics in particular is limited.^{xxxi} Bilateral development cooperation that is focused on gender equality has remained at around 4% of official development assistance (ODA) for the last decade.^{xxxii}

Political constraints: funding for feminist organisations and movements, which are the most significant drivers of change towards gender equality, is particularly limited. In 2020-21, the latest year for which data are available, only some 0.4% of total ODA went to women's rights organisations.^{xxxiii} Additionally, the politics of data need to be anticipated and navigated; individual-level poverty data bring increased visibility of intersectional inequalities, which will strengthen evidence for accountability and change. While this may prompt political hesitance, the increased ability to connect to lived realities and respond to inequalities that is enabled by such data brings potential political benefit.^{xxxiv}

Progressing gender-sensitive measurement of multidimensional poverty contributes to systemic change by shifting what counts and becomes visible as evidence. Institutions with global mandates that include addressing gender inequality and poverty such as UN Women, UNDP and the World Bank, produce key reports that are public statements of issues, evidence and directions. Global fora and institutional actors provide a mechanism to move evidence and recommendations into agreed commitments, priorities and recommendations. For feminist foreign policy advocates, progressing the implementation of commitments and recommendations on measurement and disaggregated data can reinforce the relevance of multilateral systems and strengthen their feminist fitness.

Recommendations

This section suggests general and specific approaches that can be implemented by **countries with a declared or substantively aligned FFP or FIAP** to strengthen the availability of individual-level, gender-sensitive data on multidimensional poverty and shift expectations regarding what constitutes adequate measurement of poverty.

1. Link a component of their funding for **global and regional multilateral institutions** to implementation of analysis and recommendations to strengthen individual-level poverty measurement. For example,
 - a. Enable countries to collect and use individual-level, gender-sensitive, multidimensional poverty data as part of UN Women's *Women Count II* program to close gender data gaps and build statistical capacity.
 - b. Support UN Women and the World Bank to collaborate on developing a roadmap for individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement of multidimensional poverty, including convening a second workshop on individual-level poverty measurement, building on the World Bank's 2017 workshop. This could be timed for Q4 2023, to inform discussions at CSW68 in 2024, or after, to accelerate action on gender and poverty.
- c. Support UNDP to explore the insights enabled by individual-level multidimensional poverty data, alongside its annual publication of existing multidimensional poverty analyses using household-level data.
2. Question relevant institutions in global fora and other engagements about action being taken to implement commitments and recommendations to measure and address the relationship between gender and poverty. For example,
 - a. Routinely ask institutional representatives whether disaggregated data and intersectional analysis has informed studies and reports, and about work planned to improve the availability of individual-level data.
3. In global, regional, sectoral and bilateral meetings, support implementation of relevant commitments and recommendations regarding collection and use of individual-level poverty data that can be routinely disaggregated by sex, age, disability and sociocultural background.
4. Use consultation and engagement processes in 2023 associated with development of the World Bank's next Gender Strategy (2024-2030) to advocate for:
 - a. inclusion of a specific focus on gender and poverty;
 - b. a pathway and timetable for establishing individual-level poverty measurement as standard practice;
 - c. resourcing a consistent increase in the collection of individual-level gender-sensitive poverty data over the life of the strategy; and
 - d. annual reporting of implementation.
5. Use engagements with **international financial institutions** (IFIs), such as bilateral meetings, policy consultations, and the Annual Meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (9-15 October 2023), particularly the Development Committee, to communicate a shift in expectations regarding collection and use of individual-level data on poverty and inequality to inform analysis and priorities.
6. Link a component of funding **for IFIs** to implementation of commitments and recommendations to progress individual-level poverty measurement. For example,
 - a. Engage with government and civil society in Majority World (Global South) countries regarding the potential for gender and poverty to be an explicit priority in the next International Development Association (IDA) replenishment cycle, to be finalised at the end of 2024,^{xxxv} and the potential to link the level of replenishment contributions to data-informed action on gender inequality and poverty.
 - b. Identify a portion of contributions to the **Umbrella Facility for Gender Equality** to build capacity to collect and analyse individual-level, gender-sensitive multidimensional poverty data.

7. Advocate to the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development** (OECD) to undertake
 - a. A stock-take of data sources informing countries' social protection systems, to determine the availability of data that can be disaggregated by gender, age, disability, and other relevant individual characteristics, and are underpinned by gender-sensitive survey methodology and tools.
 - b. A cost-benefit analysis of shifting relevant measurement standards towards collection of individual-level data including considering the benefits of improved disaggregation, visibility of vulnerable populations, and accuracy of poverty and inequality data.
8. Establish an independent advisory mechanism to strengthen and extend the range and depth of feminist economic analysis and advice informing FFP/FIAP policy implementation.
9. Optimise **bilateral development cooperation** programs to:
 - a. Resource the production of individual-level gender-sensitive poverty data, progressively substituting for household-level poverty surveys over time.
 - b. Combine this with support for strengthening the capacity of government and civil society to use this data to inform priorities, policies and programming, including development of targeted, responsive social protection measures to address specific barriers contributing to multidimensional poverty.
 - c. Invest in initiatives to strengthen the capacity of civil society to use gender-sensitive poverty data for advocacy and accountability.
10. Encourage **policy-level changes that strengthen attention to gender, poverty and inequality**, such as:
 - a. Integrate commitments to individual-level gender-sensitive measurement of poverty and inequality in development cooperation frameworks as these are revised.
- b. In particular, the Australian Government is encouraged to use work on a new development cooperation policy and a new gender strategy in 2023 as an opportunity to embed Australia's commitment to improving the availability of gender data and gender-sensitive poverty data. For example:
 - i. Require use of disaggregated data about poverty and inequality to inform development of new country strategies from 2025, or inclusion of such data collection as part of multi-year country strategies, to indicate a shift in minimum measurement standards.
 - ii. Support investment in the capacity of national statistical systems to collect and use gender-sensitive poverty data.
- c. Strengthen requirements to use gender-sensitive poverty data to inform routine analysis, priority-setting, program design, and monitoring and evaluation, to drive investment. Where relevant, align procurement arrangements with policy guidance.
- d. Report annually on the contribution of Australia's development program to advancing gender equality and the implementation of specific commitments.
11. Include specific resourcing for national, regional and global action to accelerate the availability and use of individual-level, gender-sensitive, multidimensional poverty data in annual budget allocations, with a review point after four years to assess progress and future priorities.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Sarah Boyd, Liz Gill Atkinson, Melissa Meinhart and Joanna Pradela for helpful comments and feedback.

IWDA's work to advance individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement of multidimensional poverty has benefited from sustained financial and strategic support from the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade since 2015. IWDA also acknowledges and values the support of the World Food Programme, which resourced work in the Solomon Islands in 2020 during the Individual Deprivation Measure phase of work, and statistical testing and review to inform development of *Equality Insights Plus*.

THE AUSTRALIAN FEMINIST FOREIGN POLICY COALITION

The Australian Feminist Foreign Policy Coalition is diverse network advancing feminist foreign policy in Australia. Convened by IWDA, its members work across a range of sectors including foreign policy, defence, security, women's rights, climate change and migration.

Feminist foreign policy is an approach which places gender equality as the central goal of foreign policy, in recognition that gender equality is a predictor of peaceful and flourishing societies. This Issues Paper Series aims to explore the opportunities and challenges for Australia in applying a feminist lens to a range of foreign policy issues, and provide practical ways forward.

Annex: Gender and poverty: The lineage of sustained global concern

This Annex, while not comprehensive, notes some important touchpoints in the last half century of attention to gender and poverty. It illustrates both the sustained global focus, and limited implementation.

Early focus

Ester Boserup's pioneering **1970** work, *Women's role in economic development*, highlighted the sexual division of labour, differences in development impact by gender, and that many development initiatives not only ignored women but undermined their opportunities and agency.^{xxxvi}

Concern about the relationship between gender and poverty was included as an explicit global policy priority at the first UN World Conference on Women in **1975**. The outcomes document noted that "extreme poverty constitutes an obstacle to the enjoyment of basic human rights" and that "the most underprivileged among women have the same needs as all other human beings and have a right to similar dignity and respect." It urged priority be given "to those women who, with their families, live under an intolerable yoke of poverty."^{xxxvii}

The need to collect more and better data has followed – to understand the linkages between gender and poverty, and to support effective action. **1995** was an important year in this regard, with a number of landmark events:

1. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Report that focused on gender and human development. Its key messages were that "Poverty has a women's face,"^{xxxviii} and gender inequality was the most persistent of rising disparities between and within nations.

Of the estimated 1.3 billion people living in poverty, more than 70% are female. This feminization of poverty is the tragic consequence of women's unequal access to economic opportunities.^{xxxix}

The report highlighted the wide and persistent gap between women's expanding capabilities and limited opportunities, and the under-valuation and non-recognition of women's work. While naming the feminization of poverty narratively, it did not present poverty data disaggregated by gender. Nevertheless, the report argued that "Human Development, if not engendered, is endangered."^{xl}

2. The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. The Declaration and Platform for Action agreed at this conference in Beijing set out core strategic priorities and commitments to achieve gender equality. These continue to influence global discussions and policy making, including at the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which retains these as a touchstone in reviewing progress.

The Beijing Declaration confirmed the commitment of those Governments attending to equality, development and peace, noted that progress was uneven, poverty was a key driver, and that governments were dedicated unreservedly to addressing these constraints and obstacles.^{xli}

Governments agreed a detailed Platform for Action (BPFA) to give effect to 12 strategic objectives and actions. "Women and poverty" was the first priority, and the "persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women" was named as one of 12 critical areas of concern. Poverty was described as "a complex, multidimensional problem" with various causes "including structural ones" and "origins in both the national and international domains."

"Transformations in the world economy" were having a profound impact on social development in all countries, with the increased poverty of women a "significant trend."^{xlii}

Gender-insensitive economic policies were identified as part of the problem.

20. Macro and micro-economic policies and programmes, including structural adjustment, have not always been designed to take account of their impact on women and girl children, especially those living in poverty... [T]he plight of women living in rural and remote areas deserves special attention given the stagnation of development in such areas. In developing countries, even those in which national indicators have shown improvement, the majority of rural women continue to live in conditions of economic underdevelopment and social marginalization.^{xliii}

Consequently,

Macroeconomic policies need rethinking and reformulation to address such trends. These policies focus almost exclusively on the formal sector. They also tend to impede the initiatives of women and fail to consider the differential impact on women and men. The application of gender analysis to a wide range of policies and programmes is therefore critical to poverty reduction strategies... The eradication of poverty cannot be accomplished through anti-poverty programmes alone but will require democratic participation and changes in economic structures in order to ensure access for all women to resources, opportunities and public services. Poverty has various manifestations, including lack of income and productive resources sufficient to ensure a sustainable livelihood; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or lack of access to education and other basic services; increasing morbidity and mortality from illness; homelessness and inadequate housing; unsafe environments; and social discrimination and exclusion. It is also characterized by lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life.^{xliiv}

Women are recognised as "key contributors to the economy and to combating poverty through both remunerated and unremunerated work."^{xliiv}

Reflecting this analysis, the BPFA included a strategic objective to "Develop gender-based methodologies and conduct research to address the feminization of poverty," with the following specific actions to be taken by national and international statistical organisations:

68 (a) Collect gender and age-disaggregated data on poverty and all aspects of economic activity... to facilitate the assessment of economic performance from a gender perspective;

3. The World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) The WSSD endorsed the goal to eradicate poverty, influenced the establishment of this as the first of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and clearly linked poverty eradication and gender equality.

We acknowledge that social and economic development cannot be secured in a sustainable way without the full participation of women and that equality and equity between women and men is a priority for the international community and as such must be at the centre of economic and social development.^{xliiv}

The **UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979**, included in its preamble concern "that in situations of poverty women have the least access to food, health, education, training and opportunities for employment and other needs."^{xliiv}

From Beijing to the Millennium Development Goals

In 2000, 189 member states of the United Nations committed through the Millennium Declaration to achieve eight key goals by 2015. **The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)** included Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (Goal 1) and Promote gender equality and empower women (Goal 3). However, the poverty target was gender-insensitive^{xlviii}, and the gender equality target focused narrowly, on eliminating gender disparity in education.^{xlix}

A **2003 UNDP review** of 13 national MDG reports noted that four identified women as particularly vulnerable to poverty with the feminisation of poverty recognised as a challenge, but without data in support. Although a 'welcome shift' away from gender-insensitive approaches to poverty, UNDP noted that without data or policy commitments, "such statements are of little value either as entry-points for refocusing the direction of poverty policy or as benchmarks for tracking change."^l

The **2005 Report of the UN Millennium Project Taskforce on Education and Gender Equality** identified gender equality as vital for achieving all goals, identified seven interdependent strategic priorities, and urged a particular focus on three subpopulations of women, including "poor women in the poorest countries and in countries that have achieved increases in national income."^{li}

This work informed a **2006 regional symposium on measuring gender equality and harmonising indicators**, convened by IWDA and funded by the Australian Government.^{lii} The inclusion of a strategic focus on poor women picked up the Taskforce recommendation, and catalysed IWDA's involvement in **an international research collaboration from 2008**, to identify "a just and justifiable measure of poverty that is genuinely gender sensitive and capable of revealing gender disparities"^{liii}. The resulting world-first individual-level, gender-sensitive measure of multidimensional poverty was launched at the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 2014 during a side event hosted the Australian Government.

Meanwhile, not unlike the 1995 Human Development Report, the **2012 World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development** described gender equality as "at the heart of development". It recognised the imperative to focus on the relationship between gender disparity and poverty, and the additional marginalisation when gender intersects with other forms of disadvantage.

For poor women in poor places, sizable gender gaps remain. And these disparities are even larger when poverty combines with other forms of exclusion, such as remoteness, ethnicity, and disability.

It described the interaction between markets, institutions and households as a constraint on progress.

Gender gaps in productivity and earnings, for example, are pervasive. And they are driven by deep-seated gender differences in time use (reflecting social norms about house and care work), in rights of ownership and control over land and assets, and in the workings of markets and formal institutions, which work in ways that disadvantage women.^{liv}

In his foreword to the World Bank's **2013 Gender at Work Report**, a companion to the *World Development Report on Jobs*, World Bank President Jim Young Kim confirmed the empowerment of women and girls was 'vital in order to achieve our twin goals: ending extreme poverty by 2030

and boosting shared prosperity. The World Bank Group is fully committed to this agenda."^{lv}

Shaping the post-2015 agenda

The Agreed Conclusions adopted by the **Commission on the Status of Women in 2014**, at its 58th session,^{lvi} reflected on the achievements and challenges in realizing the Millennium Development Goals, and looked forward to the post-2015 agenda. The Commission reaffirmed international consensus that "the promotion and protection of, and respect for, the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women... should be mainstreamed into all policies and programmes aimed at the eradication of poverty" (para 11). It expressed:

deep concern with regard to Millennium Development Goal 1, ...that poverty impedes women's empowerment and progress towards gender equality, and that the feminization of poverty persists.... The Commission notes that current poverty measures do not adequately reflect women's vulnerability to poverty, owing to inadequate data, inter alia, on income distribution within households. (para 19)

...The Commission also recognizes that effective gender-responsive monitoring of the Goals has been limited owing to a lack of investment in and the consistent collection and use of reliable, integrated gender indicators, statistics and data, disaggregated by sex, age, disability, location and other relevant factors, and that goals, targets and indicators, including gender-sensitive indicators, are valuable in measuring and accelerating progress... (para 37)

The Commission urged action in five priority areas, including addressing data gaps and improving gender statistics:

Improve systematic and coordinated collection, analysis, dissemination and use of gender statistics and data disaggregated by sex, age, disability and other relevant variables at the national level, through appropriate financial and technical support and capacity-building... [D(eee)]

Continue to develop and enhance standards and methodologies, for use at national and international levels, to improve data, inter alia, on women's poverty, income distribution within households, unpaid care work, women's access to, control and ownership of assets and productive resources, and women's participation at all levels of decision-making, including to monitor progress on the Millennium Development Goals for women and girls; [D(ggg)]

The Sustainable Development Goals and leaving no one behind

In 2015, 192 countries endorsed the Agenda for Sustainable Development 2030, and 17 interdependent Sustainable Development Goals, including ending poverty (Goal 1), achieving gender equality (Goal 5) and reducing inequalities (Goal 10). The full wording of the poverty goal – End poverty in all its forms everywhere – implies and requires individual-level, multidimensional measurement to track and verify. However, the focus in developing the indicator framework was to use approaches with agreed methodology and being regularly collected where possible. This effectively supported the status quo of gender-insensitive measurement of poverty and limited incentives for methodological innovation such as individual-level, gender-sensitive measurement of poverty, that could help to verify progress towards the goal.

UN Women named the consequences in its flagship *Progress of the World's Women Report 2015-16*:

While 'women's socio-economic disadvantage is reflected in pervasive gender inequalities across many dimensions of poverty, the absence of sex disaggregated data makes it difficult to establish if women are, across the board, more likely to live in poverty than men.'^{vii}

The overarching commitment to "leave no one behind" in realizing the SDGs has underpinned a growing focus on disaggregated data. The Interagency Expert Group on the SDGs' dedicated work stream on disaggregation has recognised that in some cases, multiple levels of disaggregation (e.g., by gender *and* age) may be needed. A focus on strengthening the production of quality data that can be disaggregated by sex, age, income and other relevant characteristics is also reflected at the regional level.^{lviii}

The report of the **2019 High-level Political Forum** on Sustainable Development, the annual global meeting to review progress on the SDGs, recognised that the invisibility of key populations due to data gaps is holding back progress, noting that "Investment in data and capacity is also needed for the adequate measurement... If the most vulnerable are not visible in statistics, there will not be appropriate policy action."^{lix}

Shifts towards individual-level measurement of poverty

In **2017**, the World Bank convened an invited workshop on individual poverty measurement, bringing together individuals, institutions and initiatives working on aspects of individual-level measurement. This work influenced the World Bank's **2018** Poverty and Shared Prosperity Report, with specific chapters looking beyond monetary poverty,

and looking inside the household, at the situation of poor children, women and men, differences in resources and poverty within household, and methodological considerations.^{lx}

In **2018**, the **World Bank and UN Women** also collaborated on a working paper to explore what can be learned about gender differences from existing individual- and household-level information, given 'the absence of individual-level poverty data'^{lxi}

The UN Economic Commission for Europe's **2017** Guide on Poverty Measurement recognised that "Both quantitative and qualitative studies have found that household-level variables are not necessarily optimal predictors of individual well-being and poverty status, as they ignore gender and other intra-household inequalities (such as those based on age), as well as the possibility that non-earners may be poorer than other earning adults in the same household." It advises that to identify poor people, that "different poverty measures, based on information collected both at household and individual levels, are combined."^{lxii}

In **2019** the UN Statistical Division published new **methodological guidelines on the production of statistics on asset ownership from a gender perspective (2019)**. These recognized that "prior research has found that most assets are owned by individuals, either solely or jointly, thus making individual-level data more revealing than household-level data for informing evidence-based policies and programmes. Added to this, individual-level data enable gender analysis and also analysis along numerous other dimensions, such as age or marital status, that are important for understanding a range of policy issues."^{lxiii}

Endnotes

ⁱ The initial research to develop an individual-level, gender-sensitive measure of poverty was a collaboration between the Australian National University, IWDA, Oxfam Great Britain (Southern Africa), Oxfam America, the Philippine Health and Social Science Association, and the University of Colorado at Boulder. It was funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant (LP0989385, 2008-2012) and partner organisations, with substantial additional support from the Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature at Oslo University.

ⁱⁱ Chant, Sylvia. 2006. Re-thinking the 'feminization of poverty' in relation to aggregate gender indices. *Journal of Human Development* 7(2): 201-220 at page 217.

ⁱⁱⁱ Canada, the European Community, France, Germany, Japan, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

^{iv} van Reisen, Mirjam. and Ussar, Maxi. 2005. *Accountability Upside Down: Gender equality in a partnership for poverty eradication*. Geneva, Eurostep and Social Watch. <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=6389d67a-bbe3-4d5d-8ef4-593e84d65beb>.

^v Kilby, Patrick and Crawford, Joanne. 2011. *Closing the Gender Gap: Gender and Australian NGOs*. ACFID Research in Development Series Report No.2. <https://acfid.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Closing-the-gender-gap.pdf>

^{vi} UN Women. 2015. *Progress of the World's Women 2015-16: Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights*. UN Women, https://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/pdf/UNW_progressreport.pdf

^{vii} The MPI was developed to provide a way to calculate multidimensional poverty globally and uses widely available data, drawing primarily on USAID's Demographic and Health Survey

(DHS) and UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS). Both surveys sample women of reproductive age, meaning that core data used to populate the MPI is not influenced by the circumstances of women over 50. See Development Initiatives, 2020. *Assessing Contributions of the Individual Deprivation Measure*, for discussion of the coverage of various global surveys and their implications <https://equalityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Assessment-of-IDM-Contributions-FINAL-corrected.pdf>

^{viii} <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/12/women-income-security-in-old-age>

^{ix} Chant, Sylvia. 1997. *Women-Headed Households Diversity and Dynamics in the Developing World*, Palgrave MacMillan, p.39

^x Ravi Kanbur. 2016. *Intra-Household Inequality and Overall Inequality*. Cornell Dyson School Working Paper 2016-11. <http://publications.dyson.cornell.edu/research/researchpdf/wp/2016/Cornell-Dyson-wp1611.pdf>

^{xi} Kanbur, Ravi. 2010. "Globalization, Growth and Distribution: Framing the Questions," in Kanbur, Ravi and Spence, Michael. 2010. *Equity and Growth in a Globalizing World: Commission on Growth and Development*. World Bank, pp. 41-70. 132. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2458>

^{xii} Cozzarelli, Catherine and Markham, Susan. 2014. *Capturing women's multidimensional experiences of extreme poverty*. USAID. <https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/frontiers/2014/publication/section-1-capturing-womens-multidimensional-experiences-extreme-poverty>

^{xiii} UN Women and World Bank. 2018. *Gender differences in poverty and household composition through the life cycle*. SDG

Report Spotlight on Goal 1, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2018/SDG-report-Spotlight-01-Gender-differences-in-poverty-and-household-composition-en.pdf>.

^{xiv} Wisor, Scott, Bessell, Sharon, Castillo, Fatima, Crawford, Joanne, Donaghue, Kieran, Hunt, Janet, Jaggar, Alison, Liu and Amy, & Pogge, Thomas. 2014. Individual Deprivation Measure – a gender sensitive approach to poverty measurement. Melbourne. International Women’s Development Agency.

<https://www.individualdeprivationmeasure.org/resources/arc-report/>

^{xv} Hunt, Janet, Bessell, Sharon, Crawford, Joanne, Fisk, Kylie, Nguyen, Hieu, Pham, Trang, Suich, Helen & Yap, Mandy. 2017. The Individual Deprivation Measure: Methodology Update 2017.

Australian National University, Canberra and International Women’s Development Agency, Melbourne.

http://www.individualdeprivationmeasure.org/wp-content/uploads/Methodology_Update_2017_FINAL.pdf. This work was undertaken as part of a four-year partnership between the ANU, IWDA and the Australian Government, to ready the Individual Deprivation Measure (IDM) for global use.

^{xvi} Caperna, Giulio & Papadimitriou, Eleni. 2020. JRC Statistical Audit of the Individual Deprivation Measure, Joint Research Centre. EUR 30320 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. <https://equalityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/JRC-Statistical-Audit-of-the-Individual-Deprivation-Measure-2020.pdf>

^{xvii} As part of IWDA’s *Equality Insights* program, statistical performance of IDM items in five countries was reviewed to inform item reduction for the *Equality Insights Plus* face-to-face survey, and provided a base for developing *Equality Insights Rapid*, a shorter phone-based variant. See Meinhart, Melissa & Russell, Cheryl. 2022. *Equality Insights Rapid: Tool Development Report*. Melbourne, International Women’s Development Agency. <https://equalityinsights.org/resources/equality-insights-rapid-tool-development-report/>

^{xviii} See, for example, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. 2021. *Caregiving in crisis: Gender inequality in paid and unpaid work during COVID-19*. Paris, OECD, December. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/caregiving-in-crisis-gender-inequality-in-paid-and-unpaid-work-during-covid-19-3555d164/>

^{xix} <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/pandemic-prices-and-poverty>, published 13 April 2022. The 2021 extreme poverty estimates are from Brookings Institution:

<https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2022/05/18/covid-19-and-poverty-vulnerability/>

^{xx} UN Women. 2020. *From Insight to Action. Gender Equality in the context of COVID-19*. <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-COVID-19-en.pdf>

^{xxi} Chant, Sylvia. 2006. Re-thinking the ‘feminization of poverty’ in relation to aggregate gender indices. *Journal of Human Development* 7(2): 201-220 at page 217

^{xxii} Fisk, Kylie, McInerney, Carol, Rehill, Patrick, Crawford, Joanne & Pradela, Joanna. 2020. *Gender Insights in the Solomon Islands: Findings from a two-province study using the Individual Deprivation Measure*, Melbourne, International Women’s Development Agency at page 102. <https://equalityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Gender-insights-in-the-Solomon-Islands-Equality-Insights.pdf>

^{xxiii} The World Bank convened global experts in February 2017 for an invited two-day workshop on Individual Poverty Measurement. The author presented on the IDM with Helen Suich from the ANU IDM team. Workshop discussions informed subsequent public recognition of data limitations and their implications.

^{xxiv} World Bank, *Monitoring Global Poverty: Report of the Commission on Global Poverty*. Washington, World Bank, 2017 <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/25141>

^{xxv} World Bank. 2018. *Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2018: Piecing Together the Poverty Puzzle*. Washington, DC: World Bank, pp.6-7 <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/30418/9781464813306.pdf>

^{xxvi} Ibid at page 125.

^{xxvii} Ibid at page 5

^{xxviii} The wording was a chapter title in this excellent report: UN Millennium Project. 2005. *Taking action: achieving gender equality and empowering women*, Taskforce on Education and Gender Equality.

^{xxix} Crawford, Joanne and Pradela, Joanna. 2022. *Building from the foundations: improving data to inform future-fit social protection*. Policy Brief, T20 Indonesia 2022, Task Force 5: Inequality, Human Capital, and Well-being.

https://www.t20indonesia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/TF5_Building-from-The-Foundations-Improving-Data-to-Inform-Future-Fit-Social-Protection.pdf

^{xxx} Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data. 2018. *Making the case: More and better financing for development data*. https://www.data4sdgs.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/Financing%20for%20Development%20Data%20Pamphlet%20FINAL_27Mar.pdf

^{xxxi} Badiee, Shaïda, Swanson, Eric, Noe, Lorenz, Wahabzada, Tawheeda, Pittman, Amelia & Appel, Deirdre. 2021. *State of Gender Data Financing 2021*. Open Data Watch and Data2X. https://data2x.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/State-of-Gender-Data-Financing-2021_FINAL.pdf

^{xxxii} <https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-topics/development-finance-for-gender-equality-and-women-s-empowerment.htm>

^{xxxiii} OECD. 2023. *Official development assistance for gender equality and women’s empowerment: A snapshot* <https://www.oecd.org/dac/snapshot-oda-gender-2023.pdf>

^{xxxiv} For further discussion of navigating the politics of open data, including new data sources, see Open Data Watch, UN Women & the Individual Deprivation Measure. 2019. *Navigating the Politics of Open Data: A High-Level Political Forum Side Event: Outcome Document*. <https://equalityinsights.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/IWDA-UN-Women-HLPF-Outcome-Document-2019.09.23-small.pdf>

^{xxxv} The 20th IDA Replenishment cycle runs from 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2025. If the 21st replenishment operates on a similar timetable to the 20th cycle, an initial meeting in April 2024 would determine strategic directions and priorities, and commitments would be finalised in December 2024.

^{xxxvi} Melikidze, Valeri, Stancliffe, Rachel, Tarkhan-Mouravi, George. 1995. *Human Development Report 1995: Gender and Human Development*. New York at page 101.

<https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-1995>

^{xxxvii} United Nations. 1996. *Report of the World Conference of the International Women’s Year, Mexico City, 19 June – 2 July 1975*, United Nations, New York. E/CONF.66/34. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N76/353/95/PDF/N7635395.pdf?OpenElement>

^{xxxviii} Ibid at page 4

^{xxxix} Ibid at page 36

^{xl} Ibid

^{xli} Beijing Declaration, UN Fourth World Conference on Women, September 1995 <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf>

^{xlii} Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) para 40

^{xliii} BPFA Para 20

^{xliiv} BPFA Para 47

^{xli v} BPFA para 21

^{xli vi} United Nations. 1995. *Final Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen*. A/CONF.166/9:

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N95/116/51/IMG/N9511651.pdf?OpenElement>

^{xli vii} <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>

^{xli viii} “Target 1. Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people whose income is less than \$1 a day.”

^{xli ix} “Target 4. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and all levels of education no later than 2015.”

ⁱ UNDP. 2003. *Millennium Development Goals: National Reports Through a Gender Lens*. UNDP. New York at page 22.

ⁱⁱ UN Millennium Project. 2005. *Taking action: achieving gender equality and empowering women*, Taskforce on Education and

Gender Equality.

<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Taking%20Action-%20Achieving%20Gender%20Equality%20and%20Empowering%20Women.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Development Bulletin. No. 71. September 2006. Measuring Gender Equality.

<https://crawford.anu.edu.au/rmap/devnet/devnet/db-71.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Scott Wisor, Sharon Bessell, Fatima Castillo, Joanne Crawford, Kieran Donaghue, Janet Hunt, Alison Jaggard, Amy Liu and Thomas Pogge, *Individual Deprivation Measure – a gender sensitive approach to poverty measurement*, Melbourne, International Women's Development Agency, 2014

<https://equalityinsights.org/resources/idm-research-report-2014/>

^{iv} World Bank (2013), *Gender at Work. A Companion to the World Development Report on Jobs*, the World Bank Group, 2013, https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Gender/GenderAtWork_web.pdf p.xxi

^{iv} Ibid.

^{vi} Agreed Conclusions, UN Commission on the Status of Women 58th Session, 21 March 2014. E/2014/27 at Paragraph 11.

https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/CSW/58/CSW58_Agreed_Conclusions.pdf

^{vii} UN Women. 2015. Progress of the World's Women 2015-16, United Nations at page 44 https://progress.unwomen.org/en/2015/pdf/UNW_progressreport.pdf

^{viii} See, for example, United Nations Economic and Social Council, Statistical Commission. 2019. Report of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific on statistical

development in Asia and the Pacific. E/CN.3/2019/7. 5-8 March <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/50th-session/documents/2019-7-ESCAP-E.pdf>

^{ix} United Nations Economic and Social Council, High Level Political Forum. 2019. Summary by the President of the Economic and Social Council of the high-level political forum on sustainable development convened under the auspices of the Council at its 2019 session. E/HLPF/2019/8 at page 4

<https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/251/18/PDF/N1925118.pdf?OpenElement>

^{ix} World Bank. 2018. Op.cit.

^{ixi} <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/135731520343670750/gender-differences-in-poverty-and-household-composition-through-the-life-cycle-a-global-perspective>

^{ixii} United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. 2017. Guide on Poverty Measures, United Nations. ECE/CES/STAT/2017/4 at pages 161-162 <https://unece.org/DAM/stats/publications/2018/ECECESSTAT20174.pdf>

^{ixiii} Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistical Division. 2019. Guidelines for Producing Statistics on Asset Ownership from a Gender Perspective. Studies in Methods Series F No. 119, United Nations. ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/119. https://unstats.un.org/edge/publications/docs/Guidelines_final.pdf