

Gender really matters:
Perspectives from the field
and implications for
poverty measurement

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gender MATTERS

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When women benefit, the whole community benefits.

Acknowledgements

International Women’s Development Agency recognises partnership and collaboration as fundamental to development effectiveness. As we work with partners, we build our capabilities and strengths to advocate for gender equality. Together we create space for women’s voices to be heard and amplify these through networking, advocacy and research.

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1. Introduction

Understanding who is poor, in what ways and to what extent, is fundamental to addressing poverty. From both an ethical and effectiveness perspective, it is important to know, for example, whether women and girls make up a greater proportion of people living in poverty than men and boys (or vice versa). However, despite widespread acknowledgement of the importance of gender in development and frequent claims that women make up a growing majority of the world's poor¹, current global poverty data cannot be accurately disaggregated by sex. Poverty data is currently collected in relation to *households*, not individuals. This is despite evidence of significant gender inequality within households, which can shape how individual household members experience poverty. Inequality in the household can also persist even after gender equality gains have been made in the workplace or in community decision-making. Current measures also focus on a narrow range of dimensions which are not informed by the views of poor women and men about what is important in measuring and addressing poverty. They also exclude dimensions that may be particularly important for revealing the relationship between gender and poverty, such as time use², violence and access to contraception.³

Motivated by a belief that overcoming the limitations of current approaches to poverty measurement is both essential and possible, an international research collaboration was formed to explore the question: what is a just and justifiable measure of poverty that is also capable of revealing gender disparities where they exist? A core concern of the research was to ground a new approach in the lived experiences of poor women and men and how they believe poverty and hardship should be defined and measured. Participation of those in poverty matters, from a rights perspective and for developing an appropriate and justifiable measure of poverty that focuses on aspects of life that poor women and men consider important.⁴ Their experiences and views are at the heart of the research and have informed the development of a new multidimensional measure of poverty, the *Individual Deprivation Measure* (IDM), which can also measure gender disparities between poor women and men. This addresses some limitations with current gender equity measures which tend to privilege the experiences of the better off who are active in the formal economy, neglecting the informal sector and inequities in life that are more relevant to those who are poorest. For example,

data about women's representation in parliament does not tell us anything about whether women have decision-making control closer to home, such as within the household or on locally elected bodies.⁵

The household *is* important in poverty measurement – but we can only understand how it functions to mediate access to rights, resources, assets and opportunities if we understand the situation of individual household members and whether and how their circumstances differ. Are all deprivations equally important for women and men, boys and girls? Are some more important at some ages and stages of life? How important is it to measure dimensions of life that play out within the household, such as time use, decision-making, family support, violence, access to energy or to educational opportunities?

This publication does not aim to summarise the research as a whole. Rather, it seeks to highlight the importance of the enterprise by sharing the perspectives of some of the women and men across six countries whose views informed development of the IDM. The rich personal perspectives shared in the initial qualitative phase of research provide insights into some of the ways in which gendered social expectations, roles and responsibilities, gender relations and gender discrimination shape and are shaped by poverty. We pay attention to how poor women and men define poverty for themselves, their families and their communities and to dimensions of life which illuminate the implications of intra-household dynamics for poverty and deprivation.

The research challenges dominant approaches to defining and measuring global poverty. Women and men did not speak of being poor and then not poor, or of just needing more money. They told complex stories about how gender, age, location, environment, disability and other factors influenced their circumstances and opportunities and how they navigated these contexts to survive, resist and act. The constraints and challenges identified by poor women and men point us to the dimensions that need to be at the heart of measuring and addressing poverty. Our hope is that these insights help illustrate the significance and strengths of the IDM.

1. For further discussion about claims regarding the feminisation of poverty see Chant (2006).

2. Across the world, women continue to spend more time on unpaid household and care work than men, ranging from twice as much time in Sweden to 4.6 times more in Ghana to 6 times as much in Pakistan (World Bank 2011: 297). This is true even when women earn most of the household income (Wisor 2012).

3. For an extended discussion about problems with current poverty measurement, see Reddy & Pogge (2010).

4. Participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) offer an important mechanism for communities to determine how poverty is measured at the local level and identify priorities for poverty alleviation, but they are difficult to compare over time and place. Importantly, most PPAs take the household as the unit of analysis and are rarely scaled up from a local level to generate national or supra-national poverty assessments (Wisor et al. 2014, forthcoming).

5. See Quay (2012). Moreover, women's representation in parliament can be high in a particular place while development indicators for women such as maternal mortality can remain poor.

The research project overview

The research discussed in this paper was conducted as part of an Australian Research Council-funded linkage research project *Assessing development: designing better indices of poverty and gender equity*, administered by the Australian National University. IWDA was the industry linkage partner, contributing significant funding and in-kind support over three years. Other partners providing financial and in-kind support were Oxfam Great Britain (Southern Africa), the Philippine Health Social Science Association and the University of Colorado at Boulder. Oxfam America and the Centre for the Study of Mind in Nature at the University of Oslo provided additional funding.

The project was led by internationally respected academics and brought together NGOs and research institutions with a shared objective of improving the measurement of poverty and gender equity.

Our priority was to construct a measure that:

- Is non-arbitrary and has proven itself in public debate to be sound and coherent
- Is gender-sensitive and capable of revealing gender disparities where they exist
- Assesses the situation of individuals rather than households and so can be disaggregated by sex
- Reflects the priorities of poor women and men
- Is deprivation-focused
- Is practical, feasible and manageable in terms of cost
- Builds on, complements, or improves existing approaches
- Uses existing data where relevant but does not perpetuate current data limitations
- Is informed by insights from gender and development studies.

The research used a three phase design. **The first phase** began with qualitative, participatory research in six countries (Angola, Fiji, Indonesia, Malawi, Mozambique and the Philippines) to gain insight and understanding. Approximately 1,115 men and women were involved. Participants were separated by sex and by three life stages: young women and men, women and men in middle age, and older women and men. Because there was significant variation in life expectancy across the research countries, life stage and associated responsibilities rather than age ranges were used to delineate groups.

The second phase of the research was quantitative, to gauge the preferences and priorities of poor women and men in the same six countries regarding the most important factors for defining and measuring poverty (around 1,800 women and men participated). Field work in the first two phases was undertaken in three sites in each country (urban, rural and highly marginalized communities⁶) and led by local research teams working in partnership with local NGOs (see Acknowledgements for details). The first two phases of fieldwork informed the development of a new measure of poverty and gender disparity, the *Individual Deprivation Measure* (IDM).

The third phase was a nationally-representative trial of the new measure in the Philippines, with a survey sample of 1,806 people.

The project website www.genderpovertymeasure.org provides a wealth of information about the research including about the people and organisations involved, methodology (field guides, questionnaires), data analysis and outputs including individual country reports and the forthcoming final report authored by Scott Wisor, Kieran Donaghue, Joanne Crawford, Sharon Bessel, Thomas Pogge, Fatima Castillo, Janet Hunt, Alison Jaggar and Amy Liu (2014, forthcoming).

6. For this research, 'marginalised' was defined as subject to systematic discrimination or exclusion, such as a squatter settlement, or a community without a clear administrative boundary, a group of internally displaced people, or an ethnic or religious minority. The research team recognised that identifying a marginalised community can be difficult in countries where most communities face systematic deprivation.

1.1 What are the issues with current poverty measures?

Five specific limitations of existing poverty measures informed the IDM research focus. These limitations are in turn carried into efforts to alleviate poverty, because the data gathered is used to determine who is poor, where poverty exists, who should get which resources and to subsequently judge which policies are most poverty reducing (Reddy & Pogge 2010).

i) They measure poverty of households, not individuals. What poverty *is* – what constitutes poverty – is experienced by individuals; this is the “level at which poverty is actually experienced” (Kabeer 1996: 12). However, the World Bank’s poverty measure, the International Poverty Line (IPL), and the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) developed by the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and introduced in the United Nations Development Programme’s *Human Development Report* in 2010, use data collected by household surveys.⁷ When disaggregated data is required, household data is converted into individual data, for example by assuming that household income is shared equally among all individuals within the household (Foster et al. 2013: 4). If we measure the poverty of households we cannot capture the range of experiences of different individuals within a household nor reveal where many deprivations are experienced by one person in the household (for example a young girl with a disability who faces discrimination and stigma and practical barriers that limit her access to health care, education, mobility, sanitation and participation in community life), or are shared among household members. Such information is important ethically and vital for effectively targeting policy, programming and resources.

ii) They do not provide gender-sensitive or sex-disaggregated data. Existing measures focus on deprivations (e.g. lack of money) that both women and men may suffer and exclude areas of life that we know from gender and development literature and experience are important for women, such as freedom from violence, free time/ overall labour burden and decision-making around family planning. They also cannot provide sex-disaggregated data. This makes it impossible to understand the relationship between poverty and gender and identify any differences in the nature and extent of poverty for women and men.

iii) They are not grounded in the views of poor women and men about what poverty is and how it should be measured. In most cases poor women and men have been excluded from discussions of how social and economic progress should be assessed. This was noted by the *Voices of the Poor* project, initiated by the World Bank, which collected the perspectives of more than 60,000 poor women and men (Narayan 1999; Narayan et al. 2000; Narayan & Petesch 2002). The subsequent reports offered deep insights into the experience of living in poverty, with individuals focusing on assets – human, social and environmental – rather than income. Inequity between women and men was a common theme in each of the countries studied. However, the *Voices of the Poor* research did not set out to engage poor women and men on how poverty should be defined and measured, and did not use the insights gathered to revise measures of poverty or gender inequity.

iv) They exclude important dimensions of deprivation. The International Poverty Line focuses on money as the key variable for assessing and addressing poverty, defining women and men as poor if they live on less than US\$1.25 PPP per day.⁸ The IPL is subject to a range of critiques concerning, in particular, its narrowness of focus. Focusing on money suggests that everything that is needed to be not poor can be purchased.⁹ Money is certainly important to moving out of poverty and poor women and men involved in our research confirmed this; but it is not all that matters. In addition, who earns and makes decisions about money matters for where resources are spent, with evidence that marginal income in the hands of women has a greater impact on household well being than additional money in the hands of men (World Bank 2012: 5). The Multidimensional Poverty Index goes some way to address this limitation by including a number of important inter-related dimensions – education, health and standard of living. However, other important dimensions continue to be excluded such as freedom from violence and labour burden/ access to free time. The indicators used in the MPI to measure deprivation are also limited. For example, educational indicators focus on enrollment but provide no information on quality of schooling or educational achievements¹⁰ (Wisor et al. 2014, forthcoming).

7. The household surveys used to provide data for these assessments are completed by a single member of a household, on behalf of all household members. An additional household member is interviewed only for modules other than those covered by the primary respondent; for example, a designated ‘head of household’ might be interviewed about consumption, education and health and if this respondent is not female, then a female household member may be asked about contraception, pregnancy, childbirth and associated care (Wisor et al. 2014, forthcoming).

8. The World Bank’s International Poverty Line is currently set at US\$1.25 2005 Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). The IPL is meant to represent the purchasing power that US\$1.25 had in the United States in 2005. Calculating the IPL in the currency of a developing country in a particular year Y

involves two steps: (1) a conversion of purchasing power in 2005 between the United States dollar and the local currency; and (2) a conversion, in local currency, between year Y and the base year of 2005.

9. Other concerns include that it is unrealistically low and so shows greater progress on tackling poverty than would a higher rate. For a review of debates over the IPL, see Anand, Segal & Stiglitz (2010) and also chapters 3-5 of Pogge (2010).

10. For a review of the huge disparities between educational achievement and educational enrolment, see Pritchett (2013).

v) They use a binary approach – an individual is either poor or not poor. Current approaches do not show the extent or depth of poverty nor vulnerability to poverty. For example, once a household is very slightly above the relevant cut-off, it will not be counted as poor, even if it has little or no 'buffer' to absorb small adverse environmental, health or economic shocks. As Figure 1 illustrates in relation to the IPL, a binary approach treats Person A and Person B as equally poor, and Person C and Person D as equally not poor, even though their situation relative to the cut-off point is different.¹¹

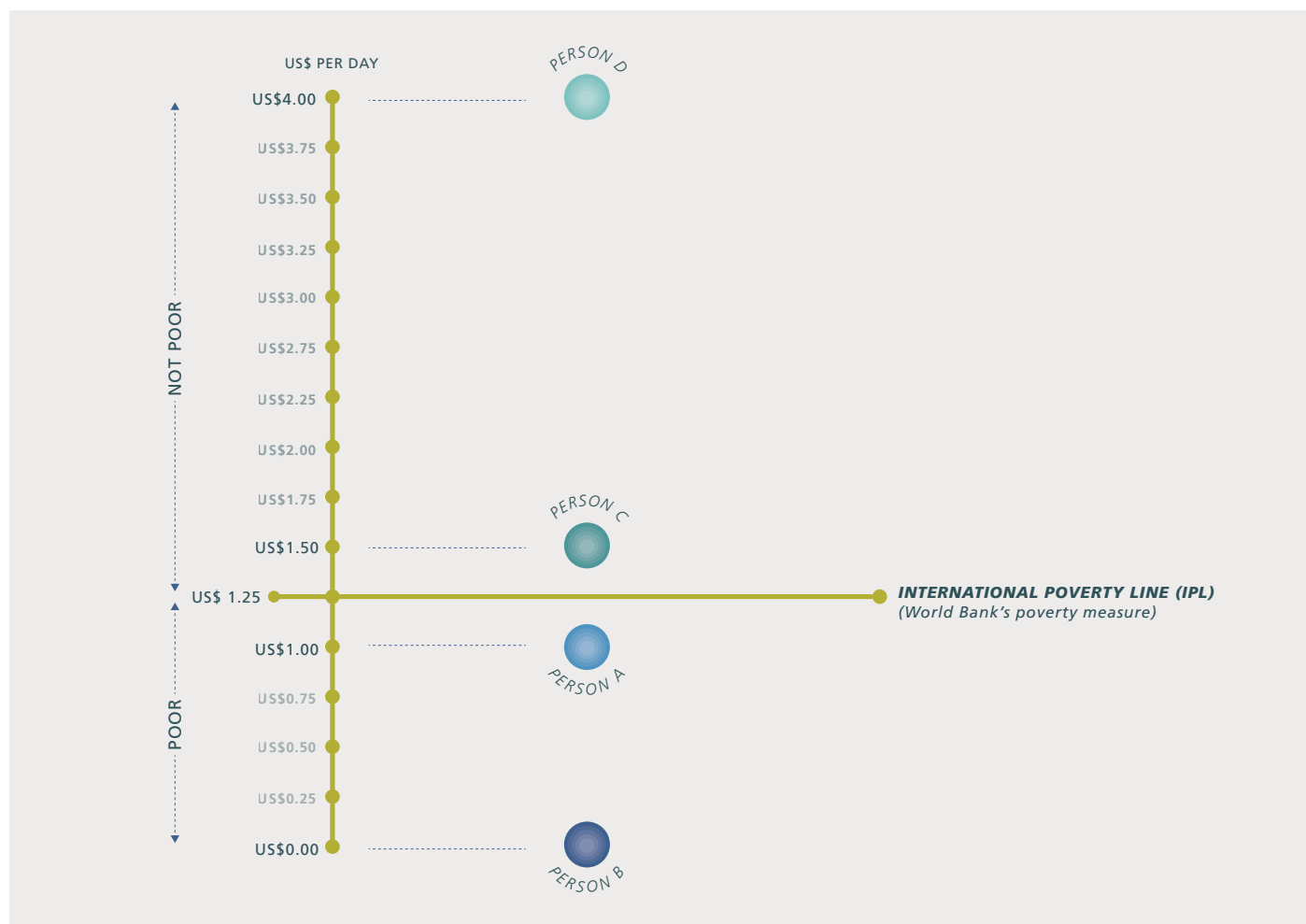


FIGURE 1: Binary measures show people as the same ('poor' or 'not poor') even when their circumstances differ significantly.

11. For a detailed account of the MPI's approach and its designated cut-off points, see Alkire & Santos (2010)

1.2 The Individual Deprivation Measure (IDM) and how it moves beyond these limitations

The IDM improves on existing approaches to poverty measurement in the following ways:

(i) It measures the poverty of individuals rather than households. By assessing the situation of individuals, the IDM can tell us who is poor, in what ways. By using a sampling method that involves interviewing all adult members of the household (or as many as reasonably feasible), the IDM makes it possible to identify if there are differences in deprivation within households, in specific dimensions of life or in overall deprivation.¹² The IDM also enables societal-level assessments of poverty, vulnerability and hardship, which can be disaggregated by sex, age and other factors.

(ii) It is gender-sensitive and can provide a measure of gender disparity. The IDM provides sex-disaggregated data in relation to dimensions that are important to both women and men. The situation of men and women can be compared in relation to specific dimensions of life and in overall deprivation. This information can be used to develop a composite measure of gender equity that is more relevant to the situation of poor women and men than existing measures. If development interventions do not take account of men's and women's different experiences, they risk reinforcing rather than challenging gender disparities.

(iii) It is grounded in how poor women and men think poverty should be defined and measured. Their priorities provide a rationale for the dimensions included in the IDM and are fundamental to its significance and legitimacy. The IDM brings measurement into line with empowering and participatory approaches that locate agency as central to addressing poverty and poor people as partners in poverty reduction (Narayan & Petesch 2002: 462).

(iv) It provides a more comprehensive measure of poverty. Its 15 dimensions address material, social, environmental and familial aspects of life, using indicators which can be relatively easily measured at reasonable cost.¹³

(v) It measures deprivation on a five point scale (within each dimension and overall), rather than just showing if a person is poor or not poor. This makes it possible to distinguish whether an individual is somewhat deprived, in a few areas, or deeply deprived in many aspects of life.

The IDM realises the research ambition – to develop a way of measuring poverty that is informed by lived experience, gender sensitive, reveals gender disparity and tells us who is poor, in what ways and to what extent, including within households. The perspectives of poor women and men that follow help to show why this matters.

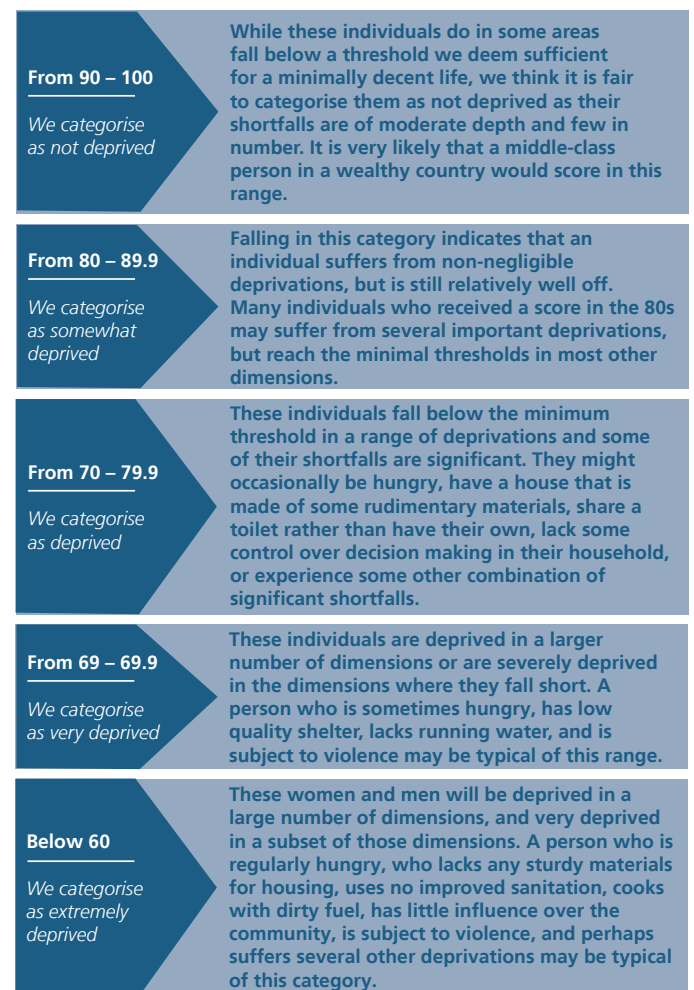


FIGURE 2: The Individual Deprivation Measure (IDM) uses five thresholds to show the extent and depth of deprivation rather than just whether a person is poor or not. What someone needs to be no longer deprived depends on how deprived they are to start with.

12. This sampling method posed challenges given that violence/ freedom from violence is one of the dimensions measured by the IDM. The research team reviewed current advice on researching violence against women and consulted experienced researchers in developing an approach that could gather data about violence from all adults in a household without increasing the risk of further violence, particularly for women. Further information is provided in the final research report (Wisor et al. 2014, forthcoming).

13. The dimensions are: food; water; shelter; health care; education; energy/ cooking fuel; sanitation; decision-making and personal support; clothing and personal care; freedom from violence; family planning; environment; voice in the community; time-use (labour burden); and work (covering paid and unpaid, and assessing status/ respect and safety/ risk). Many of the indicators included in the IDM are already being collected through existing multi-topic surveys, or could be with minor modifications. Financial deprivation is assessed via a simple assets index at the household level. Multidimensional deprivation (the IDM) score and financial status are then presented together as two axes of achievement, making it possible to identify where multidimensional and financial deprivation are related and where they are not.

2. Lifting the lid on the household: gendered expectations and their implications



Housing in Gunung Rancak, the rural research site on Madura Island, East Java, Indonesia.
Photo: Ulfah Muhayani.

2.1 Seeing individuals within households

Gendered social norms, such as particular expectations for men and women and ideas of what constitutes a 'good man' or 'good woman', are reproduced within the household (Narayan 1999) via systems of power and hierarchy. As Sylvia Chant (1997: 39) explains,

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

Decisions made in the household and who makes them – for example, about who will receive education and how household income is spent – can have a direct impact on the deprivations experienced by individual household members.

The income earned by fathers, usually men or fathers, [is] dispensed, some of it for buying cigarettes and then the rest will be given to mothers for everyday cooking.

Participant, Madura, Indonesia

The older male participants claimed that generally it is mothers who are controlling the budget and food allocation within the household because of their experience in managing the house: “Yes, because she is the one staying at the kitchen, controlling food and does the budgeting”.

Older man, Paracelis, Philippines

Individuals within households may have different levels of power and control over household resources, assets and opportunities, and this can be linked to gender roles and relations as well as age/ lifestage.¹⁴ Such differences affect which decisions individuals can make, their access to and control over resources and how they experience different hardships. Understanding the interconnectedness of

14. The research methodology sought to build in sensitivity to age and gender, to recognise that gender norms and associated roles and responsibilities vary across the life course, with marriage, pregnancy and children having a particular impact. Because there was significant variation in life expectancy and in the typical age at which these events occurred across the research countries, we aimed for equal representation from men and women across three broad age groups (youth

and young adults, middle aged people, and older people) in phases one and two. Dividing focus groups by sex and age group also aimed to help participants feel comfortable to contribute their views. Life stage and associated responsibilities rather than specific age ranges were then used to place participants in the age group that best reflected their circumstances. Further information is available in the final report and in the Phase one field guide.

decision-making in the household, female empowerment and access to resources is important in understanding both poverty and gender inequality (see for example Hunt et al. 2009). Nonetheless, in conducting research for the IDM, participants overwhelmingly viewed 'poverty' as something that could be collectively shared among household members:

If one is poor, the whole family is poor.

Male unknown age, Gunung Rancak, Indonesia

Yes, everyone in one house is poor. If the mother has no work, the father and the children are also poor and have no food to eat.

Older woman, Bajau, Philippines

They [members within a household] are at the same level [of poverty], because for example, they both work.

Male youth, Paracelis, Philippines

Both man and woman who belong to the same household have the same level of poverty, regardless if one works for a longer period of time, or if one is paid higher than the other.

Older woman, Paracelis, Philippines

However, participants also nearly universally noted that the content of deprivation can differ by age and gender (see Wisor et al. 2014, forthcoming). When asked to talk about hardships and deprivations these were often differentiated based on age/ lifestage, gender and associated roles and responsibilities. For example, women's burdens may be increased due to their responsibility for looking after the majority of house work. Likewise, elderly participants often felt that their age exacerbated their hardships and vulnerabilities, often due to their dependent situation and inability to work.

Poor men and poor women are the same, but women may have more burden than anyone else in the family because women have responsibility to take care of household affairs. If a woman or a wife wants to cook but she does not have money, she will feel sad, if the children ask for pocket money but she cannot give them any, she will feel terrible, if she wants to buy on credit from a warung [food stall], the owner of the food stall won't believe she will pay it back.

Middle aged woman, Madura, Indonesia

Women are heavily affected by hunger as they are just staying home, whereas men would go to their friends and eat there. Men would also go for piece work and to buy their clothes. They do this because they are the ones who go out of the home to look for work so they need to look better than women who just stay home caring for the home and children. Women are not given the chance to go to work because the men are always jealous and think that their wives are sleeping with other men.

Middle aged woman, Mtopwa Village, Malawi

If we are old, we cannot go anywhere, our mobility is limited, if we want to work in the fields, our body is no longer strong [...] if we want to work as shop keepers, we are too old, we have to accept our condition and wait until we die.

Older participant, Madura, Indonesia

What becomes especially apparent through the qualitative research is the importance of context in understanding poverty and the ways in which individual variables such as age and gender can impact deprivation, and how they interact with the collective context of the household. Both individual and collective contexts are important and these can be retained as part of the analysis when using the IDM.

2.2 Families, gendered expectations and access to resources and opportunities

Family relationships¹⁵ are integral to individual experiences of poverty and one's ability to move out of poverty. Family connections and the family unit play a central role in defining men's and women's roles, within and outside the household, shaping the way poverty is experienced by individuals. Men's and women's expectations of each other are played out within the family and affect the way that resources and tasks are distributed and how individuals feel when deprived. For example, because women are typically expected to have primary responsibility for household and care work, education was generally seen as less important for them because they would end up working in the home, doing work that is often seen as less valuable or not requiring formal education.

15. We understand families as taking diverse forms and containing many different relationships that can change over time. We do not assume a homogenous, unchanging model of family.

For education, we prioritize sons, daughters only need to know najis and ibadah (ritual cleansing and religious observance) and how to take care of their children in the future.

Older man, Madura, Indonesia

For education, all children can go to school, however, if there is a limitation, sons should go because they will become head of a family someday.

Middle aged woman, Madura, Indonesia

When it comes to financial support to pursue educational opportunities, adult men and young males and females tend to agree that the boys take priority over the girls. More boys than girls are entitled by the families to use the households' financial resources to pursue education, even if the education facilities are located far from the area of residence. It is more accepted that boys handle money to pay for public transport to go to school, while girls are expected to work close to the house and community and perform domestic activities or work in small businesses in the neighbourhood.

Viana site, Angola report

Gendered expectations and interpretations of men's and women's roles and contributions have significant implications for the strategies available to move out of poverty. For example, young women expressed that it was difficult to find ways to alleviate hardship without an education to facilitate engagement in formal employment. They viewed limited educational access as a hardship that was both a consequence of and contributed to their poverty.

In some situations, for example in highly marginalised contexts, school attendance among young boys and men was also poor, albeit for different reasons. Young male participants listed reasons for not attending school as hunger or needing to engage in scavenging or other income-generating activities. Many young boys did not see the need to attend school given that their opportunities to utilise these skills would be limited. Although both boys and girls in poverty found their access to education limited, the content of this deprivation and the way it was experienced differed, in part due to gendered expectations of what women and men 'should' be doing.

Men often felt increased pressure to provide for their families due to their status as breadwinner. Men named this role as a hardship when in poverty, as poverty is viewed as both a barrier to achieving this socially

prescribed role and a consequence of failing to do so. In some ways men saw the breadwinner expectation as a burden *because they were poor*; their poverty was a sign that they were unsuccessful in fulfilling this role.

We feel so sorry if we see a man that does not have a job because they have responsibility to their family, usually they easily get angry.

Older woman, Madura, Indonesia

It is a man's responsibility as a household head to provide for the basic needs of the household. In order to sufficiently fulfil his responsibilities, a man must work harder because if he does not do so he may subject himself to embarrassment and ridicule and his household will suffer while he is around.

Middle aged man, Somo Village, Malawi

If there are a lot of children in a family and the father is not working, you know the family is having problems and if you hear a youth was involved in some theft like stealing from a plantation, you know the family is facing problems.

Middle aged woman, Nausori, Fiji

Asking about the circumstances and perspectives of individuals rather than households revealed how burdens and hardships are influenced by age/ lifestage, gender and family context – and where these factors intersect to deepen vulnerability and deprivation. In most sites, the local research teams found that family support was an important dimension, with its presence or absence affecting the hardships experienced. Where there was a lack of family unity or support, individuals who particularly rely on the support of family members, such as elderly people and children, found themselves especially vulnerable to hardships associated with poverty. In Mozambique the local research team reported that young girls in Namacurra (a semi-rural site) considered that orphaned children, particularly young girls, were more vulnerable to sexual exploitation and labour exploitation as 'domestic slaves' (Matsinhe & Cumbe-KULA 2012: 39).

The lack of family support is a cause of poverty because, for example, to grow crops on farms we need to have support from our family.

Adult man, Zavala, Mozambique

It also sometimes becomes very hard for him [my son] as he has his own family to look after. When I was fit I used to do some kind of work to support him but since the time I lost my one eye I am unable to do any work.

Older man, Naleba, Fiji

Yet the rigidity of gender roles within families could also contribute to individual and collective hardship. For example, men's hardship was said to increase if they were single or alone as they were not practiced in performing those tasks assumed to be women's, such as cooking and cleaning; some spoke of feelings of shame or embarrassment when taking on such roles. On the other hand, women's hardship was said to increase when they did not have a husband or partner present to perform traditional male roles, such as earning an income outside the home or performing heavy physical labour. Family relationships thus became a central mechanism through which individuals defined and experienced poverty.

According to the local research team in Mozambique, "girls interviewed [felt] women are the poorest because they cannot build their own home and, despite being intelligent, they feel limited because they believe that they always need a man's protection. They see marriage as the only alternative to escape poverty" (Matsinhe & Cumbe-KULA 2012: 32). An unwillingness to take on the tasks allocated to other members of the family or household points to rigid ideas about what is appropriate for women and men. When this is combined with practical difficulties in undertaking certain tasks, the challenges for women and men were significant. Some individuals would not take on roles that were socially coded to belong to the opposite sex, even if this may exacerbate their hardships.

Poverty is different [for women] because when a woman is abandoned by her husband she ends up poorer because she needs to take care of the children alone. Poverty is more severe for women [who are] alone because they cannot build a house or support their children.

Adult woman, Zavala, Mozambique

Poverty is most noticeable in women because they can only farm while a man does other activities, [for example] he can work another person's farm, can make bricks to build houses while a woman cannot do the same.

Woman unknown age, Ribáuè, Mozambique

For women what ends up making their life difficult is that they cannot do some things that men usually do like building a house, raising cattle or taking coconuts.

Young woman, Zavala, Mozambique

The importance of family relationships acted then to provide both advantages and burdens. While families were often characterised as a support network through which poverty could be alleviated, if an individual lost a husband or wife, their hardships increased, exacerbating their poverty and reducing their ability to change their situation. Others have discussed similar findings regarding the importance of community kinships, which support those in poverty but bring expectations of reciprocity that must be met (for example, to contribute to a community function such as a wedding or a funeral) even when it might be financially difficult to do so (Narayan 1999: 44). Families could also be oppressive and increase an individual's hardships.

For women and girls, their roles and responsibilities in the domestic sphere, initially in the family home and then often in a home with their husband and family, predominantly shapes life choices and has lifelong implications.

As we moved out from my in-laws house we built a house just as a shelter and started our life, at that time my husband used to do only cane harvesting so we could not afford to build a proper house. Life became very hard for me as my family was also growing and I had four children and income was very low at times. I was also the victim of domestic violence, I used to be kicked by my husband even in the times of my pregnancy which led to my first child becoming crippled [...] I can't even go and do any labouring work because I have to look after my disabled son. Sometimes it becomes very hard for me to fulfil my children's requirements and buy my other personal requirements.

Middle aged woman, Naleba, Fiji

Once married, young women can be discouraged from continuing education. Early marriage also increases the prospects of early pregnancy, which further limits access to education and opportunities to exercise autonomy outside the household. For example, the research team in Mozambique noted that girls referred to early marriages being very common and that girls are frequently pressured by the family to get married early so their family does not have to support them. However, the girls also said that they disregarded some family advice regarding strategies to escape poverty, such as parents' suggestions to engage in



Group discussion from Malawi phase one research 2011.
Photo: Malawi research team.

intergenerational sexual relationships to access consumer goods (cell phones, clothing) and education (Matsinhe & Cumbe-KULA 2012: 39).

For girls, what makes their life difficult is the fact that they drop out from school early because they get pregnant and many end up giving more responsibilities to their family since they have to help this girl because she can't support herself.

Elderly woman, Zavala, Mozambique

I feel depressed and frustrated but I'm still hopeful that one day I will be able to find a job so that I can support my family. I still want to study further so that it becomes a bit easier for me to find a job. I'm against getting married now or any time soon as I feel, being a daughter, marriage is more expensive than for a son. I'm hopeful that if I get married I want to marry a rich man so that I can have an enjoyable and a comfortable living.

Woman unknown age, Naleba, Fiji

A woman's life becomes very complicated when she has a child because she stops studying, the child's father abandons the children and the mother ends up having to support the child alone and has to buy school uniforms and books for children while most of the time she cannot find a job.

Adult woman, Zavala, Mozambique

3. Work and time

How an individual spends their time, and on what, is included as a dimension in the IDM because of the importance of time as a resource for poor people. It also illuminates the gendered division of labour and of leisure time in ways that take account of paid and unpaid work, inside and outside the household. The gendered division of work and time was evidenced across the research sites. Men were primarily engaged in physical labour and/or income generating activities outside the home while women had the primary responsibility for household and care work. Women often engaged in income generating activities and generally this was added to domestic chores and child-rearing. The men and women who spoke with local researchers told of situations consistent with Chant's (2006) analysis that as women's work diversifies and paid work is added to existing unpaid work, we do not see a corollary rise in men's paid and/or unpaid work. Sylvia Chant (2006: 217) describes this trend as the "feminization of responsibility and obligation [which refers to] women's increasing liability for dealing with poverty (responsibility), and their progressively less choice other than to do so (obligation)".

I work harder [than my husband] because aside from scavenging I also attend to household chores.

Middle aged woman, Tondo, Philippines

Well, it's because aside from earning a living, you're still the one doing the household chores.

Middle aged woman, Tondo, Philippines

Sometimes, I also scavenge for garbage and even get a higher income compared to my husband, but still when I get home, still I need to do house work.

Middle aged woman, Tondo, Philippines

Being a woman, she's the one who budgets [...] she deals with all the problems she sees at home. The men, since they are the ones earning, don't care.

Middle aged woman, Tondo, Philippines

Two of my sons are working and live out of town. I tried to teach my sons to do housework and duties that are traditionally women's work.

Older woman, Nausori, Fiji

Most of the work in the house is done by women or girls.

Middle aged woman, Bajau, Philippines

For many women, their household and caring responsibilities constrained their choices in relation to activities outside the home and the return on their labour. The kinds of work individuals could do changed across the life cycle, with patterns of time use and overall labour burden intersecting with gender and age in ways that saw different work predominating at different lifestages.

In order to be rich we have to work. I will work when my children have grown up. Right now, I cannot work because I have to take care of them.

Middle aged woman, Madura, Indonesia

When the children were younger life was more difficult for me. I had a lot more tasks in terms of raising the children and less time to do the things I wanted to do. Now I can engage in farming and small business and take part in community activities. I learnt from living the hard way.

Older woman, Nausori, Fiji

Gender influences an individual's strategies to alleviate poverty. Participant discussions of who engaged in begging and why was an example of this. Women were often the ones begging because nobody would give to men who beg as it was expected that they should be working. Additionally, begging was a way of generating income which women could engage in alongside caring work because women could have their children with them. As the Philippines research team explained: "children go with their mothers or sisters to beg because if those begging are seen with their children, people take pity and give" (Bracamonte 2012: 56).

We beg so our children and elderly can eat like me, my in-laws, and my father. My wife begs for us to eat. I stay at home jobless. That's it.

Older man, Bajau, Philippines

Both men and women recognised the gender division of labour, and that if paid and unpaid work were considered together, women often worked more hours overall and men had more leisure time.

For women in the home, women are obligated to raise the family and look after and nurture family. They should be the first to wake up and the last to go to sleep because they are looking after the family needs.

Older man, Nausori, Fiji

After we have eaten the women are still washing the dishes while the men are already stretched out.

Older man, Paracelis, Philippines

I wish I could exchange roles with him, I wish I'm the male.

Middle aged woman, Tondo, Philippines

The woman does everything; she is the house manager, the mother of the family. She cooks, washes clothes. While us, men, we just work [for pay]. The duties of a woman are really heavy.

Older man, Tondo, Philippines

The gendered division of labour meant that men and women often worked in different physical spaces. Consequently, at least some of women's work in the household was effectively rendered invisible to men, literally and because women's work was not valued. The lack of shared experiences of care work sometimes resulted in misperceptions of the nature and demands of particular types of work.

She has longer free time especially if there is a baby. She can rest, or has more time to spend with the children because she doesn't leave the house.

Older man, Paracelis, Philippines

Other dimensions of poverty, such as limited access to water, intersected with the burdens associated with women's household and care work. Some women reported that this work could be particularly difficult and/ or time consuming in poor communities. Women are responsible for multiple tasks – such as collecting water or generating income whilst simultaneously looking after children – which make complex demands on their time and exacerbate their sense of hardship. This does not mean that gendered norms in themselves make people poor, but rather their rigidity shapes the experience of poverty and can multiply hardships. Different dimensions of poverty affect different people in different ways, influenced by gender, age and the roles, responsibilities and expectations that follow.

The lack of running water in most communities is a great sign of poverty, since there is no life without water and families need a lot of water for their daily living. This is a very serious problem for us women who have to bring water from long distances, all the way from the water points to our homes. Besides the weight of the bucket or plastic container on the head, we also lose a lot of time because at the public water points there is always a long queue until our turn comes. We lose the time to do other work at home.

Women's organisation leader, Kilamba Kiaxi, Angola

The greater status typically accorded to all forms of paid work compared to all unpaid work meant that the types of work women undertook and its social and economic contribution were frequently undervalued. By making paid and unpaid work visible and treating them as on a par, the IDM may reinforce other efforts to shift attitudes about what counts as 'work', what is required for communities to flourish, and how this should be reflected in systems of social and economic valuation.

4. Sexual autonomy and violence

In Mozambique local researchers noted that “in Namacurra girls highlighted the issues of early marriage and sexual harassment in schools as additional constraints to progress, to the extent that this prevents them from pursuing their educational objectives” (Matsinhe & Cumbe-KULA 2012: 33). In this case, the limited sexual autonomy of women and girls contributed to burdens associated with poverty such as limited access to quality education. Violence and sexual abuse could result from strategies to alleviate poverty, meaning that violence was considered a consequent hardship of poverty in some instances.

In Malawi, local researchers noted that “parents force the girls to leave school and marry early so that they [the husbands] can support them. In order to find money to support themselves and their families, it was further reported that sometimes girls are pushed by a lack of basic needs into sleeping with older men, and that sometimes they are even raped because of the circumstances that they are placed in” (Women’s Legal Resource Centre 2012: 37). Again, poverty did not necessarily cause these hardships but gender-based discrimination compounded the experience of poverty for some girls by further limiting their access to education and their potential to move out of poverty.

Violence was sometimes referred to by men and women when describing the hardships they faced. Women made it clear that violence and the threat of violence could be part of their experience of particular hardships. Violence or the threat of violence could negatively impact on their access to resources and their ability to move around their communities.

These days, getting firewood is not easy because if caught, we are asked to dance for the guards or worse still we are raped. Because of this, we are left helpless as we can no longer depend on ourselves in terms of money.

Woman unknown age, Somo, Malawi

When the youths are drunk they linger on the roadsides and pass sexual comments to women and young girls. So we have to be extra cautious. We have to go and drop our children to the main road and pick them up as well. We cannot allow them to go out after 6pm.

Older woman, Nanuku, Fiji

Violence was often one end of a continuum in which women explained how hardship and poverty directly related to their ability to exercise sexual autonomy and/ or freedom. Participants said that due to economic pressures some women engaged in sexual activities or relationships in which consent could be considered questionable at best. These sexual engagements were used as a way of generating income or as barter, in order to obtain money, objects or services that would help alleviate hardships of individual women or their families. The decision to engage in such arrangements reflected the limited choices available to poor women for generating income.

Local researchers in Mozambique found that in times of particular hardship or when they were unable to perform heavy physical work, “women may become prostitutes in exchange for money” (Matsinhe & Cumbe-KULA 2012: 27). Sexual exploitation was explained by participants as occurring in situations where individuals, women in particular, had little effective choice or freedom. In Ribáuè, Mozambique, local researchers reported that “women referred explicitly to the issue of sexual exploitation as one of the obstacles they faced. Single women may engage in sex for support or to get men to do certain activities they need completed, such as weeding the land, building a house and even assisting them with selling agricultural products” (Matsinhe & Cumbe-KULA 2012: 47). Young girls were “not able to perform heavy tasks such as ‘carrying bags or building houses’, which is why they often resort to prostitution with older men to have money to pay for such work. They also trade sex for various goods including, food and drinks” (Matsinhe & Cumbe-KULA 2012: 48).

An unmarried woman has areas in the farm where she cannot work, she has to pay someone, or sometimes she has to have sexual intercourse to get her farm weeded.

Woman, Ribáuè, Mozambique

In Malawi “young males at Mkwanda Village noted that a boy can go out and look for piece work in his free time to find money for personal needs, such as clothes and shoes. It was reported that girls do not have free time to look for piece work because their daily activities revolve around helping with household chores and going to school (when they are in school) ... [G]irls will either go into prostitution or into early marriages so as to get support from their husbands” (Women’s Legal Resource Centre 2012: 31).

Differing expectations of women and men, girls and boys, combined with gender discrimination and inequality in many areas of life, directly impact on the ability of some women and girls to exercise sexual autonomy in contexts of poverty. Survival sex was one strategy in a limited range of possibilities.

Girls will be the ones affected more by lack of money than boys because girls need a lot more things than boys. Things that girls need in their day-to-day life, and which boys do not, are petticoats and brassieres. When girls lack these things, either because their parents cannot provide them or they themselves cannot find money to buy them, they resort to prostitution.

Male youths at Mkwanda, Malawi

Participants recognised that this burden was intimately connected to gender: women and girls were predominantly the victims of sexual exploitation. Local research partners noted that survival sex was frequently employed by 'single' women. In Malawi, elderly women participants noted "that the situation becomes even more desperate for the woman in town if she is a single mother with dependants and staying in a rented house. It was said that in extreme cases, in order for these women to be able to pay the rent and support their dependants they resort to selling sex thereby exposing themselves to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases" (Women's Legal Resource Centre 2012: 30). This reinforced for some participants the importance of a family structure as a means to survive poverty, encouraging young women and girls to get married.



Women farmers in the Cakolo municipal market, participating in a focus group at the Lunda Sul rural research site, Angola.
Photo: Angola research team.

5. Conclusions: addressing poverty and gender disparity together

We manage what we measure—and, in turn, what we measure affects what we do

Istanbul Declaration (UNDP 2012)

We believe the IDM is a significant achievement. After four years of research, discussion and analysis, and with the involvement of thousands of participants across 18 sites in six countries, the research has established the relevance and feasibility of a measure that assesses progress in addressing poverty in a way that helps reveal the relationship between poverty and gender. It also provides a new measure of gender disparity that is relevant to the circumstances of poor women and men. The research approach and the IDM itself have brought the role of gender and age in shaping experiences and consequences of poverty into clearer focus. A nationally representative trial of the newly developed measure in the Philippines confirmed the value of being able to measure differences in deprivation among individuals within the household; in our sample of 1,806 respondents we found substantial variation in IDM scores between different members of the same household.¹⁶ Further trialling is needed in different contexts to provide comparative data and refine the IDM to the point where it can be readily integrated into national and international systems of social valuation. Undertaking similar participatory research with girls and boys and generating a gender responsive individual measure of child poverty is also a priority.

Continuing to measure poverty at the household level is clearly inadequate because it masks the diverse situations of individuals within the household. The diversity of individual circumstances reflected here highlights what is lost in household level measurement. This can only limit the effectiveness of our efforts to understand and address poverty. Wasting resources always matters but it matters especially in the context of declining levels of official development assistance. The practical and ethical imperative to do better is strong. If poverty interventions are targeted at the household they are unlikely to benefit everyone in the household equally when the circumstances of different household members can vary significantly here. The benefits resulting from assistance targeted to households are likely to reflect and perpetuate existing inequalities within. Current approaches to measuring and understanding poverty not only fail to account adequately for the relationship between gender and poverty, their gender-blindness is likely to reinforce rather than redress existing inequalities.

The individual and collective experience of poverty is complex and multidimensional (Wisor et al. 2014, forthcoming; Narayan 1999). Not all individuals are affected in the same way. Gender, age and the roles and responsibilities expected and played out across the lifecycle shape what poverty looks like for different individuals and the strategies available to them. We are not suggesting here that poverty is somehow worse for women or that women are poorer than men – a motivation of this research is that we simply do not have the sex-disaggregated data to determine whether this is case. What we do say is that poverty is *different* for men and women, girls and boys, depending on both individual and collective contexts, and that it is imperative that we measure poverty in a way that reveals rather than obscures these differences. If we are to understand and transform the injustices and waste of potential that poverty represents, we need to assess the situation of individuals in a way that can reveal the influences of gender and age.

There is no singular experience of poverty. While we can identify dimensions that poor women and men universally regard as aspects of poverty, this does not denote universal experiences or solutions. While there are challenges in measuring poverty and deprivation at the individual level in a way that is gender-responsive, these need to be tackled, not side-stepped. To address poverty effectively, we need a better understanding of who is poor, in what ways and to what extent; and we must shape policies and programs accordingly and then assess what works, how well and for whom.

16. A brief report on the trial survey from our data collection partner, Pulse Asia, is available at: www.genderpovertymeasure.org/storage/Pulse%20Asia%20Philippines%20survey%20March%202013%20final%20report.pdf

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Phase one research reports

Reports of the qualitative research conducted as part of the research project *Assessing development: designing better indices of poverty and gender equity* across six countries are available at www.genderpovertymeasure.org/publications:

Castillo, Fatima Alvarez with Nimfa Bracamonte, Caster Palaganas & Cora Añoneuvo (2011) *Poverty and gender in the Philippines*

Chattier, Priya with Emele Morgan (2012) *Poverty and gender in Fiji*

Matsinhe, Cristiano & Edite Cumbe, KULA–Applied Studies and Research (2012) *Poverty and gender in Mozambique*

Bracamonte, Nimfa (2012) *Poverty and gender in a marginalised community: Philippines – Bajau*

Añoneuvo, Cora & Emerson Sanchez (2012) *Poverty and gender in urban Philippines – Tondo*

Palaganas, Erlinda, Marvie Molintas, Jason Ledda & Fatima Castillo (2012) *Poverty and gender in rural Philippines – Paracelis*

Women's Platform for Action with KULA–Applied Studies and Research (2012) *Poverty and gender in Angola*

Muhayani, Ulfah with Yuliati Hotifah, Noor Jehhan & Ilfi Nur Diana (2011) *Poverty and gender in Indonesia*

Women's Legal Resource Centre (2012) *Poverty and gender in Malawi*

About IWDA

International Women's Development Agency is the only Australian development agency entirely focussed on gender equality and women's rights in Asia and the Pacific.

IWDA's vision is for a just, equitable and sustainable world where women enjoy the full range of human rights, where women and men interact with dignity and respect, and where women have an effective voice in economic, cultural, civil and political structures.

IWDA works in partnership with women's groups and through advocacy to create empowering and transformative change for women.

IWDA is deeply connected with the global women's movement and the feminist history that informed the foundation of our organisation in 1985. IWDA has consistently worked to catalyse and accelerate change in our region through local, national and international partnerships, alliances and networks.

As a secular, not for profit agency, IWDA works within a Gender and Development framework, seeking to promote respectful relationships between men and women at all levels of society. It promotes the rights of women as enshrined in key international conventions and resolutions.

About *Gender Matters*

Gender Matters is committed to supporting the Australian international development community's work towards women's empowerment and gender equality. The publication series documents issues and links emerging across IWDA's development and research programs with partners, focuses on innovative theory and practice, encourages dialogue and research about uncertainties and gaps, and shares learning that can inform future development initiatives.

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Disclaimer

Gender Matters explores issues that IWDA believes are important for the development sector to consider and discuss. The authors take responsibility for any errors and gaps.

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