

**'CARGAS CRECIENTES':
LOS VERDADEROS COSTOS
DE LA 'FEMINIZACION DE LA
POBREZA' EN EL SIGLO 21**

Sylvia Chant
London School of Economics

Presentation prepared
for UNIFEM conference
on gender and poverty,
Mexico City, 3-4 October
2007

Structure of presentation

- 1 What is the 'feminisation of poverty'?**
- 2 Problems with underlying assumptions and emphases**
- 3 Policy ramifications and concerns– the 'feminisation' of anti-poverty programmes**
- 4 Re-casting the 'feminisation of poverty'**

MAIN COMPONENTS OF FIELD-BASED RESEARCH



- Quantitative data – e.g. income poverty statistics
- Qualitative data
 - i) interviews and focus groups with low-income women and men from different age cohorts
 - ii) consultations with 'institutional personnel' (in NGOs, state agencies and ministries, and international development organisations)

BREAKDOWN OF GRASSROOTS SURVEY POPULATIONS, THE GAMBIA, PHILIPPINES AND COSTA RICA

	<u>YOUTH</u> (10-29yrs)	<u>MIDDLE ADULTS</u> (30-49yrs)	<u>SENIOR ADULTS</u> (50yrs+)	<u>TOTAL</u>
THE GAMBIA				
Female	16	14	11	41
Male	17	6	9	32
Total	33	20	20	73
<u>PHILIPPINES</u>				
Female	9	20	21	50
Male	11	7	9	27
Total	20	27	30	77
<u>COSTA RICA</u>				
Female	13	24	10	47
Male	10	6	10	26
Total	23	30	20	73
<u>TOTAL</u>	56	77	70	223

WHY THE GAMBIA, PHILIPPINES & COSTA RICA?

- Desire to include country from each major region of the 'Global South'
- Personal research base in each country
- Interesting contrasts (e.g. in income poverty, human development, gender indicators)

THE GAMBIA

'Low' human development (UNDP)

'HIPC' (WB)

High income poverty – and rising

Low GDI and GEM scores and ranks

PHILIPPINES

'Medium' human development

'Lower middle income'

Intermediate income poverty – and declining

High GDI and GEM scores/ranks

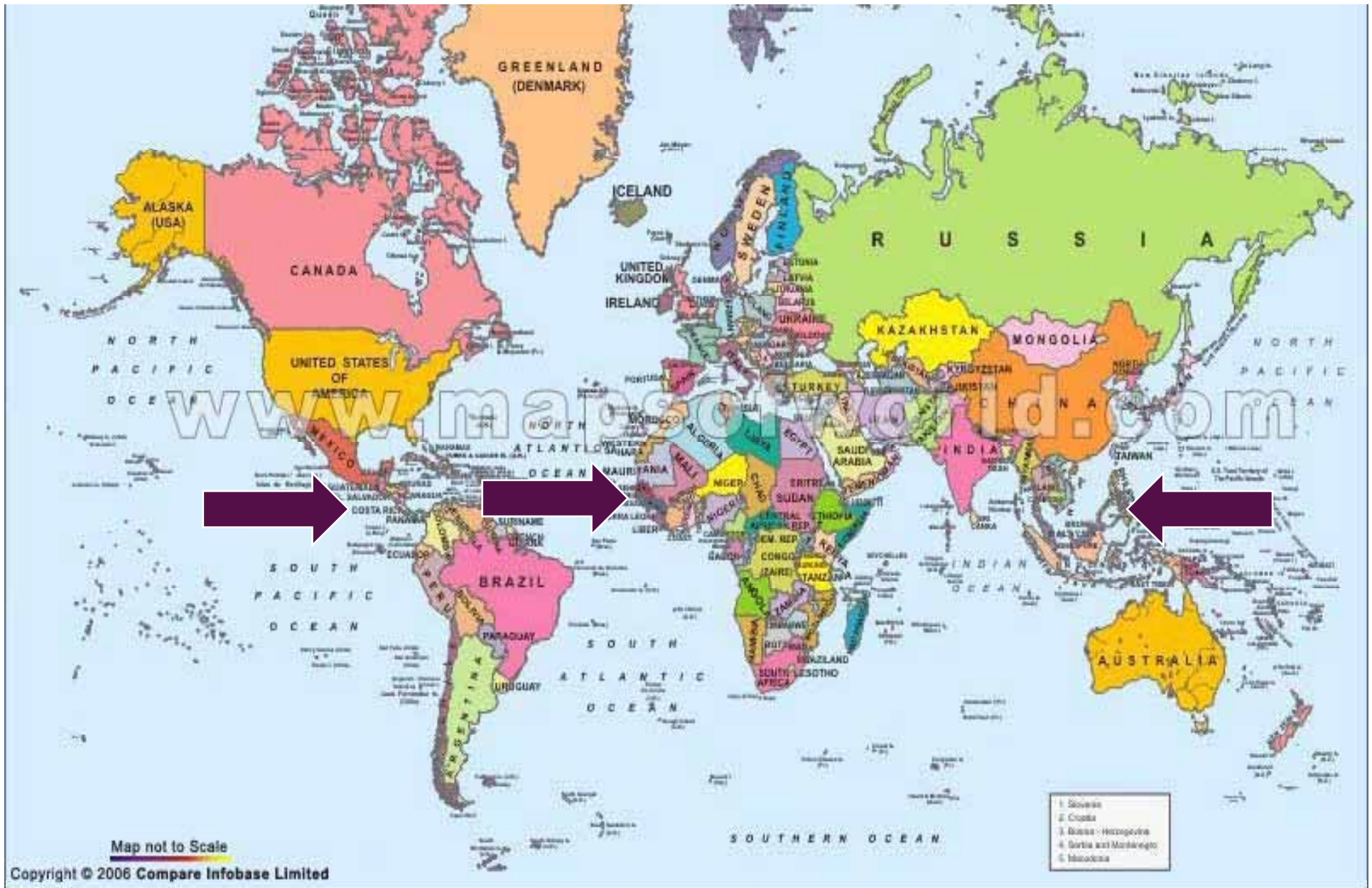
COSTA RICA

'High' human development

'Upper middle income'

Low income poverty – but stagnating

High GDI and GEM scores/ranks



Spot the case study country...!

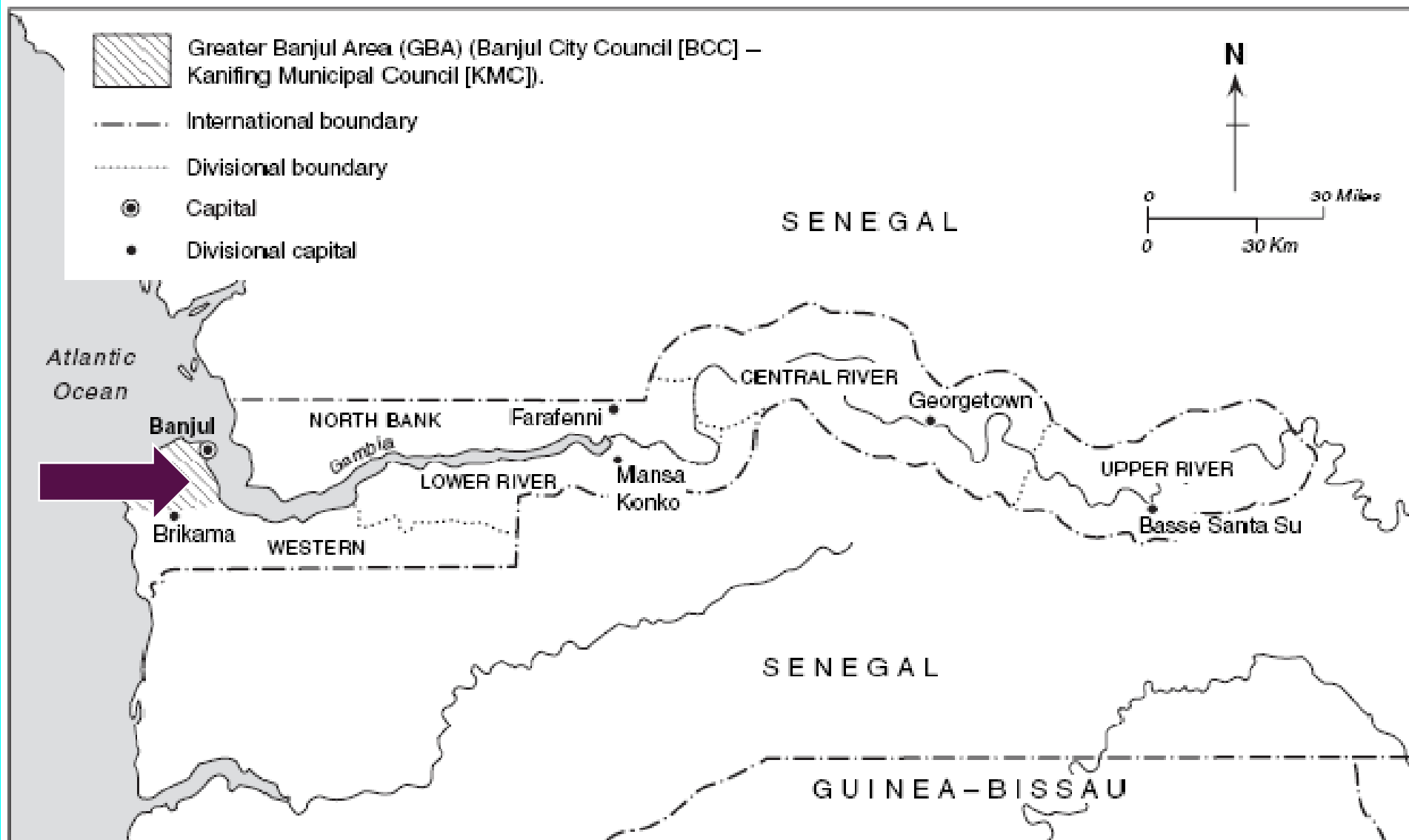


Figure 4.1 The Gambia: Administrative Divisions and Divisional Capitals

THE GAMBIA

GNI per cap \$ 290 (16th poorest)

Poverty – IPL 59% (<\$1/day)
- NPL 61%

GDI rank 123 (144)

Economy

agriculture (groundnuts)

re-exports

tourism





The Philippines

Major island groups
and location of
Metro Cebu

PHILIPPINES

GNI per cap \$ 1170 (110th /171)

Poverty – IPL 15.5
(%) - NPL 30.4

GDI rank 66 (144)

GEM rank 37 (78)

Economy

manufacturing (esp
garments & electronics),
agriculture (esp coconuts)
tourism
labour export





COSTA RICA

GNI per cap \$ 4670 (54th /171)

Poverty – IPL 2.2
(%) - NPL 21.2

GDI rank 41 (144)

GEM rank 19 (78)

Economy

manufacturing (electronics,
high-tech goods)

agriculture (esp
pineapples,bananas)

tourism



MAIN TENETS OF THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

- incidence of poverty is greater among women than men
- incidence of poverty among women relative to men is growing over time
- women's growing incidence of poverty is closely associated with increases in female household headship ('poorest of the poor')

‘In spite of its multiple meanings, the feminisation of poverty should not be confused with the existence of higher levels of poverty among women or female-headed households... The term “feminisation” relates to the way poverty changes over time, whereas “higher levels” of poverty (which include the so-called “over-representation”), focuses on a view of poverty at a given moment. Feminisation is a process, “higher poverty” is a state’.

Medeiros and Costa (2006:3)

POLICY IMPACTS OF 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

- Goal of 'eradicating the persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women' adopted in Beijing Platform for Action
- 'Mainstreaming' of gender in PRSPs and MDGs
- 'feminisation' of anti-poverty initiatives e.g. micro-finance, CCTs

POLICY IMPACTS OF 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

- The 'feminisation of poverty' has drawn attention to the 'great number of women living in poverty.... highlighting the impact of macro-economic policies on women, calling for women to be recognised in the development process, and promoting consciousness of the existence and vulnerability of female-headed households'

Wennerholm (2002:10)

- 'The feminisation of poverty is more than a slogan: it is a marching call that impels us to question our assumptions about poverty itself by examining how it is caused, manifested and reduced, and to do this from a gender perspective'.

Williams and Lee-Smith (2000:1)

Some concerns about the emphasis on income in the 'feminisation of poverty'

- 1 Ignores several aspects of poverty pertinent to women's disadvantage emphasised by more holistic conceptualisations of poverty e.g. capability approaches, livelihoods approaches – 'feminisation of poverty' is 'not just lack of income' (Fukuda-Parr, 1999).
- 2 Income argued to be less robust in determining women's privation than other factors e.g. land, decision-making power, violence

'The important determinants that go into the making of women's social positions in today's world society are marked by legal, political, cultural and religious discrimination. These circumstances clearly indicate that the fact women are disproportionately affected by poverty is neither due primarily to lower incomes nor finds its sole expression in them. Instead, inequality has its most important roots in inadequate access to resources, lack of political rights, and limited social options as well as in a greater vulnerability to risks and crises'

Rodenberg (2004:5)

Some concerns about the emphasis on income in the 'feminisation of poverty'

3 Methodological concerns

- reliability of income data
- utility of aggregate household incomes
 - * conversion problems
 - * 'secondary poverty'
 - * arbitrary/artificial inflation of poverty among female-headed households

'Headship analysis cannot and should not be considered as an acceptable substitute for poverty analysis' (Lampietti and Stalker, 2000:2)

Some concerns about the emphasis on income in the 'feminisation of poverty'

4 Lack of data to support the case

- No comprehensive international database on gendered poverty
- Even less panel data allowing analysis of trends over time
- Most data on gendered poverty pertains to female-headed households
- Available data do not indicate systematic, rising or even ongoing disadvantage among women or female-headed households

Some concerns about the emphasis on FHHs in the 'feminisation of poverty'

1. Unquestioned 'orthodoxy' that FHHs are the 'poorest of the poor'

'Women-headed households are overrepresented among the poor in rural and urban, developing and industrial societies'.

Bullock (1994:17-18)

'Households headed by females with dependent children experience the worst afflictions of poverty...Female-headed households are the poorest'

Finne (2001:8)

'Households headed by women are particularly vulnerable.

Disproportionate numbers of women among the poor pose serious constraints to human development because children raised in poor households are more likely to repeat cycles of poverty and disadvantage'.

Asian Development Bank (2003:11)

Some concerns about the emphasis on FHHs in the 'feminisation of poverty'

- 2 Ignores feminist research emphasising the importance of patriarchal gender relations at domestic level in impacting upon women's poverty
- 3 Neglects questions of 'choice' and 'trade-offs'
- 4 Ignores heterogeneity of FHHs

‘Women are...more often affected, and jeopardised by poverty. Lacking powers of self-control and decision-making powers, women – once having fallen into poverty – have far fewer chances to remedy their situation. This fact, however, should not be understood to imply globally that e.g. a rising number of women-headed households is invariably linked with a rising poverty rate. It is instead advisable to bear in mind that a woman’s decision to maintain a household of her own may very well be a voluntary decision – one that may, for instance, serve as an avenue out of a relationship marred by violence. If poverty is understood not only as income poverty but as a massive restriction of choices and options, a step of this kind, not taken in isolation, may also mean an improvement of women’s life circumstances’

Rodenberg (2004:13)

Some concerns about the emphasis on FHHs in the 'feminisation of poverty'

- 2 Ignores feminist research emphasising the importance of patriarchal gender relations at domestic level in impacting upon women's poverty
- 3 Neglects issues of 'choice' and 'trade-offs'
- 4 Ignores heterogeneity of FHHs

And some serious omissions..

1 Other differences among women beyond headship *e.g. age*

2 Men and gender relations

e.g. does 'feminisation of poverty' imply a 'masculinisation of wealth'?

3 Gender-differentiated inputs, responsibilities and rights

A 'feminisation of responsibility and obligation'?

- 1 Women's inputs increasing -- men's static or declining
 - i Labour

'While women should be sitting and watching after the children, they have to work because some fathers just used (i.e. are accustomed) to sit and chat, drinking *ataya* (green tea)'

Sophie, 15, Gambia

'We women are all working so hard that we don't see our husbands until the night – and then they're asleep!'

Binta, 30, Gambia

i Labour (cont.)

'A poor man will say "I do not have a job, I do not have some things", and usually most will resort to vices to try and compensate them for what they don't have. Whereas a poor woman will carry her responsibilities. She will create something to have earnings. I have to have a *sari-sari* store to have earnings. I have to cook to eat, to sustain ourselves, different to a man'

Linda, 44, Philippines

'..es que los hombres creen que cuando se casan lo quieren es una empleada'

Aracely, 36, Costa Rica

ECLAC (2004:5)

'..most men still do not share in household work or in the array of unpaid care-giving activities entailed by membership in a community or society.... (men in)..male-headed households are more likely to enjoy the advantages of free domestic work by the spouse, thus avoiding expenditures otherwise associated with maintaining a household'

A 'feminisation of responsibility and obligation'?

ii Income and expenditure

'Men are not doing anything – if they pay for the breakfast, it's women who pay for lunch and dinner. Women pay for the school lunches. You see the festivals, and it's the women who are selling ... some men are not working.'

Teeda, 35, Gambia

'El hombre es más desperdiciado, porque el hombre tiene plata y se va a la cantina, mientras que la mujer cuando tiene plata piensa en comprar para darle a comer a sus hijos...el hombre se no preocupa por nada. Sólo se preocupa por él, y no le importa si lo están esperando en la casa'

Eida, 52, Costa Rica

ii Income and expenditure (cont.)

'Women have a brighter future than men because nowadays more men are indulge in vices like drugs, *shabu* ('poor man's cocaine'), mistresses, drunkenness... Though there are some women in these vices this is not as much as men. Maybe because men is the source of income he has his money anytime and what he wants to do he can do... but nowadays men spend little time with the family. They are fond of getting with their '*barkadas*' (gang/group of male peers), drinking beer just around the neighbourhood. Women and children are just left behind at home'

Conrada, 24, Philippines

A 'feminisation of responsibility and obligation'?

2 'No power to choose'

i Women's greater inputs to household livelihoods not matched by greater capacity to negotiate an increase in men's

ii Women's sense of duty and obligation forced by lack of choice

'If there's a problem and the children go hungry, men just put on their kaftan and go out, but women have to stay behind to answer their children's needs'

Nyima, 51, Gambia

A 'feminisation of responsibility and obligation'?

2 'No power to choose'

iii Men's extra-domestic activities and expenditure can further deplete household resource base

'If you are a woman you always have to think about having to spend it (money) on everyone else, whereas men will just use any surplus income to secure a second wife'

Satou, 38, Gambia

A 'feminisation of responsibility and obligation'?

2 'No power to choose'

iv Polarisation of 'female altruism' and 'male egoism' – discursively and practically

'La mujer pobre no solo piensa en ella; piensa en su familia, en sus hijos, y en salir adelante. En cambio el hombre es más egoísta. Entonces, el sólo ve sus necesidades. En cambio, la mujer ve las necesidades de ella y las de sus familiares. Generalmente el hombre cuando ve la situación muy negativa tiende a irse y a dejar la mujer sola para que asuma la responsabilidad'

Ixi, 40, Costa Rica

A 'feminisation of responsibility and obligation'?

2 'No power to choose'

iv Polarisation of 'female altruism' and 'male egoism' – discursively and practically

- Not 'feminine' -- or deemed permissible - to abrogate maternal and spousal duties
- Open confrontation not 'feminine'

'Women are slaves to men... and very backward – this is our culture, we have to accept'

Elderly female vegetable sellers, Gambia

A 'feminisation of responsibility and obligation'?

2 'No power to choose'

iv Polarisation of 'female altruism' and 'male egoism' --
discursively and practically

- Tactical 're-doubling' of women's efforts to live-up to 'feminine' ideals
 - to defuse conflict
 - to ensure household viability
- Men's recourse to elements of 'traditional masculinity' over which they retain some control

A 'feminisation of responsibility and obligation'?

2 'No power to choose'

'...men and women are often poor for different reasons, experience poverty differently, and have different capacities to withstand and/or escape poverty'

Whitehead (2003:8)

A 'feminisation of responsibility and obligation'?

- 3 Growing disjuncture between gendered responsibilities and rights
 - 'Feminisation' of responsibilities for household livelihoods not matched by notable increases in women's personal well-being, freedoms
 - Perpetuation of male prerogatives despite lesser inputs
 - Growing mismatch between inputs and outcomes → greater exploitation of women

A 'feminisation of responsibility and obligation'?

Women face more vulnerability and exploitation in male-headed households

- Onus on women to cope with poverty often greater in MHHs not only because they can't rely on men, but are in some instances also supporting men
 - from 'chief breadwinner' to 'chief spender'
- FHHs may not be male-absent hhs or bereft of men's incomes
- FHHs may also be 'enabling spaces'
 - control, agency, greater equitability of resource inputs and allocations freedom from violence

POLICY IMPACTS OF 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

- **Women on the poverty agenda**

'...the value of integrating poverty and gender and development has been increasingly acknowledged both within UN agencies such as the UNFPA and UNIFEM, among bilateral development agencies, and in the research communities in the North and South'

Johnsson-Latham (2004:20)

POLICY IMPACTS OF 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

- **'Win-win' formula**

Gender equality—poverty reduction—
economic growth (Rodenburg, 2004)

- **Linking of gender and poverty has
secured resources for women**

Poverty reduction and reducing gender inequality not one and the same

Overlapping, but different, forms of disadvantage (Jackson, 1996)

Different stakeholder interests
- efficiency versus human rights

Co-optation and marginalisation of women's 'empowerment'

POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

'..the use of apparently similar terminology of empowerment, participation and sustainability conceals radical differences in policy priorities. Although women's empowerment may be a stated aim in the rhetoric of official gender policy and programme promotion, in practice it becomes subsumed in and marginalised by concerns of financial sustainability and/or poverty alleviation'

Mayoux (2006:7)

POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

'..some programmes to combat poverty reproduce patterns of discrimination, since women are used as unpaid or underpaid providers of family or social welfare services, and are only marginally treated as autonomous individuals entitled to rights and benefits related to activities designed to improve their quality of life'

(ECLAC, 2004b:54)

POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

'Women have much to contribute to anti-poverty programmes. Their gendered assets, dispositions and skills, their inclination towards involvement in household survival and at community level, and their precarious relationship to the wage economy, all help to make them appear a peculiarly suitable ally of anti-poverty programmes. This is not least because they also represent an army of voluntary labour, and can serve as potential guardians of social capital.....'

POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

...These gendered assets and dispositions are being increasingly recognised by the international development agencies, but so far this has not brought significant material benefits to the women involved. The costs many women bear through juggling these multiple responsibilities in terms of weak labour market links, lack of support for carework and long term security are rarely taken into account. Prevailing policy assumptions still tend to naturalise women's "roles" and seek to make use of them and influence how they are developed and managed subjectively and situationally'

Molyneux (2006)

POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

- **Focus on women deflects attention from men**

Ignores the role of domestic gender relations in women's privation

POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

'What is implied is that female-headed households are poorer than male-headed households. The question that is not asked, however, is whether women are better-off in male-headed households. By making male-headed households the norm, important contradictions vanish within these households, and so too does the possibly unbalanced economical (sic) and social position of women compared to men'

Dauids and van Driel (2001:162)

POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

Major pitfalls of excluding men

- No attention to 'secondary poverty'
- Potential fuelling of gender rivalry or hostility
- Increase in women's labour loads

POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

'One might even argue that the economic and social reproductive realms which women are expected to tread, overextend the range of roles and responsibilities of women compared to men, which does not necessarily enlarge their life choices, but may even limit them'

UN/UNIFEM (2003:19)

POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

- **Neglecting 'empowerment' where it counts**

Too much emphasis in anti-poverty programmes of women's condition rather than position (Johnson,2005)

POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

'...money alone does not make for empowerment. Other resources needed include less tangible goods. These include self-confidence and pride in one's own worth, and knowledge and skills acquired through formal and informal means. Very importantly, resources also include the time and freedom to form strong relationships with other women, which can form a counterpart to the traditional power of the family and marriage in women's lives'

Sweetman (2005:6)

POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

- Neglecting 'empowerment' where it counts

Common strategies to 'empower' women in anti-poverty initiatives can lead to more claims upon them



POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

'...poverty is increasingly seen as [a] deprivation, not only of essential assets and opportunities, but of rights, and therefore any effective strategy to reduce poverty must empower disadvantaged groups, especially women, to exercise their rights and participate more actively in decisions that affect them'.

Asian Development Bank (2002:xvi-xvii)

POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

Key problems in anti-poverty programmes

- **Unilateral focus on women or FHHs**
- **Concern about women's condition (incomes) not position (power)**
- **Reinforcement or exacerbation of women's role in serving others (altruism)**
- **Exclusion of men and gender relations**
- **Reluctance of policy makers to address intra-household issues & empowerment where it counts⁵**

POLICY PROBLEMS WITH THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

Despite rhetoric around women's empowerment ... the 'feminisation' of anti-poverty programmes has tended to increase women's burdens of dealing with poverty



Need to address **INPUTS** as well as incomes

MOVING FORWARD.....



RE-CASTING THE 'FEMINISATION OF POVERTY'

- Multidimensionality
- Inputs as well as incomes
- Male-headed as well as female-headed households
- Domestic gender relations⁵⁷



MOVING FORWARD.....



POLICY DIRECTIONS

- Redress over-utilisation of women's time & labour
- Address 'empowerment' more holistically
- Engage with intra-household power dynamics
- Bring men on board