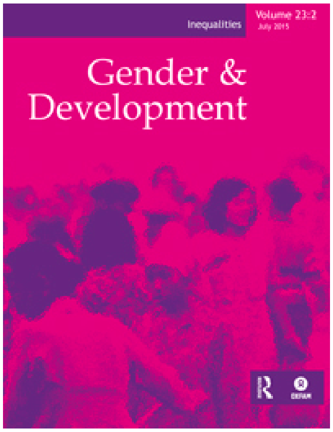

Gender & Development
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgde20

Gender, poverty, and inequality: a brief history of feminist contributions in the field of international development

Naila Kabeer

Published online: 13 Jul 2015.

Gender, poverty, and inequality: a brief history of feminist contributions in the field of international development

Naila Kabeer

This paper provides a brief history of feminist contributions to the analysis of gender, poverty, and inequality in the field of international development. It draws out the continuous threads running through these contributions over the years, as the focus has moved from micro-level analysis to a concern with macro-level forces. It concludes with a brief note on some of the confusions and conflations that continue to bedevil attempts to explore the relationship between gender, poverty, and inequality.

Cet article propose une brève histoire des contributions féministes à l'analyse du genre, de la pauvreté et de l'inégalité dans le domaine de développement international. Il fait ressortir les fils conducteurs présents dans toutes ces contributions au fil des ans, tandis que leur axe central a évolué, passant d'une analyse au niveau micro à l'examen des forces au niveau macro. Il se conclut par une brève note sur certaines des conclusions et appariements qui continuent à miner les tentatives faites pour examiner la relation entre genre, pauvreté et inégalité.

El presente artículo brinda una breve historia acerca de los aportes feministas al análisis de género, pobreza y desigualdad en el área de desarrollo internacional. En este sentido, examina los ejes que, de manera permanente, han atravesado estos aportes en años recientes, a medida que la atención se ha desplazado desde el análisis a nivel micro hacia el cuestionamiento de las fuerzas existentes a nivel macro. Concluye abordando brevemente algunas de las confusiones y fusiones que siguen obstaculizando los intentos de examinar la relación existente entre género, pobreza y desigualdad.

Key words: poverty; inequality; gender; intersectionality; financial crisis; policy repsonses

Introduction: poverty and inequality

This issue of *Gender and Development* focuses on inequality, reflecting the current moment of focus on the rapid growth in income, and wealth inequality, in both poor and affluent countries in recent decades. This has helped to move distributional issues, and a concern with measuring what Frances Stewart calls 'vertical inequalities' (Stewart 2002), centre-stage. 'Vertical inequalities' rank individuals/households by their place in the income/wealth hierarchy, in contrast to 'horizontal inequalities', which refer to inequalities between socially defined groups that often cut across income groups. Vertical inequalities draw attention to class-based inequalities, while horizontal inequalities address discrimination based on marginalised social identities, such as gender, race, and caste. Development policy has touched on economic inequalities and social discrimination in an intermittent way but has remained largely focused on economic growth and the eradication of absolute poverty.[1]

In this overview article written to frame the issue, I provide a brief history of feminist contributions to the analysis of poverty and inequality in the field of international development, drawing on my own experience. At this juncture, when development policymakers and planners are turning more systematic attention to inequalities of various kinds, feminists in development have much to bring to the table. We have decades of experience in analysing class inequalities through the lens of gender analysis to reveal the social and political aspects of phenomena that first appear to be purely economic in nature. Our work also reveals how horizontal inequalities of gender have served to differentiate the experience of class, particularly among those in the lower end of the income distribution. More recently, we have drawn attention to how *intersection* between vertical inequality with the multiple and overlapping horizontal inequalities of gender, caste, race, and ethnicity helps to explain the persistence of poverty, discrimination, and social exclusion, over lifetimes and generations.

Vertical inequality measures rank individuals/households by their position in the income/wealth hierarchy, and estimate what share of the total national income accrues to them. A recent study of global trends in income inequality between 1988 and 2008 found that while the top 1 per cent of the global income distribution reported a 60 per cent rise in their real incomes, there had also been significant gains all along the income distribution – with one striking exception. The bottom 5 per cent of the distribution had not shared in this progress: their real incomes had remained the same throughout this period (Milanovic 2012, 12).

This highlights the continuing need to retain a concern with those at the bottom end of the income distribution. While the definition of absolute poverty has moved from a very minimal concern with nutritional needs to a broader range of necessities, the fact that the poverty line is currently defined as $1.25 per person per day (adjusted for purchasing power parity) reminds us that the goal of poverty reduction sets the bar very low indeed. Even so, 48 per cent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa and 30 per cent of those in South Asia lived below this level in 2010 (UN 2013, 6).

Conceptualising poverty: state and process

Poverty used to be conceptualised in terms of the income needed to achieve a predetermined and physiologically-defined level of survival by members of the 'average' household. This poverty line served to distinguish the poor from the non-poor within a population. In early research on poverty, it was assumed that households were internally unified, and that their incomes were equitably distributed among their members. Consequently, all members of households were thought to be likely to be equally poor or equally well-off.

This assumption came under serious challenge from empirical evidence that income deficits impinged more severely and systematically on some members of the household than others, most often along lines of gender and age. The need to deconstruct households, and ask questions about the intra-household distribution of well-being, was thus the first step in the process of developing a gendered understanding of poverty. It revealed the relevance of identity-based inequalities, even among the poor.

My own entry into the field of poverty analysis began in 1987, when I was commissioned to develop an analytical framework for monitoring poverty from a gender perspective as part of a larger programme on poverty monitoring in Bangladesh. Because so little was known about the gender dimensions of poverty in Bangladesh at the time, I opted to combine available statistics on poverty and well-being with qualitative assessments of how poor women in different parts of Bangladesh described their own experiences (Kabeer 1989).

Central to the framework that came out of this research was the distinction between poverty as 'state' – expressed as a snapshot view of the basic needs deficits of the poor at a particular point in time; and poverty as 'process' – focusing on the 'causes and mechanisms of the generation and transmission of poverty' over time (Fergany 1981, 15). The two were, of course, closely inter-related, since deficits in needs at any particular point in time were both outcomes of ongoing processes of poverty, and contributory factors. Nevertheless, the distinction served to underline what emerged as the main finding of the study, that 'women and men experience the state of poverty differently and often unequally and become impoverished through processes that sometimes (though not always) diverge' (Kabeer 1989, 10).

I will retain the distinction between poverty as state and process in this article, and use it to explore some of the ways in which gender relations have differentiated the experience of poverty and inequality for men and women in different regions of the world, and the processes through which these differentiated experiences are reproduced over time.

The state of poverty

Let me take my own early study as a starting point, and use it to reflect on how the understanding of the gender dimensions of poverty has evolved since then.

A study of national statistics in Bangladesh at the time made it quickly clear that, as in many other regions of the world, household income was distributed in horizontally unequal ways, which systematically discriminated against women and girls in relation to basic survival and well-being, as measured by indicators of health, nutrition, and mortality. In addition, the Bangladesh data showed that while gender inequalities were not confined to the poor, they tended to be exacerbated by poverty.

I used qualitative interviews to explore the gender dimensions of poverty beyond these gender-disaggregated statistics. An important contribution to the literature at the time was the idea of a hierarchy of needs among the poor, in the sense that the basic survival needs of the present had to be satisfied before making plans for the future or concerning oneself with more intangible concerns with status, self-esteem, autonomy, and dignity (Chambers 1989). Much of the literature exploring this had focused on the generic category of 'the poor', but my interviews suggested that this hierarchy played out in gendered ways. This was evident in one woman's explanation for doing agricultural waged labour in the fields in a country where norms of propriety required respectable women to remain secluded within the home:

> What need have the poor for self-respect or propriety? Everything is dictated by scarcity (abhab): scarcity of food, scarcity of clothes, scarcity of shelter, there is no end to scarcity … there are mothers who cannot feed their children, can they afford propriety? (Kabeer 1989, 7)

This statement suggested that for those living on the margins of physical survival, the struggle to stay alive was indeed an overriding priority, as suggested by Robert Chambers. But if the hierarchy of needs is imposed by one's objective position in society, rather than a reflection of subjectively-determined preferences, the statement also conveyed the harsh nature of the trade-offs that defined poverty. This woman could abide by her community's norms and enjoy their approval, or she could feed her children.

Female-headed households and poverty

The fieldwork revealed some of the other ways in which gender inequalities differentiated the experience of poverty. Female headship emerged as one example of this. That female headship was empirically associated with poverty in a country like Bangladesh, where women were largely dependent on male earnings, was not surprising. However, it was also evident from the research that it was *female-supported* households, those supported primarily or solely by women's earnings, that were associated with poverty rather than households deemed *female-headed* because they were being managed by women in the temporary absence of men.

Mayra Buvinic and Nadia Yousseff (1978) had earlier drawn attention to female household heads as a special category among the poor; indeed, as the 'poorest of the poor' (1). Their typology of female heads, based on data from Latin America and the Caribbean, distinguished between widows, divorced women, women in consensual unions and single mothers. Data from the region showed that these *de facto* (as opposed to *de jure*) female-headed households were indeed disproportionately represented among households below the poverty line.

The use of the phrase 'the poorest of the poor' in relation to female headship, and the rise of female headship in a number of regions of the world, served over time to establish it as a marker of the perceived process of the 'feminization of poverty' (Buvinic 1993, 1). Early efforts to distinguish between different types of female heads were lost in the process, until the very presence of households headed by women was taken as an indication of poverty.

Attempts to estimate the percentage of women and men living in poverty have relied on this equation between female headship and poverty, which is believed to have given rise to the ubiquitous statistic that 70 per cent of the world's poor were women, advanced in the UN *Human Development Report 1995.* Alain Marcoux (1998) questioned this estimate. He pointed out that, given the global estimate of people in poverty at the time was 1.3 billion, it suggested the improbable ratio of 900 million poor women and girls to 400 million poor men and boys. Such a claim could only be justified by making the improbable additional assumptions that male-headed households had a balanced sex composition, while female-headed ones were made up of an excess of female members.

However, female-supported households continue to be used widely as an indicator of poverty. A recent report by the UN Women (2012, 1) suggests that in all but three of 25 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, the ratio of women to men in the working age group in the poorest households varied from 110 to 130 to every 100 men. This estimate makes sense if we recognise that women are less likely to have paid work than men; that when they have paid work, they are likely to be paid less than men; and that, as a result, households that rely primarily on female rather than male earners are likely to be poorer on average.

Class, gender, and violence against women

The other gender dimension of poverty that emerged from the fieldwork related to violence. Participatory assessments of poverty in various contexts had highlighted the class-based nature of the violence experienced by poor people (Beck 1994), but had little to say about patriarchal forms of violence faced by women. My fieldwork offered additional insights. First of all, it suggested that gender mediated class-based violence when it came to women: many women I interviewed spoke of rape and sexual harassment by men from more affluent families. One young girl had been raped by the sons of the landlord she worked for and had turned to prostitution: 'Now she charges money for what they took by force' (Kabeer 1989, 22).

Secondly, class mediated certain forms of patriarchal violence through its link to scarcity. Conflicts revolving around food emerged as a frequent trigger for violence: women were beaten if there was not enough food, if it did not taste right or if they were found tasting it before their husbands had eaten. There also seemed to be a seasonal pattern to domestic violence in that it increased in the 'hungry' months. A similar observation was made in a study by Betsy Hartmann and James Boyce (1983) who had been told by a sharecropper's wife in the village they studied: 'When my husband's stomach is empty, he beats me, but when it is full, there is peace' (89). As the authors pointed out, wife-beating were frequently an outlet for men's powerlessness in the face of grinding poverty.

Multi-dimensional and intersectional understandings of poverty

Over time, qualitative assessments of poverty have helped to move the conceptualisation of 'poverty as state' beyond money-metric measures, to a more multi-dimensional conceptualisation which encompasses some of its less tangible dimensions. They have drawn attention, for instance, to gender differences in the priorities expressed by poor people, differences that reflect the roles and responsibilities assigned to men and women by households and communities. They have also drawn attention to women's greater workloads, giving rise to the concept of 'time poverty' (Hanmer *et al*. 1997).

At the same time, quantitative assessments have shown that it is the *intersection*, rather than the *addition*, of different kinds of inequality, vertical as well as horizontal, the fact that these inequalities overlap, reinforce, and exacerbate each other, that explains some of the most acute forms of disadvantage, what is referred to as 'extreme poverty'. Gender inequality cuts across both vertical inequalities and other horizontal inequalities including race and caste. Its intersection with these other forms of inequality means that it is women and girls from the poorest caste, ethnic, and racial groups who have poorer levels of health, nutrition, and education, and very often suffer higher levels of violence than other women, including women from similarly poor backgrounds (Kabeer 2010).

The processes of poverty: causal inequalities

The processes of poverty can be divided into those which explain why poor people remain poor over extended periods of time, the so-called 'poverty trap', and those which explain why people, both poor and non-poor, become poorer over time. A focus on processes necessarily draws attention to the unequal distribution of the means through which people in different contexts seek to meet their needs and pursue their goals. While the means themselves are clearly likely to vary across regions, the livelihoods literature has been useful in drawing out a number of generalisable insights. In particular, it has served to highlight the importance of human labour, skills, knowledge, and abilities (or what Amartya Sen [1992] called 'capabilities') to the livelihood strategies of poor people and to the extent to which largely unskilled family labour is the most abundant, sometimes the only, capability available to the very poorest.

In this analysis, the chances of poor households climbing out of poverty depend on the quantity of labour at their disposal, the productivity of this labour as determined by physical strength, education, skills and so on, and on their ability to mobilise other resources. These include material resources, including land and other natural resources, productive equipment, and credit, as well as social resources such as their claims on their kinship networks, the 'moral economy' of the community, and the state. It is of course the larger vertical inequalities in society that will determine what share of these resources accrue to the poor.

Analysis of the gendered causes of poverty requires attention to gender inequalities in access to, and control over the means of survival and security among households who are themselves disadvantaged in the distribution of these resources. Given the importance of physical labour as the predominant, and often the only, resource at the disposal of the poor, a critical insight into the gendered processes of poverty relates to asymmetries in the extent to which men and women are able to dispose of their own labour or enjoy command over the labour of others.

The first, and most widespread, form that this asymmetry takes relates to the fact that while everywhere in the world, households must allocate the labour at their disposal between earning a living and caring for the family, in much of the world, women bear a disproportionate share of the unpaid work of caring for the family. This 'reproductive tax' (Palmer 1995, 1981) on time, from which men are largely exempt, leaves women with less time for earning a living and hence dependent to a greater or lesser extent on male earnings.

Other asymmetries relate to the form taken by women's productive contributions. In areas of strict seclusion, women either work as unpaid family labour or in home-based forms of economic activity where they relinquish control over the production process and to the proceeds of their labour to male household members. Elsewhere, as in West Africa, women are obliged to provide labour on their husbands' farms before they can labour on their own, curtailing the returns they enjoy from their efforts.

Gender asymmetries are evident in the ability to translate labour effort into income in the market place. These reflect gender inequalities in endowments, such as education and productive assets. They also reflect the gendered organisation of economic opportunities. Labour markets across the world tend to be organised along hierarchical lines which reflect the intersection between income and group-based inequalities. As a result, women from poor and socially marginalised groups (lower castes or minority ethnic groups, for instance) tend to be concentrated in activities at the bottom of the hierarchy which are not only poorer-paid than the rest, but also the least desirable, because of the risks, stigma, and exploitative working conditions associated with them.

Gender asymmetries in livelihood opportunities are also reproduced through policy-related inequalities in access to credit, agricultural extension, and other services (Hanmer *et al*. 1997). As the Consultations with the Poor pointed out (Narayan *et al*. 2000), the problem is not merely one of neglect by public providers, but also of arrogance and disdain of those from better-educated and higher-status households towards those who occupy an inferior position by virtue of their gender, caste, class, and other marginalised identities.

The 'poverty trap' thus reflects how vertical inequalities of income and wealth are bound up with the multiple and overlapping horizontal inequalities associated with marginalised identities of various kinds to produce entrenched forms of disadvantage, referred to as 'chronic poverty'. The fact that gender inequality tends to exacerbate the disadvantages generated by the intersection between vertical inequalities and other forms of horizontal inequalities explains why poverty and inequalities continue to be reproduced over time in a gendered form.

Poverty as process: coping with idiosyncratic shocks and natural disasters

While the idea of the 'poverty trap' captures the way in which multiple, and reinforcing, inequalities keep people in poverty, research into the way in which households cope with various forms of crisis provides useful insights into the processes through which households, both poor and non-poor, slide into greater poverty. An early strand of this research focused on particular categories of 'shocks': idiosyncratic shocks, such as illness in the household; generalised but anticipated shocks, such as seasonal droughts; and unanticipated shocks, such as natural disasters (Agarwal 1990; Corbett 1988; Dreze 1988).

Detailed analysis of household strategies to deal with such shocks suggested that they could be classified along a loose continuum which gave a systematic pattern to the sequence of responses. Priority was given in the early stages of this sequence to responses which entailed less threat to the household productive base, and a greater degree of reversibility. These might include cutting back on number of meals consumed, purchasing less nutritious foods, foraging for wild food, borrowing from neighbours or money lenders, turning to wealthier patrons, letting illness go untreated, depletion of household stores, selling off smaller consumer durables, taking children out of school, and temporary migration in search of work. Much later in the sequence came the selling off of producer assets, which was likely to undermine the household's chances of recovery. The final stages could include permanent migration, and the breakdown of the family unit.

While the shocks in question were not confined to poor households, what distinguished poor from better-off households was their greater exposure to certain kinds of shocks (illness in the family; seasonal unemployment) as well as their lower likelihood of recovery. With fewer options available to them, poorer households arrived at the later, less reversible stages of the sequence outlined above with greater rapidity than other households and were more likely to permanently slide into greater poverty.

Horizontal inequalities among the poor frequently determined who bore the brunt of households' coping efforts. Thus, reduction of consumption was more often at the expense of female than male members. The mortality rates of girls peaked sharply relative to boys in times of drought in the Indian context (Rose 1999). John Hoddinott (2006) found that a drought in Zimbabwe in the early 1990s led to a decline in women's nutritional status, but not men's: this negative impact was strongest for women from poorer households.

Gender inequality was also evident in the sequence of household divestment strategies: women's goods were generally sold off earlier in a range of South Asian locations (Agarwal 1990). Janice Jiggins observed (1986) 'whatever women's personal earnings or assets, these (were) consumed *before* the point of family breakdown' (14). This meant that further down the spiral into greater poverty, when family interdependencies began to break down, women had fewer resources to fall back on than men.

The final stages of impoverishment were characterised by more drastic measures – the wholesale migration of family members, the sale of children, or abandonment of weaker members. Able-bodied male earners were very often the first to abandon the family unit, leaving women to look after the very young and the very old. At extreme levels of destitution, mothers might abandon their children to fend for themselves in the informal economy. Thus after the 1974 famine in Bangladesh, women who had been deserted by their husbands migrated to the cities and began to fill the vagrant homes, while in one district, special homes had to be set up for deserted children (Alamgir 1980).

Poverty as process: policy-induced shocks

The onset of structural adjustment policies in the 1980s in the wake of the debt crisis experienced by various countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America signalled the beginning of a worldwide shift to market-led growth strategies, spearheaded by neo-liberal governments in powerful donor countries and promoted across the world through the lending policies of the international financial institutions. SAPs consisted of a number of key policy measures: downsizing of the state's role in the economy and cutback in public expenditure with a view to promoting private enterprise; the deregulation of labour and capital markets; and the liberalisation of trade and financial flows. The hypermobility of international capital and the exposure of countries to fluctuations in global markets meant that these policies inaugurated an era marked by a series of financial crises, of which the 1997–1998 East Asian crisis and the 2007–2008 financial crisis were only the most dramatic.

Structural adjustment policies introduced the concept of 'policy-induced shocks' into the development literature. Diane Elson (1991) summarised a number of such studies that dealt with responses to structural adjustment. She distinguished between two categories of responses. Income-generating responses referred to the increase in labour force participation by women and children and changes in household structure to increase ratio of earners to dependents. Consumption and expenditure responses included cutting down on meals, cheaper foods, borrowing in cash or kind, resort to borrowing, and reliance on the community.

Other studies have explored how households have coped with recent financial crises. Rasmus Heltberg *et al.* (2012) discuss some of the responses and consequences associated with the 2008–2011 financial, food, and fuel crises in developing and transitional economies. They divided coping mechanisms into three categories. 'Behaviour-based responses' referred to reducing quantity and quality of food and non-food expenditure, taking children out of school, intensifying work efforts, diversifying income sources, migration, and resort to illicit activities, such as sex work, drug dealing, and theft. 'Asset-based responses' included sale of assets, loans from moneylenders, microfinance organisations and families, and use of common property resources. Finally, 'assistance-based responses' included welfare assistance from governments, NGOs, religious organisations, mutual solidarity groups, relatives, friends, and neighbours.

A number of general points can be made on the basis of this literature. First of all, there is a remarkable continuity in the crisis-coping responses reported in the later round of the literature, and those described in the earlier round. There are clearly a finite number of actions that households in poverty are able to take in order to protect themselves from the worst effects of crisis. At the same time, the fact that the study by Rasmus Heltberg *et al*. covered a wider range of countries than the earlier literature helps to make clear how certain options may vary between countries. For instance, formal government assistance was available to a greater extent in the former socialist countries than elsewhere. Moreover, while the sale of assets was reported as a crisis response across low- and middle-income countries, the reliance on common property resources for food and fuel was largely confined to low-income countries.

Secondly, these later studies make a distinction between the first- and second-order effects of shocks, crisis, and recession. The gendered impacts of the first-order effects varied considerably. For instance, in most countries, men lost their jobs in larger numbers than women as a result of the public sector entrenchments which accompanied structural adjustment since they made up the majority labour force – although women were often disproportionately represented among those who lost their jobs. The first round of impacts of financial crisis, on the other hand, varied from country to country because it depended on whether male- or female-intensive sectors were first hit (Aslanbeigui and Summerfield 2000).

However, regardless of the first-order effects, women's time emerged as 'a crucial variable of adjustment' in the second-order effects, given its allocation to a multiplicity of different responsibilities within the home, the market, and the community (Commonwealth Secretariat 1989, 71). One form this took was the entry of large numbers of women who had hitherto been economically inactive, leading to what is referred to as the 'added worker' effect. This led to the paradoxical result that in the midst of high levels of unemployment or under-employment, there were rising levels of female labour force participation. Women were often able to find jobs even when men were not, because they were willing to work for lower wages and to take up jobs wherever they could find them in order to ensure that household basic needs were met.

Micro-level studies carried out in the context of structural adjustment and economics recession also documented a 'scissors-effect' on women's time, as they sought to increase their unpaid labour to compensate for cutbacks in public services or to substitute for expensive items of food or clothing which were now beyond the financial means of the household while at the same time, increasing their time into paid work to compensate for rising male unemployment and the increases in the cost of living. As Caroline Moser (1989) pointed out in the context of her study in urban Ecuador, some women coped with these demands, others 'hung-on' but some simply 'burned-out', exhausted with the variety of conflicting responsibilities they had to juggle.

Later studies of the impact of the 1997 and 2008 financial crises reaffirmed the importance of women's time as a mechanism for adjustment to crisis. As men were laid off, women moved into various forms of paid work, putting in long hours of work for low pay, usually in the informal economy, often leaving small children in the care of older siblings. The more direct pressures they faced to feed their children led many to accept low status and physically demanding jobs like cleaning, laundry, and sex work.

Second-order effects of economic crises also affected children. For instance, in the context of the Indonesian crisis, entry into school was deferred for young children, while older ones, particularly girls, were withdrawn in order to contribute to household livelihoods:

> *Some wound up far away in cities where they could be easily exploited as domestic servants, factory labour, or street vendors. Those who became street children searching for food and money had little protection and became prey to pimps, policemen and gangs, who incorporated them in their criminal activities.* (Knowles *et al*. 1999, 44)

Second-order effects also affected social relations within the family and the community. In urban Ecuador, Caroline Moser noted that women who were dependent on their husbands to make ends meet were more likely to report a rise in domestic violence than those who had a reliable income of their own. In urban Zimbabwe as well, Nasneen Kanji (1994) reported higher levels of domestic conflict in households that were struggling to meet household needs with very little support from husbands.

The studies on the impact of the 2008 financial crisis note that in some sites, reduced incomes and rising unemployment had led to a rise in domestic violence, by men against women as well as by women against children. In others, domestic violence was exacerbated by the combination of high rates of unemployment and alcohol consumption by men (Heltberg *et al*. 2012). The study also reported a rise in female-headed households, as men migrated in search of jobs without necessarily sending remittances home or simply abandoning their families. Given that many resort to theft to cope with financial hardship, it is not surprising that in almost all the countries studied, concerns with crime had increased.

Thirdly, while later studies on response to adjustment, recession, and crisis do not refer explicitly to the sequencing considerations that had been identified in the earlier literature, they do note that some coping mechanisms had longer lasting – and less reversible – effects than others. As Rasmus Heltberg *et al.* point out, 'coping came at significant costs to poor individuals, families and communities and … some of these costs may continue to be felt well after the crisis subsides' (8). As examples, they mention the impact of reduced food consumption in the context of chronic malnutrition, the sale of productive assets, the foregone education and health care, and the rise in anti-social behaviours which are likely to reverberate for a long time to come.

These studies also noted that some groups were more resilient in the face of crisis than others. In their study of the East Asian crisis, James C. Knowles *et al.* observed that while upper- and middle-income groups were able to cope with the crisis using strategies that avoided long-term damage, the same was not true of the poor. In relation to the impact of the more recent global crisis, it was noted that while groups tied to the formal economy were often hit first and most directly by lay-offs, they could also count on severance payments and live off savings without resorting to drastic measures that would hamper their chances of recovery as national economies started to grow. Most informal sector workers had been struggling to make ends meet before the crisis, and they saw the most damage to their livelihoods as a result of their coping responses. These groups were least likely to recover when their national economies started to grow again.

Fourth, it is clear that responses that are possible in the face of idiosyncratic or localised crises, for instance, drawing on common property resources or seeking help from family and neighbours, are likely to dry up in situations when large numbers of people were simultaneously resorting to these measures in the context of more generalised forms of crisis. At the same time, the fact that large numbers of people were engaging at the same time in the same strategies meant that they were driving changes at the macro-level.

For instance, the 'added worker' effect shows up at the national level. Sonia Bhalotra and Marcella Umana-Aponte (2010) used national survey data from 63 developing countries for the period 1986–2006 to study the impact of fluctuations in per capita GDP on women's employment status at the time of the survey. They found a strong counter-cyclical pattern in Asia and Latin America, with less-educated women dominating the 'added worker' effect, suggesting the effect was strongest among poorer households. Most of these women had not been working before and most went into self-employment, presumably in the informal economy. In sub-Saharan Africa, on the other hand, where many more women were already in paid work, women, particularly those from better off households and presumably in formal sector jobs, lost their jobs along with men in times of recession.

The spread of informal work can be seen as one of the longer-term changes at the macro-level, that has both accompanied and been a consequence of economic liberalisation policies. Workers laid off during an economic crisis or as part of public sector retrenchment generally turned to the informal economy for 'last-resort' survival activities. The fact that men and women fare very differently in the informal economy is evident from the fact that, in most developing country contexts, women are more likely than men to be in what the ILO terms 'vulnerable employment' (that is, own account work and unpaid family labour). Of men and women in vulnerable employment, women are more likely than men to be in unpaid family labour, and hence without an income of their own.

Gender, poverty, and inequality: disentangling the connections

I would like to conclude this brief account of feminist contributions to the field of gender, poverty, and inequality by highlighting a number of conflations and confusions that surface in the field from time to time. These frequently reflect how the relationship between vertical and horizontal inequalities is conceptualised.

One source of confusion is the widespread tendency in the development literature to conflate women's poverty with gender inequality. In her article on 'rescuing gender from the poverty trap', Cecile Jackson (1996) noted the tendency among a number of multilateral development agencies to engage with gender inequality only as this affects women in poverty, due to their focus on action to stimulate economic growth and/or to alleviate poverty. As she argued, 'the concept of poverty cannot serve as a proxy for the subordination of women … and there is no substitute for a gender analysis which transcends class divisions and material definitions of deprivation' (489). Her point, therefore, was that gender inequality, and its impact on social relations, was not confined to the poor; rather, it cuts across socioeconomic classes.

The reverse problem was evident in the conceptualisation of Millennium Development Goal 3 on gender equality and women's empowerment, which failed to give attention to class and other differences among women. Thus, while the overall goal of the MDGs was the halving of extreme poverty in the world, MDG 3 was formulated in terms that might or might not be relevant to the needs and interests of poor and marginalised women across the world. For instance, tackling gender disparities in literacy and primary school enrolment rates is likely to be relevant to these groups, but less likely to be the case for secondary and tertiary education. Increasing the share of women in national parliaments, although important from a broader gender equality perspective, provides no guarantee that it would promote the needs and interests of women from poor and marginalised groups. Expanding the share of women in non-agricultural employment did little to address the poor pay and exploitative conditions that characterised the non-agricultural activities undertaken by poorer women from different social groups.

The third and final concern I want to raise is a tendency to lose sight of what distinguishes gender inequality from other relations of inequality. In recent consultations about the post-MDG agenda, it was widely agreed among those committed to social justice that a major limitation of the MDG agenda was its failure to acknowledge both vertical inequality and horizontal inequalities (beyond gender inequality) as major challenges facing the international community. One response to this has been advocacy for new ways to measure income-based 'vertical inequality', such as the Palma ratio.[2] These are better able to capture change than the traditionally used Gini coefficient,[3] but also ignore social discrimination.

The other has been to argue for greater attention to various forms of horizontal inequalities, such as age, disability, ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, and so on. In all of this, there has been a worrying tendency among some groups to treat gender as 'just one of many inequalities that generate poverty and exclusion … we don't lose points on gender if we admit that class, race and ethnicity also have a role – sometimes a primary role – in creating inequalities' (Melamed 2012, no page number). By way of conclusion, therefore, let me reiterate the arguments that I made over a decade ago in relation to the then newly-adopted MDGs as to why gender should not be treated as 'just another inequality' (Kabeer 2003).

First of all, gender inequality is more pervasive across societies than any other form of inequality, though it may take different forms in different societies. Consequently, understanding the causes and consequences of gender inequality is of concern to all societies in the world, rich as well as poor.

Secondly, gender inequality is also pervasive across different groups within societies, cutting across class, race, caste, ethnicity, and other forms of inequality. It is not simply one more horizontal inequality to be added to the others. Rather, it intersects with these other inequalities in ways that intensify the disadvantages associated with other forms of inequality.

Finally, gender inequality is structured into the organisation of social relations in society, as fundamentally as class is in capitalist societies, as race was in apartheid South Africa, and as caste is in India. Women's location at the intersection between production and reproduction, between making a living and caring for the family, makes the organisation of gender relations central to the nexus between economic growth and human development, and hence central to the development agenda.

Naila Kabeer is Professor of Gender and Development at the Gender Institute, London School of Economics. Postal address: Gender Institute, London School of Economics and Political Science, Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, UK. Email: N.Kabeer@lse.ac.uk

Notes

1 By contrast, wealthier countries have been focused on 'relative poverty' despite the call by the 1995 Copenhagen Summit of Social Development for countries to develop measures of both absolute and relative poverty and the need for all nations to eradicate absolute poverty (Sarlo 2001).

2 The 'Palma ratio' measures the ratio of the income share of the top 10 per cent in the income distribution to the bottom 40 per cent, on the grounds that the income share of the middle 50 per cent has been relatively stable over time across countries.

3 The 'Gini co-efficient', which is the more commonly used measure of income inequality, compares how the actual distribution of income diverges from a perfectly equal distribution of income.

References

Agarwal, Bina (1990) 'Social security and the family in rural India coping with seasonality and calamity', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 17(3): 341–412

Alamgir, Mohiuddin (1980) *Famine in South Asia: The Political Economy of Mass Starvation*, Cambridge, MA: Oelgeschlager and Hain Publishers

Aslanbeigui, Nahid and Gale Summerfield (2000) 'The Asian crisis, gender, and the international financial architecture', *Feminist Economics* 6(3): 81–103

Beck, Tony (1994) *The Experience of Poverty: Fighting for Respect and Resources in Village India*, London: Intermediate Technology Publications

Bhalotra, Sonia and Marcela Umana-Aponte (2010) 'The dynamics of women's labor supply in developing countries', IZA Discussion Paper No. 4879, Bonn: Institute for the Study of Labour

Buvinic, Mayra (1993) 'The feminization of poverty? Research and policy needs', Presentation to Symposium on Poverty: New approaches to analysis and policy November 22–24, Geneva: International Institute for Labour Studies

Buvinic, Mayra and Nadia Youssef (1978) *Woman-headed Households: The Ignored Factor in Development Planning. Report Submitted to the Office of Women in Development, USAID*, Washington, DC: ICRW

Chambers, Robert (1989) 'Editorial introduction: vulnerability, coping and policy', *IDS Bulletin* 20(2): 1–7

Commonwealth Secretariat (1989) *Engendering adjustment for the 1990s*, London: Commonwealth Secretariat

Corbett, Jane (1988) 'Famine and household coping strategies', *World Development* 16(9): 1099–112

Dreze, Jean (1988) '*Famine Prevention in India' Development Economics Paper No. 3, Suntory Toyota International Centre for Economics and Related Disciplines*, London: School of Economics and Political Science

Elson, Diane (1991) 'Household responses to stabilization and structural adjustment: male bias at the micro level', in D. Elson (ed.) *Male Bias in the Development Process,* 211–52 Manchester: Manchester University Press

Fergany, Nader (1981) 'Monitoring the condition of the poor in the third world: some aspects of measurement', ILO/WEP Research Working Paper WEP 10-6/WP52, Geneva: ILO

Hanmer, Lucia, Graham Pyatt, and Howard White (1997) *Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa: What Can we Learn about the World Bank's Poverty Assessments?* The Hague: Institute of Social Studies Advisory Services

Hartmann, Betsy and James Boyce (1983) *A Quiet Violence. View from a Bangladesh Village*, London: Zed Books

Heltberg, Rasmus, Naomi Hossain, Anna Reva, and Carolyn Turk (2012) 'Anatomy of coping. Evidence from people living through the crises of 2008–2011', Policy Research Working Paper 5951, Washington: World Bank

Hoddinott, John (2006) 'Shocks and their consequences across and within households in rural Zimbabwe', *Journal of Development Studies* 42(2): 301–21

Jackson, Cecile (1996) 'Rescuing gender from the poverty trap', *World Development* 24 (3): 489–504

Jiggins, Janice (1986) 'Women and seasonality: coping with crisis and calamity', *IDS Bulletin* 17(3): 9–18

Kabeer, Naila (1989) 'Monitoring poverty as if gender mattered: a methodology for rural Bangladesh', IDS Discussion Paper 255. Brighton: IDS

Kabeer, Naila (2003) *Mainstreaming Gender and Poverty Eradication in the Millennium Development Goals*, London: Commonwealth Secretariat

Kabeer, Naila (2010) *Can the MDGs Provide a Pathway to Social Justice? The Challenge of Intersecting inequalities,* Brighton: IDS/UN MDG Achievement Fund

Kanji, Nazneen (1994) 'Structural adjustment in Zimbabwe. The way forward for low-income urban women', in Fatima Meer (ed.) *Poverty in the 1990s: The Responses of Urban women,* Paris: UNESCO, pp. 41–64

Knowles, J., E. Pernia and M. Racelis (1999) 'Social consequences of the financial crisis in Asia', Economic Staff Paper No. 60, Manila: Asian Development Bank

Marcoux, Alain (1998) 'The feminization of poverty: claims, facts and data needs', *Population and Development Review* 24(1): 131–39

Melamed, Claire (2012) 'Gender is just one of many inequalities that generate poverty and exclusion', http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development/poverty-matters/2012/mar/09/gender-inequality-poverty-exclusion (last checked by the author 7 July 2015)

Milanovic, Branko (2012) 'Global Income Inequality by the Numbers: In History and Now - An Overview', Policy Research Working Paper 6259, Washington, DC: World Bank

Moser, Caroline (1989) 'The impact of recession and adjustment policies at the micro-level: low income women and their households in Guayquil, Ecuador', in UNICEF (ed.) *Poor Women and the Economic Crisis. The Invisible Adjustment*, Santiago: UNICEF, pp. 137–62

Narayan, Deepa, Chambers, Robert, Shah, Meera and Petesch, Patti (2000) *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Palmer, I. (1995) 'Public finance from a gender perspective', *World Development* 23(11): 1981–6

Rose, Elaina (1999) 'Consumption smoothing and excess female mortality in Rural India', *Review of Economics and Statistics* 81(1): 41–9

Sarlo, Christopher (2001) *Measuring Poverty in Canada Critical Issues Bulletin*, Vancouver: Fraser Institute

Sen, Amartya (1992) *Inequality Re-examined*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

Stewart, Frances (2002) *Horizontal Inequalities: A Neglected Dimension of Development* (QEH Working Paper Series 81, 2002), Oxford: QEH, University of Oxford

UN Women (2012) 'The Millennium Development Goals Report: The Gender Chart', New York: UN Women

United Nations (2013) 'The Millennium Development Goals Report, 2013', New York: United Nations