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Glass Ceilings and Iron Bars: Women, Gender, and Poverty in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Abstract: This paper argues that it is necessary to focus on gender rather than exclusively on women in discussions on global poverty eradication. It argues firstly, that the drivers of poverty are complex and multifaceted leading to a least two different forms of deprivation – transitory and structural poverty – each requiring different forms of analysis and treatment. Transitory poverty can arise as a consequence of an event or shock that would diminish an individual’s capacity to retain or secure employment and where a State lacks an appropriate form of social protection. Structural poverty, on the other hand, arises where groups are excluded from the workforce on a more permanent basis due to a wide variety of factors of discrimination such as sex, race, ethnicity, and age. Focusing on the sex of an individual alone cannot explain why some are more likely to experience different forms of poverty than others. Policies that protect women against transitory poverty, such as care related allowances, are not sufficient to eradicate structural poverty. Secondly, structural poverty prompts an examination of gender roles and relations. Unlike the category of ‘women’, the concept of gender demands consideration of a wider range of intersecting factors that influence life chances. The structure of contemporary gender relations, where women continue to experience higher levels of violence, and carry the greatest burden of responsibility for non-market based production activities, create the social conditions where domination and dependence thrive, and where persistently high rates of poverty seem inevitable. Such circumstances are generated by human agency. Thus, thirdly, it argues that these circumstances can and should be changed through human action. Knowledge of these circumstances gives rise to moral obligations for both men and women to avoid upholding values and practices that lead to domination and dependence as a matter of basic justice.

Keywords: Gender relations; Women; Transitory poverty; Structural poverty; Social norms; Human agency; Dependence; Domination; Justice

Introduction

Following decades of targeted programs to reduce poverty levels in developing countries, the persistence of high levels of extreme poverty remains a practical and political problem at the end of the Millennium Development Goal period. According the 2013 report from the UN High Level Panel of Eminent Persons, developed to inform the post-Millennium Development Goals discussions,

‘The next development agenda must ensure that in the future neither income nor gender, nor ethnicity, nor disability, nor geography, will determine whether people live or die, whether a mother can give birth safely, or whether her child has a fair chance in life’ (2013: 7).

It takes the elimination of global poverty as one of its central goals. Further, it argues that as the ‘majority of those living in extreme poverty are female’ (2013:17), such a goal requires an explicit focus on the causes of extreme poverty for women.

The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) public policy framework which structured the international development agenda from 2000 to 2015, set out to reduce poverty by half as its first goal, where poverty is measured as the proportion of the population living below \$1.25 purchasing power parity (PPP) per day from the 1990 baseline. Eighty-four countries are expected to achieve this goal by 2015. Although the goal will be achieved, 1.2 billion people are expected to remain below this poverty line in 2015.¹

During this period women have continued to be over-represented in this category, in particular, female-headed households with young children.² However, the precise number of women in poverty is not known. According to some estimates, women represent seventy percent of the world’s poor.³ But the exact figure is difficult to identify for a number of reasons including the scope of analysis, for example, intra-household distribution patterns are not tracked by any country.⁴ Also, identifying the most vulnerable groups can be problematic.

Methods of measuring poverty that focus on headcount can fail to capture the dynamic nature of poverty and the different drivers of poverty. When poverty is measured as a stock⁵, such measurements assume ‘the poor’ are a minority group in a state of continuous dependency, identifiable by region and demographic (Murphy and Walsh, 2014). However, as Chen and Ravallion (2008) explain, this stock is in constant flux with inflows and outflows below and above the threshold indicating mobility among a much wider population of those living close to the threshold. According to the *World Development Report (2014): Risk and Opportunity*, in 2013 more than 20 percent of the population in Developing Countries live on less than \$1.25 a day; more than 50 percent on less than \$2.50 per day and nearly 75 percent on less than \$4 (WDR 2014: 5). Shocks, both natural and social, can and do contribute to significant mobility between these categories of ‘poor’ and non-poor’. Thus transitory poverty is a risk for a large proportion of the population of Developing Countries which lack adequate social protection systems⁶.

1 See <http://www.thelancet.com> Vol 382

2 See *World Development Report*, World Bank, 2012

3 See http://www.unifem.org/gender_issues/women_poverty_economics/

4 See the *World’s Women 2010 Trends and Statistics Report* available at http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/Worldswomen/WW_full%20report_color.pdf

5 See for example, Sen, 1999

6 See, for example, Tanner and Mitchel, 2008; Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004

At the same, many of the same individual's experience what is referred to here as structural poverty which refers to socially constructed arrangements and structures which exclude different groups who share 'different' social identifiers such as sex, race, age, class, religion, marital status, sexual orientation, and so on from certain activities.⁷ Different groups experience different forms of structural exclusion and discrimination whereby they are unable to realise their autonomous capacities due to social, economic, political, and legal norms and practices that prevent their full and free engagement in productive activities. Such barriers are socially constructed and reinforced through multiple forms of explicit and implicit gender-based discrimination.⁸ Women and men can and do experience both forms of poverty and as such this distinction is operational rather than categorical. Although this distinction is critical when selecting appropriate instruments, interventions, and policies, the tradition of measuring poverty as a stock continues to inform mainstream international debates and policies.

The MDGs sought to reduce other forms of human deprivation in the most acute areas hindering human development, in particular education, health, and gender-based inequalities. The specific focus of MDG 3, on gender equality and women's empowerment⁹, sought to transform gender relations in developing countries through achieving parity in primary and secondary education, and increasing women's participation in politics and non-agricultural market based activities and employment.¹⁰ The Millennium Declaration also included a commitment to mainstream gender considerations across all other goals.¹¹

Gender here refers to the socially constructed norms, expectations, and values that assign roles and govern relations between men and women, boys and girls. As Zalewski notes, gender is learned and reproduced within situated socio-cultural contexts and is amenable to change (2010: 12). Equality here refers to equality of opportunity and empowerment is broadly defined as 'improving

7 See for example, Murphy and Walsh, 2014; Grootaert, Kanbur, and Oh, 1995

8 See, for example, the Human Development Report 2014, for further details on the persistence of what they refer to as 'structural vulnerabilities' of the poor - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2014-report>

9 See <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/host.aspx?Content=indicators/officialist.htm>

10 The MDGs set targets for developing low and middle income countries only. Gender-based inequalities and women's lack of empowerment in developed locations was not included in this framework. However, evidence that high income countries continue to experience high levels of gender inequality and lack of women's empowerment is evident in a number of areas including in women's low engagement in political and leadership roles, the persistence of a large wage gap between male and female workers, the persistence of high levels of violence against women, and so on.

11 The process of Gender Mainstreaming first entered the political discourse at the Beijing Platform for Action conference, 1995. Since then, the UN have defined Gender Mainstreaming as 'the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The Ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality'. (*UN Report for the economic and social council*. 1997: 1)

the ability of women to access the constituents of development—in particular health, education, earning opportunities, rights, and political participation’ (Duflo, 2012: 1053). There are two constituent elements entailed in the idea of empowerment – firstly, there must be options and the possibility of alternative choices; and secondly, one must be in a position and have the necessary capacities to make choices (Kabeer, 1999).

The ambitions of ‘gender mainstreaming’ when first introduced into the policy arena at the World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995, were to achieve a radical transformation in gender relations across all policies, not simply those traditionally concerned with women. As True notes, ‘it is conceived as a strategy to re-invent the processes of policy design, implementation and evaluation by taking into account the gender-specific and often diverse interests and values of differently situated women and men’ (2003: 371).

However, evidence from the MDG period (2000-2015) finds that in spite of some successes in improved health outcomes, increased numbers of women in the formal economy, and increased enrolment rates in education at primary level, the lives and status of women has not seen a dramatic transformation during this period. The seismic shift in gender relations has not materialised. Further, the gains vary greatly across regions with the least change for women in the lowest income and least developed locations.

At an aggregate level, women, in particular poor and rural women in developing countries, continue to be more vulnerable to extreme poverty, malnutrition, ill health, lower educational outcomes, and higher incidents of violence. They carry much greater responsibility for reproduction, care, subsistence food provision, and household tasks than men, which directly impinges upon their freedom to choose and pursue personal and professional interests that they may have reason to value. In many households, women continue to be denied decision-making power and control over the household finances; while in public, women continue to be under-represented in many national parliaments and in senior leadership positions in both public institutions and private organisations.¹²

Frustration with the slow tide of change has given rise to a debate in the literature on Gender and Development concerning the question of whether or not there should be a continued focus on ‘gender’ or shift the focus to ‘women’. On the one hand, some argue that the focus on gender has depoliticised and de-radicalised the feminist struggle for the empowerment of women. Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead, for example, have argued that the term ‘gender’ has

¹² See <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1315936222006/Complete-Report.pdf>; and <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/report-2013/mdg-report-2013-english.pdf>

neutralised the political content of feminist struggles, acting as a 'technical fix' (2007: 9) in development projects and programmes. They argue that the term gender has 'fallen from favour and has a jaded, dated feel to it. Diluted, denatured, depoliticised, included everywhere as an afterthought... (2007: 6-7). Thus, they call for a move away from the concept of gender, to refocus on the specific needs of women (Mannell 2012; Cornwall, Harrison, and Whitehead 2007 & 2008).

On the other hand, Caroline Moser argues that there is a need for a shift away from 'women's issues' and incorporate issues that relate to women and men, girls and boys. 'Such gender disparities can then cross-cut with other types of diversity such as those based on age, ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation' (2012, 442). The category of 'woman' does not represent a homogenous group. The sex with which one is born is but one part of a much more complex make-up. Women, like men, are situated in contexts where age, race, ethnicity, class, and many other factors can have a bearing on one's life opportunities.¹³ Focusing on gender allows for an examination of these factors, how they can intersect and can entrench inequality (Dhamoon, 2011), and thus provides a richer evidence-base to inform policy in the post MDG period (Sandler and Rao 2012; Ndesamburo, Flynn, and French 2012; van Eerdewijk and Dubel 2012; Derbyshire 2012; Chant and Sweetman 2012).

This paper argues that if global poverty, in both its transitory and structural forms, is to be eradicated it is necessary to focus on gender as a relational and socially constructed factor that can contribute to higher levels of extreme poverty among women rather than men, acting as a structural barrier to women's inclusion in activities outside of the household. A focus on 'women issues' alone does not necessarily entail firstly, consideration of the implications of change for men and the required shift in social behaviour and values; secondly, their agency in addressing such issues; and thirdly, the wider range of factors that can influence exposure to poverty for women and men.

The following section begins with an overview of the MDG period before examining three reasons offered in defence of this position. Firstly, it argues that contemporary methods of measuring poverty by head-counting and simple sex-disaggregation do not distinguish between different forms of poverty, and indeed cannot measure some experiences of poverty. It argues that the drivers of poverty are complex and multifaceted leading to a least two different forms of deprivation – transitory and structural poverty – each requiring different forms of treatment.

13 Awareness of how these variables interact has contributed to a new body of research applying and examining the method of 'intersectionality', that is how different social identifiers, such as sex and race, interact to form multiplicative inequalities. See for example Cho, Williams Crenshaw, and McCall, 2013 for a discussion of the range of research using an intersectionality analytical framework.

Secondly, an examination of gender roles and relations is required if the drivers of poverty are to be addressed. Focusing on the sex of an individual alone cannot explain why some are more likely to experience different forms of poverty than others. Policies that protect women against transitory poverty, although important, are not sufficient to eradicate structural poverty. Addressing the drivers of structural poverty requires much wider social, political, and legal change. It also requires methods of measuring poverty that can capture different experiences of poverty hidden by contemporary methods. This section examines two areas that remained hidden from the policy architecture of the MDGs and poverty reduction strategies, yet which contribute to the drivers of structural poverty – gender based violence; and the socially determined roles of women and girls as housekeepers and carers. Although women’s experiences and opportunities are heterogeneous, the structure of contemporary gender relations, where women in every location continue to experience higher levels of violence, and carry the greatest burden of responsibility for non-market based production activities, create the social conditions where domination and dependence thrive, and where persistently high rates of poverty seem inevitable. Women alone cannot eradicate these circumstances. The types of legal, political, economic, and social change required to create circumstances where all members of a community – male and female – can live free of poverty and the threat of poverty carries implications for both men and women.

Finally, there is widespread recognition that the drivers of poverty are generated by human agency. These are socially constructed rather than a natural phenomenon, or as a consequence of desert, effort, or ability. Thus, it is argued that they can and should be changed through human action. Knowledge of these circumstances gives rise to moral obligations for both men and women to avoid upholding values and practices that lead to domination and dependence, as a matter of basic justice.

The Millennium Development Goals & Beyond

The Millennium Development Goals established the public policy framework for international development practice from 2000 to 2015. As 2015 draws near, a wide range of actors, including national governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international organisations (IOs), Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), and academics have engaged in an evaluation of the achievements and failures of the MDGs. These evaluations will inform and guide on the shape and content of the Post 2015 international development goals.

The first Millennium Development Goal aimed to half poverty and hunger by 2015. According to the World Bank approximately 27 per cent fewer people

will be living in poverty by 2015 than in 1990.¹⁴ However it is expected that approximately 1.2 to 1.4 billion individuals will remain below this threshold.¹⁵

At least two relevant factors can be observed. Firstly, high birth rates in low-income countries have contributed to a rapid global population growth in the poorest locations. There are over 1 billion more members of the global community than in 1990. Also, general efforts and development interventions in the area of health care in particular have contributed to increases in life-expectancy, improved maternal health, and lower infant mortality rates.

Secondly, interrelated global events, including the global economic shock, beginning in 2008, combined with increasing food prices, changing climates and weather patterns, rising social and political unrest and violence, have all contributed to high levels of human insecurity. Although those born in low income countries in 2015 have a better chance of survival, they also face higher levels of insecurity. Thus the first goal has been achieved, but the persistence of extreme poverty continues to be a practical and political problem in the post MDG period.

Recognition that women frequently experience different forms of deprivations in human and capital endowments than men has had a place on the international policy agenda for many decades. Since the establishment of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1946, matters related specifically to women have been a core dimension of discussions on development and global poverty eradication, justified on the evidence-based arguments that greater empowerment is instrumentally valuable to development; and to a lesser extent, on reason-based arguments that development generates intrinsic benefits to women, as human beings of equal moral value. Gender equality correlates with higher productivity and better development outcomes. Conversely, evidence-based research points to deep links between gender inequality, women's lack of empowerment, and persistent poverty (Nussbaum, 2002: 46; Duflo, 2012). Further evidence also suggests that development interventions and instruments are not gender-neutral, and can and do affect women and men in different ways (Boserup 1970).

Thus the inclusion of a stand-alone goal related specifically to women's empowerment *and* gender equality (Goal Three) within the MDG framework reflects these arguments. As discussed above, this goal has a direct bearing on the poverty reduction priorities outlined in the MDG framework.

¹⁴ See http://www.worldbank.org/mdgs/poverty_hunger.html, accessed 27 August 2013.

¹⁵ See <http://www.thelancet.com> Vol 382, accessed 3 August 2013

The body of evidence emanating from the MDG period provides support to the claim that women are good for development, and that reducing gender inequality can lead to reductions in poverty. For example, the World Bank's *World Development Report, 2012*, argues that educating girls and women can have a positive effect on reducing fertility rates and improving nutrition and health outcomes for children; women with decision-making control over some of the household income tend to invest more in the family and household than men, leading to improved outcomes for family members in areas such as health and education; and engaging women in market based productive forces can lead to overall increases in productivity by up to twenty-five per cent in some countries, and greater food security in other countries (WDR, 2012: xx). The evidence points to a strong link between improving gender equality and women's empowerment, and improved development outcomes in the areas of health, education, and the economy, not only for women, but for households and communities more broadly. It seems that if the target to reduce (or indeed eradicate) poverty is to be achieved then gender equality is an important and instrumental background social condition.

Secondly, development, and more specifically economic growth, can be good for women. Formal paid employment and engagement in production activities outside the home can generate choice and decision-making opportunities, leading to greater autonomy and control over one's life choices. Thus, it has the potential to provide intrinsically valuable benefits for women.

In their analysis of the third goal, the WDR and MDG reports point to some important gains, but also deep variances across communities and countries. The goal contained three specific targets. The first target is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education. At an aggregate level, near parity is closest to being achieved at primary level, but only two out of one hundred and thirty countries have achieved this target at all levels of education (The UN MDG Report, 2013: 18). At secondary level girls continue to experience barriers to inclusion, in particular if they live in remote rural locations and in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately, this target does not entail any consideration of curriculum content or quality of education.

The second target concerns women's entry to the formal labour market. Again, there has been a substantial global increase in participation of women in market-based production. Women now represent 40 percent of workers in the non-agricultural sector, and 43 percent of workers in the agricultural labour force. There are distinct geographic variances when data is examined at a country level with women in Western Asia, Northern Africa, and Southern Asia faring worst at less than 20 percent participation in the waged labour

force. However, there are also some shared experiences across countries. In every region worldwide women tend to hold the lowest paid, least secure, lowest skilled roles with fewer social benefits (UN MDG Report, 2013: 21).

The third target refers to women's participation in parliament. Again, although there have been gains over the period under examination, the proportion of seats held by women globally, at 21.8 percent (as of 2013) remains very low, and five parliaments have no women at all (UN MDG Report, 2014: 23).

According to Janet Momsen, following decades of development initiatives, women everywhere work longer hours than men; tend to carry a double or triple burden of housework, child care, subsistence food production, in addition to increasing involvement in paid employment; and on average continue to earn significantly less than men, finding employment mainly in lower-paid, lower-skilled jobs (2010, 1-2).

In all locations, the evidence points to the fact that women continue to be disproportionately represented among those living in extreme poverty (UN High Level Panel of Eminent Persons, 2013: 17). However the precise number of women in extreme poverty is not known as measurements do not reach beyond household level and cannot give insight into the distribution of assets and endowments within the private domain. Susan Moller Okin refers to this as 'the black box' in contemporary mainstream economic modelling (2003: 286). These figures do not include any information on or indication of non-market based production activities including household production for which women continue to retain primary responsibility in all communities. Nor do they track the gender wage gap or seniority gap whereby women consistently earn less and are less likely to be promoted to managerial roles.¹⁶

As the drivers of poverty can include a complex conflation of interconnecting variables, these simple measurements cannot capture the lived experiences of women and men, girls and boys. In this sense, it could be argued that this method of measuring, which captures outcomes and headcounts, leaves hidden and marginalised any further examination of the causes of poverty, the origins of inequality, and the dynamics of gender relations. What seems to be clear from the evidence available is that these high level figures mask a multitude of disparities. From this some will argue that these figures indicate improvements in gender equality and women's empowerment; however, others might point to evidence that suggests they mark a further reinforcement of women's inferior social and economic status.

¹⁶ It is essential to acknowledge the large volume of research conducted by feminist development economists that do capture such data, however, these sit outside the mainstream measurements and reports that often act as a basis for informing policy and selecting development interventions.

Poverty drivers and the problem of head-counting

A recurring criticism of this policy framework is that it leaves the complex and multidimensional drivers of poverty hidden. Further, it seems plausible to assume that if the causes of poverty are not given sufficient consideration, then the solutions required to achieve reductions in the number of those experiencing poverty may not be appropriate.

Poverty is most widely measured as a stock using measurements of headcounts on an annual basis. As Krishna explains, this entails ‘considering the numbers of poor people at a particular moment in time. Such stocks can be compared across two points in time and the net change calculated’ (2007: 1). However, there are at least three problems with this form of measurement. Firstly, it does not capture the flow of those into poverty or those who have exited the category of ‘extremely poor’. Secondly, it does not explain the causes and drivers that push some into poverty and lift others out of extreme poverty. Thirdly, it does not capture intra-household distributions. That is, it cannot capture those living in the category of ‘extreme poverty’ within a non-poor household. In reality, this kind of measurement cannot capture the dynamics of poverty, or the gender-dimensions of poverty, where there is ongoing mobility between income groups, for various durations, and for various reasons.

The distinction, between poverty, understood as a stock, and poverty understood as a dynamic with inflows and outflows (of different durations), is critical to understanding the fundamental nature of poverty and assessing the dynamics of poverty flows. The numbers, when they are gathered only as a stock, conflate both transitory and structural elements of poverty.¹⁷

Transitory poverty can arise as a consequence of a random shock that would diminish an individual’s capacity to secure employment and/ or provide for their basic needs. Women, like men, are at risk of transitory poverty should they or their household experience a shock such as illness, environmental disaster, changing weather patterns, political shocks, and so on. They also experience more predictable events such as pregnancy that can affect one’s ability to engage in employment for a temporary period of time. However, as the primary bearers of care responsibilities within their households and communities, women’s exposure to such events is particularly acute. Illness of a male partner or parent may require a woman to seek work outside of the home to support the family, or indeed to give up work outside the home to care for the patient. Where health and public services are weak, the burden of care typically falls to women, rather than men, to fill. Such responsibilities are unrecognised in standard measures of poverty.

¹⁷ For a more detailed analysis of this argument see Murphy and Walsh (2014)

In high income states in the Global North, social protection and insurance instruments are widely employed to protect against such shocks and events. However, in middle and lower income states, such systems are less developed leading to circumstances, according to the International Labour Organisation, where 5.1 billion people are at risk of descent into poverty driven by such events.¹⁸

One proposed strategy is the development of social protection instruments, both to protect against risk, and to support all individuals when risks do materialise. Such a solution could be an essential tool in eradicating transitory poverty. However, its implementation must be gender-sensitive, giving consideration to both similar and different risks to which men and women are exposed.

In a UN Post 2015 Task Force Report on Social Protection, basic recommendations include the following four social protection instruments: guaranteed access to goods and services constituting essential health care, education and other social services; basic income security for children; basic income security for persons in active age unable to earn sufficient income; and basic income security for people in old age (2012: 8). Although these instruments are technically gender neutral, a gender-informed application would be required if they are to achieve the aim of eradicating transitory poverty for both men and women. They also present an opportunity to unbuckle and redistribute entrenched gendered care roles and responsibilities.

Firstly, lack of the provision of basic social services generates significant burdens that are often socially assigned to the category of 'women's responsibilities'. For example, in the absence of adequate health care facilities women are usually expected to take on the role of health care provider in the household. Thus, community-wide provision of public goods and social services could dramatically reduce social pressures and expectations on women to fill the gaps in care services thereby giving more space and time to productive activities outside of the household.

Secondly, before implementing a system of allowances for children, it is imperative to establish who, within the household, holds the caring responsibilities for children. In many countries in the Global North, childcare is paid directly to the mother, rather than the father, as evidence suggested that women carry a great share of the responsibility for care within the household, and that the mother is more likely to spend the income on the child. The implementation of such systems in Latin America has followed this approach.

¹⁸ See http://www.ilo.org/global/publications/books/WCMS_165750/lang--en/index.htm *Social Protection Floor for a fair and inclusive globalisation* (2011), accessed 27 August 2013

Further, in some locations, women not only carry most of the responsibilities for reproduction and care within the household, but also for subsistence food provision (up to eighty percent of subsistence food in Sub-Saharan Africa is produced by women). In such cases, other things being equal, providing this income directly to the mother could provide her with additional supports and may contribute to better health and education outcomes for children.

Thirdly, it is imperative that basic income security for those of active age unable to earn a sufficient income include maternity *and* paternity leave allowances and benefits for mothers *and* fathers. Pregnancy and early stage infant care does reduce a women's capacity to engage in productive activities outside of the home for a limited period of time. However, if there is to be a fairer distribution of care responsibilities within the household, fathers must be supported in taking up an active role within the household during this critical period.

Finally, in welfare states in the Global North, old age pensions can and do provide security against poverty to both men and women. However, it is imperative that the design of such schemes includes both contributory and non-contributory dimensions. Otherwise, there is a strong risk that women who have spent large portions of their lives engaged in work in the household will be at risk of descent into extreme poverty in their later years. A wide number of countries including Brazil, Botswana, India, Mauritius, Lesotho, Namibia, Nepal, and South Africa have already moved to introduce such instruments¹⁹.

Moving to the subject of structural poverty, addressing this form of poverty would require additional policy instruments, based on the contributing factors in a particular context. Different groups experience different forms of structural exclusion and discrimination whereby they are unable to realise their autonomous capacities due to social and legal norms and practices that prevent their full and free engagement in productive activities. Such barriers are socially constructed and reinforced through multiple forms of explicit and implicit gender-based discrimination.

Gender-based discrimination here is defined as 'any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field' (UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination

¹⁹ Again, see WDR 2014 for a detailed breakdown of contributory and non-contributory pension arrangements by region.

Against Women Declaration CEDAW, 1979).²⁰ Explicit discrimination refers to cases where groups are intentionally singled out for special treatment based on certain characteristics such as race, skin colour, sex, marital status, and so on. Examples are evident in legal and social norms and practices that apply special rules that can advantage or disadvantage an identifiable group. For example, before 1973, women in Ireland were not permitted to work in public organisations after marriage. Explicit discrimination is found at the domestic level in legal systems that continue to discriminate against women in areas such as inheritance, property rights, ownership and transfer of assets, reproductive rights, and so on.

Over 187 states have ratified CEDAW since 1979 providing an international framework to evaluate local practice, highlighting direct and indirect legal gaps that explicitly discriminate against women, and pushing towards the establishment of fair and just legal structures that remove explicit discriminations against women. Over the past three decades, many countries have taken significant steps towards the elimination of explicit discrimination against women. For example, many countries across east Africa, including Rwanda and Tanzania, have introduced new legislative frameworks to govern the distribution and inheritance of land. However, legal discrimination continues within many countries, in particular in locations where formal legal frameworks that give expression to the various Human Rights declarations and covenants, operate alongside more informal customary and traditional legal frameworks.

Evidence of continued discrimination can be found in the unequal access for men and women to productive resources, services, and opportunities. In many locations, women continue to have less access to productive land, less access to credit and financial capital, fewer assets, differentiated ownership rights, and inheritance practices. These explicit forms of discrimination, in particular, women's differentiated rights (sometimes based on traditional practices and sometime enshrined in formal legislation) to own land, inherit property, sign contracts, and register businesses, have been identified as a key barrier to the alleviation of structural forms of poverty in reports from the UN Panel of Eminent Persons (2013), and the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2013), on the post-2015 agenda.

Implicit discrimination on the other hand, refers to continuing social norms, practices, and beliefs that contribute to the structural exclusion of women from certain sectors.

Stiglitz (2012) refers to the idea of 'cognitive capture' to explain how an underlying mindset can influence how groups think about the limits and extent

²⁰ www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cedaw/convention.htm

of their capacities. For example, employers beliefs that members of particular groups are less productive (such as, women with young children), or underlying social beliefs that female leaders are weaker than their male counterparts and therefore unsuited to certain portfolios or positions such as defence or finance (Stiglitz 2012: 85-88).

Duflo (2012) refers to this psychological phenomenon as ‘implicit bias’ and argues that this is evident in all countries – developed and developing. She points to various tests which indicate that ‘both women and men are more likely to associate women with liberal arts and men with science’ in developed locations, in spite of the engagement of women in these academic disciplines over many decades (Duflo, 2012: 1062). Such discrimination is particularly harmful as it tends to have external consequences in the form of reduced numbers of women working in certain sectors, but also self-reinforcing where women internalise beliefs that they are more suited to certain tasks and less suited to others (Stiglitz, 2012: 86). This phenomenon holds across sectors from political opportunities, to economic opportunity, to leadership roles and social roles.

Thus, whereas transitory poverty can be caused by brute luck and gaps in social supports for natural events, structural poverty arises as a consequence of unfair and unjust social arrangements. If discussions on global poverty eradication in the post MDG period are to carry any weight, then they must give consideration to the different drivers of poverty, each requiring separate analysis and treatment. Culturally informed, context specific policies targeted at specific groups are necessary to protect against transitory poverty. Practical measures might include child support, disability or sick allowances, carers’ allowances, social insurance against extreme weather events, employment insurance against ill health or other shocks or interruptions. However, such practical policies are not sufficient to eradicate structural poverty. Rather, an examination of gender roles and relations within households and communities is also required if social norms, behaviour, and practices that systematically discriminate against particular groups are to be transformed. Different social identifiers such as sex, race, class, age, religion, and so on, can interact and combine to form multiplicative inequalities to exclude groups. Such discrimination can reinforce traditional gender relations of dependency and domination that essentially undermine the status of women and ultimately sustain social conditions that give rise to extreme poverty.

The hidden drivers: violence-domination; household duties-dependence

An examination of the drivers of structural poverty points to the importance of recognising women and men as diverse and heterogeneous collections rather

than homogenous groups. Different groups of women and men experience different forms of discrimination that constrain their actions, choices, and engagement in activities both inside and outside the household.

Although no target was set for measuring a redistribution of decision-making power in the household, the UN MDG reports includes evidence to support the claim that the unequal distribution of power between men and women in the household has not shifted significantly during this period, in spite of increased years of education and access to paid employment. It argues that ‘the suppression of women’s voices in many spheres, whether deliberate or resulting from long-standing discriminatory social and cultural norms, contributes to the persistence of gender inequality and limits human development’ (MDG Report 2013:23). According to the MGD Report for 2013, ‘Gender-based inequalities in decision making power persist. Whether in the public or private sphere, from the highest levels of government decision-making to households, women continue to be denied equal opportunity with men to participate in decisions that affect their lives’ (2013, 5). These claims point to an urgent need to examine, in much greater detail, the barriers to women’s empowerment, understood as improving access for women to the constituents of development.

There are two areas, I suggest, evident in contemporary gender relations that contribute to structural poverty and yet are hidden from scrutiny in discussions on global poverty eradication. Firstly, women in every country are at risk of higher levels of violence; and secondly, women and girls continue to carry the greatest burden of responsibility for non-market based production activities directly reducing the time available to engage in market-based activities and paid employment compared to men and boys. Such relations create the social conditions where domination and dependence thrive, and where persistently high rates of poverty seem an inevitable outcome.

Gender Based Violence:

The MDG period has not seen any change in the levels of gender based violence both inside and outside of the household. The use of violence as a method of control and domination within the household is not new, nor unique to a single culture, socio-economic status, or geography²¹. According to the *Global and Regional Estimates for Violence Against Women Report, 2013*, which represents the first ever global systematic review and synthesis of the body of scientific data on the prevalence of two forms of violence specifically against women – violence by an intimate partner (intimate partner violence) and sexual violence by someone other than a partner (non-partner sexual violence) - 35

21 Domination here is understood as actual or threatened arbitrary interference, following P. Pettit, 2001.

percent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. This figure varies a little by location, but in all locations approximately one in three women can expect to experience violence in their life; and 38 percent of all female murders are committed by intimate partners (2013: 2).

Further, and perhaps more tellingly in light of the above discussion on implicit discrimination and the internalisation of harmful and damaging beliefs, the social acceptability of violent practices remains high. The *Demographic and health survey 2011* found, that on average, 29 percent of women concurred that wife beating was justified for arguing with husbands; 25 percent for refusing to have sex; 21 percent for burning food; In Guinea, 60 percent of women found it permissible to be beaten for refusing to have sex with spouses; In Ethiopia 81 percent of women found it acceptable to be beaten for one of the reasons listed in the survey. (Source, World Development Report, 2012: 79).

These findings seem to point to different perceptions of violence – unwarranted violence, and warranted violence. In the first case, such violence is perceived as unacceptable. The main indicator is that the action resulted in a formal ‘report’ or complaint to authorities. In the second case, it seems that there are a wide range of situations where violence is deemed acceptable and even warranted, and therefore unreported. There is limited data available on such incidents. But even in the absence of reliable and generalisable data, it seems clear that violence against women continues to be used across communities as a method of control and domination, reinforcing traditional gender roles and responsibilities, acting as a barrier to empowerment. If improvement in women’s empowerment and decision-making capacities is an important element in poverty elimination strategies, then violence against women must be addressed.

The prevalence of violence within the household reinforces traditional gender relations and contributes to a cycle whereby violence is an acceptable form of social control of women and children. According to the *World Development Report 2014*, “Physical and psychological abuse experienced during childhood can have long-lasting effects on identity and behavior, not only undermining the self-esteem that is crucial for decisions regarding risk taking and pursuing opportunities but also increasing the likelihood of violent behavior in adulthood. A survey of men in six countries found that those who had been victims of abuse during childhood were twice as likely to have been violent toward their partners’ (WDR 2014: 114).

Further, this report examines the connection between different types of violence – political, collective, and individual - and development outcomes (WDR 2014: 147).

In addition to direct violence against women and girls within the household, the practice of violence against the social category of 'female' continues to be expressed through the evidence of 'missing' women and girls and the unequal sex-ratio evident in many low and middle income locations. The problem of excess female deaths or 'missing' women and girls, was first identified by Amartya Sen (1990). According to the World Bank *World Development Report* 2012, there were approximately 3.9 million missing women and girls under the age of sixty in 2011. 'About two-fifths of them are never born, one-sixth die in early childhood, and one-third die in their reproductive year' (2012: xxi). This is a stark indicator on the lower value and social status of women and girls in many locations. However, focusing on women alone will not lead to a reduction in this form of violence. It is imperative that men are engaged in the process of change.

Non-market production activities: Gender roles

When the MDG targets sought to increase the number of women in paid employment, little consideration was given to the tasks that women already perform. Yet, in all locations worldwide, women continue to carry the main burden for household care. Duflo, drawing on research conducted by Berniell and Sánchez-Páramo (2011) finds that on average, 'women spend almost twice as much time on housework, almost five times as much time on child care, and about half as much time on market work as men do' (2012: 1052). Thus, although it is becoming more common for women to enter the labour market, expectations concerning the distribution of care responsibilities between men and women, husbands and wives, boys and girls, do not seem to have shifted. Further evidence suggests that women in paid employment with sufficient means engage other women to perform household and caring tasks, rather than their partners. Thus, a transformation of gender roles and relations, with a more equal distribution of caring roles, does not seem to follow from an increase in the number of women in paid employment.

Further, during the MDG period women have continued to play an instrumental role in filling gaps in social services, health-care provision, and provision of basic utilities. In the lowest income locations, and amongst the poorest populations, many women engage all of their productive time on household activities including collection of water and fire-wood, cooking, cleaning, caring for old and young, and often carrying responsibility for subsistence farming and food production. In such locations, basic utilities such as water and energy are not available at the household level. It is estimated that women spend on average 200 million hours per day collecting water²². In the absence of a redistribution

²² See factsheet at <http://water.org/water-crisis/water-facts/water/>

of household responsibilities amongst all adults, male and female, along with improved utilities and the availability of time-saving household tools, it is not clear that formal paid employment, in particular, low-skilled, low-paid, and insecure employment offers an opportunity for autonomy, empowerment, and choice. Rather, for some women, the drive to work outside of the home, whilst retaining responsibility for activities within the household simply adds to their burden, leading to longer working hours.

These circumstances give rise to at least two considerations. Firstly, why are the non-market production activities required to run a household overlooked as valuable activities required to sustain a functioning labour force in mainstream economic analysis and in the mainstream global reports that inform policy development and decision-making? Secondly, why must women continue to carry the primary burden of responsibility for this space? The role of women as home-maker runs deep in gender identity across the globe. Yet, there is nothing in a woman biological or physiological make-up that better equips her to walk for six hours to collect water every day.

If women are to engage in the paid labour force to their full capacity, then strategies to improve the provision of basic utilities, including clean water and energy, are essential instruments in this task. Further, an evaluation and analysis of gender-based roles and responsibilities is also required. Even in circumstances where households have access to all utilities and modern conveniences, the majority of women continue to carry greater responsibilities for managing the household. According to Bridgman et al (2012), women in high income countries continue to spend approximately twice as much time on household activities than men, thus contributing towards greater levels of dependence and perpetuating a cycle of lower professional achievement and lower pay than their male counterparts.

The demands of Justice

Jurgen Habermas has argued,

‘in everyday life we must assume that our knowledge in actu – the know-how by which we are guided in the course of our performance – does not conflict with anything we know about the world. This ‘must’ expresses a conceptual link: we cannot suppress at will what we have “learned” or what we think we “know”. We don’t have a “scissors in the mind” that can trim away dissonance at will, in an effort to isolate our knowledge in actu from uncomfortable aspects of our knowledge of the world’ (2007: 23).

When selecting goals to guide the international development agenda in the Post 2015 period, actors must evaluate among a range of possible alternatives,

selecting those which they believe will achieve their shared objectives. The objectives emanating from the policy papers suggest firstly, that the new goals must ensure that no-one is left behind; and secondly, that global poverty can and ought to be eradicated. Empirical research clearly links gender equality and empowerment of women with higher growth and better development outcomes. This knowledge sets requirements for the international agenda – that both equality and empowerment of women must be a part of the new goals. However, empirical research also indicates that the dynamics of poverty are complex, leading to different forms of poverty experienced by different groups. Transitory poverty and structural poverty require different interventions and different forms of measurement. Strategies to stem the flow of transitory poverty are not sufficient to alleviate structural poverty. Further, a narrow focus on headcount, such as the number of girls in education, or the number of women in parliament, or the number of women in paid employment in the non-agricultural section, does not give an insight into the underlying causes of structural poverty, driven by complex interactions of explicit and implicit discrimination which foster circumstances where domination and dependence flourish.

Eradicating structural poverty, which is required if the objective to leave no one behind is to be realised, requires an examination of the basic structures of societies, gender relations within societies, and the main institutions with responsibility for the distribution of rights and duties with societies.²³ The household is one such institution. It is within this institution that women's, girl's, and boy's right not to be harmed, either through direct violence or the threat of violence, can be realised. Further, it is within this institution that a fair distribution of duties can be achieved. As Martha Nussbaum has argued, that women should have to bear full responsibility for all aspects of others well-being treats her only as a means to others' ends, and not as an end in herself.²⁴ However, the transformation of social norms requires engagement with men as well as women. Thus, a gender lens is more appropriate to such discussions. Such transformation would not be possible without the engagement of both sexes.

Unlike transitory poverty, which all human beings are exposed to, structural poverty is generated by human agency. Thus, it follows that these circumstances can and should be changed through human action. Responsibility for acting to achieve these changes should begin with those responsible for shaping and maintaining these institutions. As Thomas Pogge has argued, 'those with responsibility for shaping and maintaining the institutional framework

23 See John Rawls, 1971: 6

24 See Nussbaum, 2002, drawing upon Immanuel Kant.

are responsible for the output of this system' (Pogge 2010: 13). However, according to Amartya Sen, it is not only those who have caused harm that have a responsibility to act. Any other with a capacity to assist ought to act to help another in need. This duty arises where freedoms have been violated *or* unrealised. Any person with the capabilities to assist another ought to do so in these circumstances (Sen 2009: 376). Thus, I suggest that knowledge of these circumstances gives rise to a minimum moral requirement for both men and women to avoid upholding values and practices that lead to domination and dependence as a matter of basic justice and the duty not to harm others. It may also generate further requirements. But that debate will have to wait.

Conclusion

Although there is evidence to support the claim that the focus on gender has become a technical fix devoid of any transformational meaning, this paper has argued that this is not necessarily a consequence of a focus on gender. Rather, it argued that the gender analytical framework demands alternative methods of measurement and analysis, and examination of lived experiences, rather than head-counts. Secondly, contemporary measurements of poverty do not typically distinguish between transitory and structural poverty such that addressing key drivers of structural poverty has not been at the heart of the development agenda to date.

Further, it argued that there are three core reasons for maintaining a focus on gender in discussions on poverty eradication and the post 2015 agenda. Firstly, a gender-based analytical framework is more appropriate when examining the drivers of poverty and the different forms of deprivation. Focusing on the sex of an individual alone cannot explain why some are more likely to experience different forms of poverty than others. Secondly, unlike the category of 'women', the concept of gender demands consideration of a wider range of intersecting factors that influence life chances. The structure of contemporary gender relations, where women continue to experience higher levels of violence, and carry the greatest burden of responsibility for non-market based production activities, create the social conditions where domination and dependence thrive, and where persistently high rates of poverty seem inevitable. Such circumstances are generated by human agency. Thus, thirdly, it argues that these circumstances can and should be changed through human action. Knowledge of these circumstances gives rise to moral obligations for both men and women to avoid upholding values and practices that lead to domination and dependence as a matter of basic justice.

Although the fact that one is born male or female is an arbitrary matter from a moral point of view, few will disagree with the claim that from the moment

of birth, the opportunities of girls and boys, along with the limits and extent of the exercise of their freedoms and capacities, are socially determined and culturally situated. Transforming the human-made institutional and structural arrangements that favour some groups over others based on arbitrary characteristics such as sex, age, race, class, caste, ethnicity, and so on, requires actions from all members of a community, men and women. Thus, the analytical lens of gender, rather than an exclusive focus on women, is most appropriate in these circumstances.

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