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Economic Reform and Poverty: A Gender Analysis

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by Sally Baden

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BRIDGE (development - gender)
Institute of Development Studies
University of Sussex
Brighton BN1 9RE, UK
Tel: +44 (0) 1273 606261
Fax: +44 (0) 1273 621202
Email: bridge@ids.ac.uk
Website: http://www.ids.ac.uk/bridge/

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CONTENTS

Acronyms

CEEWA	Council for the Economic Empowerment of Women in Africa
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
EC	European Commission
EGS	Employment Guarantee Scheme (Maharashtra)
ESAF	Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility
ESF	Emergency Social Fund (Bolivia)
FHH	Female headed household
IBRD	World Bank
IFIs	International financial institutions
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NBFI	Non-bank financial institution
NGO	Non-government organisation
PAIT	Programa de Apoyo al Ingreso Temporal (Peru)
PAMSCAD	Programme to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment (Ghana)
PEM	Minimum Employment Programme (Chile)
PER	Public Expenditure Review
PFP	Policy Framework Paper (World Bank)
POJH	Occupational Programme for Heads of Households (Chile)
PUSH	Programme for Urban Self-Help (Zambia)
SAGA	Structural Adjustment and Gender in Africa
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SPA	Special Programme of Assistance for Africa
SRF	Social Recovery Fund (Zambia)
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1 Executive Summary

Economic reform in many developing countries has been associated with stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes supported by international financial institutions (IFIs). As these have become more widespread and long term, concern has grown about the impact of economic reform policies on poverty. Evidence is not encouraging, with many countries experiencing increases in poverty under programmes of economic reform in the 1980s, or a worsening of income distribution, with a few exceptions. These concerns have led to changes in the thinking about economic reform and poverty, including by IFIs, and in the design of stabilisation and adjustment packages, particularly the introduction of conditionalities on social sector spending and the funding of social programmes. There has also been considerable research into poverty in adjusting countries. It is unclear, however, whether these changes have yet had a significant impact or whether concerns with poverty outcomes have much influence over macroeconomic policies. Greater integration is required between strategies to reduce poverty and economic reform policies.

Early writings on structural adjustment and women highlighted the potentially negative affects, particularly on poor women, but were not based on rigorous studies. In spite of mounting evidence, the mainstream literature on poverty and adjustment still pays little attention to gender aspects of poverty and vulnerability. Where the poor are disaggregated, it is not usually in terms of gender difference, although female-headed households are often singled out as a vulnerable group. Some empirical research has been done which compares poverty trends between male and female household heads, but this does not address the questions of intrahousehold resource allocation and poverty, relevant to the majority of women. Although tools exist for integrating a gender analysis into many aspects of economic reform, these are rarely applied in practice.

Gender affects vulnerability to poverty in periods of insecurity, and women are likely to find it more difficult to escape poverty. Poor women may be particularly vulnerable to deepening poverty under adjustment. Any poverty reducing effects which adjustment may bring, e.g. through renewed stimulus to small scale agriculture, may not reach women directly, due to their lack of command over productive resources and control over output, as well as, particularly for poor women, lack of time. Poor supply response, observed in some adjusting economies may be linked to constraints to women’s ability or willingness to increase production, or market increased production, including gender biases in financial markets, and marketing systems. The costs of economic restructuring are often disproportionately borne by women, through increased labour, or reduced intake of food, with severe human development consequences for women themselves and, potentially, for children, especially girls, who may be drawn into household or income earning labour. Finally, existing safety net programmes have tended to target men, explicitly or implicitly, and wider social security and welfare provisions have not taken account of changes in social relations (including gender relations) which are occurring as a result of economic restructuring, as well as political and social conflict.

Policy responses required are further steps to incorporate gender concerns into the design of economic reform programmes, both through gender-aware economic planning and through increasing the accountability of policy-making to (poor) women. Monitoring the gender differentiated impacts of economic policies is also important, using women’s budgets and gender-disaggregated expenditure incidence analysis. Measures to remove the constraints to economic opportunities for poor women include reform of marketing systems and infrastructure and of financial markets and institutions. Reform of social security provisions is needed to take account of changes in household relations and the coping mechanisms of poor people themselves.

Useful conceptual frameworks are now in place which can assist understanding of the linkages between economic policy, gender and poverty concerns. There are also a number of initiatives which have attempted to influence policy in this area from a gender perspective. What is now needed is detailed context specific research, and comparative empirical research, which investigates how and whether policy changes take effect in implementation, and links between macro level changes and micro level responses

2 Economic reform and poverty

2.1 Economic reform programmes and poverty trends

In many developing countries, economic reform has been closely associated with structural adjustment packages, promoted by the international financial institutions (IFIs - i.e. the IMF and World Bank) in conjunction with lending programmes. In Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, particularly, Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) have dominated economic policy-making in the 1980s and early 1990s. Some East Asian countries (Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia) have also undergone processes of adjustment and, more recently, South Asian countries (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh). The experience of structural adjustment is highly varied although, broadly, in Asia, it has been associated with continuing growth, while in Latin America and particularly Africa, it has been associated with negative growth and increasing poverty. There are a number of exceptions to these overall trends.

Early discussions of structural adjustment were principally concerned with short term stabilisation and macroeconomic aggregates, and beyond this with removing distortions and increasing economic efficiency. It was only in 1987, with the publication of UNICEF's *Adjustment with a Human Face* (Cornia *et al.* 1987), that the debate on poverty and adjustment gained some prominence. Since then, a considerable theoretical, empirical and policy-oriented literature has developed on this topic (Demery and Squire 1996; Killick 1995; Stewart 1995).

The IFIs have, by and large, tended to disassociate poverty in adjusting countries with adjustment policies, arguing that either pre-adjustment economic crises or government policies (linked to vested interests and lack of political will) are mainly responsible for increases in poverty or the failure to address poverty. Adjustment policies, it is argued, would improve the situation of the poor in the longer term, through labour-intensive growth and providing new opportunities and increased incomes for the poor, especially in rural areas. To the extent that adjustment had a negative social impact, it was perceived to be temporary, and concentrated in urban areas.

In recent years, however, it has become evident that the poverty in countries undergoing economic reform is not temporary in nature. Moreover, there is considerable evidence that adjustment policies themselves have contributed to increasing poverty. Growth has not occurred as fast or as much as predicted in adjusting economies, and, where it has occurred, it has not, in general, been 'pro-poor', i.e. has tended to benefit higher income groups more. Not only has adjustment often been associated with worsening income distribution, but the majority of adjusting countries have also seen increases in levels of absolute poverty. Trends in social indicators have been more mixed, with infant and child mortality rates often continuing to fall, but in some places, educational enrolment has fallen and maternal mortality rates have worsened (Stewart 1995).

Killick (1995) finds evidence on poverty is mixed: in some countries there has been a fall (e.g. Indonesia, Malaysia), in others results are mixed (e.g. Chile, where income distributive effects of reform are regressive but targeted programmes have been effective in reducing absolute poverty), and in others adjustment is associated with increases in poverty (e.g. Malawi). Those countries that have done relatively well under adjustment are the East Asian and middle income heavily indebted countries, which are now recovering. The urban working poor are especially vulnerable under adjustment, through price rises, increased indirect taxation, job losses, and reduced real wages. However, the poor, especially in rural areas, can benefit from adjustment and any impact, positive or negative, is more likely to affect the poor than the very poor, who are weakly integrated. Benefits to the poor depend on such factors as land distribution and on the proportion of cash crops being produced by smallholders.

2.2 Changes in policy to address poverty concerns

Since the late 1980s, the IFIs have acknowledged the need to reconsider adjustment policies in the light of poverty reduction concerns. The core of the World Bank's approach to poverty reduction - set out in the *World Development Report* of 1990 - is the promotion of labour intensive growth, investment in basic services (health, education) and the provision of safety nets (or targeted schemes to assist the vulnerable). These objectives are reflected in changes in approaches to adjustment in the early 1990s, with increased emphasis on: expenditure switching, rather than deflation; greater flexibility about the timing and phasing of subsidy removals and price reform (e.g. allowing food or fuel subsidies to remain in place after devaluation); reallocation of social investment towards basic services used by the poor (e.g. primary education and health care systems); and the development of compensatory programmes, mainly employment schemes or social funds, in conjunction with reform programmes rather than as an afterthought. Other measures include a requirement that policy framework papers (PFPs) and country assessments contain an analysis of poverty issues, as well as an increase in research and data gathering on poverty issues, at country level (i.e. through poverty assessments), sectorally and through cross country analyses.

Eighteen of 32 programmes in 1992, and six of 17 adjustment programmes in 1993 included specific measures to protect the poor (World Bank 1993, cited in Haddad *et al.* 1995). Specifically, an increase in the number of programmes with conditionalities relating to social spending, from under five percent in 1984-6 to 30 percent in 1990-2, is reported (based on the Bank's own data - others claim the increase is a more modest, from three to six percent) (Killick 1995: 320-321).

The extent to which these changes have made an impact is unclear. The limited evidence is not encouraging but perhaps there has been insufficient time for changes in policy emphasis to make a significant impact. In the 1980s, adjusting countries' spending on the social sector and priority to pro-poor services worsened compared to non-adjusting countries, in part because of stronger pressure to meet debt service obligations of the former (Stewart 1995). Social programmes introduced in conjunction with adjustment programmes have reached only a small percentage of the potential target group, and were more often used as political tools (see Box 1 for more details). While some progress is reporting in including poverty (and gender) concerns in adjustment documents, there is 'no evidence that poverty and gender sensitivity is applied to the formulation of macroeconomic stabilisation policies' (Foster and Lee 1996: 7). Even where poverty assessments have been done, these are not carried through into recommendations to change economic policy (*ibid*.).

Box 1: Limited impact of social safety nets on poverty

The impact of safety nets on poverty has been slight and patchy, in most cases, due to the widespread nature of structural poverty and the limitations of a project approach in addressing this (Vivien 1995). Political objectives have tended to dominate, by favouring schemes with high visibility rather than poverty reducing impact, or attempting to 'buy off' vocal opposition groups. Demand led schemes have tended to benefit better off groups who are already organised, and who often have limited outreach to the poor.

'Social Funds introduced in the context of adjustment reached only a small fraction of the poor' (Stewart and van Geest 1995: 126). In Ghana, 0.3 percent of the total population were reached and only five percent of retrenched workers; in Egypt, 0.5 percent of the total population benefited; in Honduras, 13 percent, and in Mexico, a more impressive 27 percent (*ibid.*; Graham 1994). In Zimbabwe, only 26 percent of the urban poor who were targeted with food subsidies were reached.

Economic reform policies clearly still need considerable rethinking if poverty is to be reduced, and more action is required in the form, for example, of greater emphasis on poverty in policy dialogue, and the closer integration of poverty strategies with adjustment programmes. Economic policies are needed which limit the costs of adjustment. Some measures such as user charges for health and education have clearly had damaging effects on low income groups and therefore need to be reviewed (Killick 1995; Stewart 1995). There is a need for reform to social security systems to address poverty issues, rather than a reliance on often ineffective safety nets (Graham 1994).

3 Gender in mainstream debates on economic reform and poverty

In the literature on poverty and adjustment (reviewed above) there is still a tendency to ignore gender (and other) aspects of vulnerability and to treat the poor as a homogenous and passive category (e.g. Stewart 1995). The World Bank's own poverty assessments have, until recently, paid very little attention to gender issues (Hamner *et al.* 1996).

Where 'the poor' are further disaggregated, it tends to be by rural-urban residence, or by degree of poverty (e.g. destitute or extreme poor versus absolute poor), or sector of activity, so that gender aspects of poverty are rarely visible. There are also distinctions made between the 'new' and 'old' poor (the former being those who have been impoverished under adjustment). Where reference is made to gender issues, it is usually by singling out female-headed households as a vulnerable group, requiring targeted assistance.

Initially, concern with gender issues in relation to economic liberalisation and adjustment, emerged as a subset of the debates on poverty referred to in 2.1. Poor women were seen to carry the major burden of adjustment through increased demands on their reproductive labour, as well as falling social services provision, an argument first advanced in UNICEF's *Invisible Adjustment* (1988) mainly in the context of urban Latin America.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's two volume study *Engendering Adjustment* (Chinery-Hesse 1989) argued that women bear the major burden of adjustment, in their four 'roles' as producers, mothers, home managers and community organisers. A 'pincer' effect, added to the pressure for women to earn market incomes at the same time as increasing their reproductive burden, through decreasing social services provision and community infrastructure and by increasing household labour requirements, e.g. the need to prepare cheaper foods.

These studies, while they set out an initial agenda for looking at the impact of adjustment on women, were not persuasive, because they lacked the backing of rigorous empirical studies and tended not to address the impact of adjustment on men, or gender relations. There is still considerable disagreement as to whether it is adjustment policies which have negatively affected women, or the pre-existing conditions (Moghadam 1997; Haddad *et al.* 1995). More recent arguments for consideration of gender in structural adjustment have focused on efficiency questions (Elson 1991, 1993; Palmer 1991), and it is these perspectives that have proved influential in mainstream policy debates because they have drawn attention to the possibility that unequal gender relations may underlie some of the poor performance of adjusting economies (see e.g. World Bank 1993).

A few more rigorous quantitative empirical studies have attempted to look at the gender differential impact of adjustment on poverty using household survey data (see Box 2). However, these have tended to focus on comparisons of male- and female-headed households, in part because of data limitations. While these provide a certain amount of insight, including some counterintuitive findings, they do not provide a comprehensive view of gender and poverty questions related to adjustment, since the majority of women live in male-headed households.

Box 2: Female headship, poverty and adjustment in Dominican Republic and Ghana

Data presented by Haddad *et al.* (1995) shows that the proportion of female-headed households who were poor decreased in the period 1986-92 in the Dominican Republic, while that of male-headed households grew. Similarly, the percentage of female-headed households among the poor in rural Ghana is thought to have declined after adjustment. These improvements related to, respectively, the rapid expansion of export manufacturing after 1988 in the Dominican Republic and the access of women to land and labour for independent farming in Ghana. However, crude comparisons of male- and female-headed households may overlook: differentiation within these categories (e.g. between female heads); the longer working hours of female heads of household; and the sensitivity of measures of poverty to gender differences.

A series of measures have been taken by the World Bank and donor agencies in the last two to three years, in part stimulated by external pressure from NGOs as well as researchers, to give a higher profile to the gender differentiated impacts of economic policy reform and to modify policies on this basis. These include: setting up a consultative group, with international representation, to monitor progress on gender issues and propose reforms to the Bank; the piloting of 'gender-aware' adjustment missions in Mali, Mozambique and Burkina Faso (see section 5); and sponsoring research (notably the SAGA programme's three country study, and major study of gender and adjustment in Tanzanian agriculture commissioned by the EC).

However, despite the fact that 'macro-economics is notoriously gender blind (but often biased)... other growth related policies such as public expenditure allocation, tax policy, deregulation/price liberalization and even privatization are all highly amenable to gender analysis...' (Foster and Lee, 1996: 7), few adjustment documents integrate such an analysis.

4 Why is gender important to economic reform and poverty linkages?

4.1 Gender, economic reform and vulnerability to poverty

Gender is a key determinant of vulnerability (others are, e.g., age, class, ethnicity, region etc.) so that in a periods of economic transition, women are likely to be especially vulnerable to increased poverty or insecurity. While job losses may affect men and women, women may find it harder than men to regain employment or become self-employed, due to relative lack of education and skills, lifecycle issues (employers may favour younger women) and lack of independent access to capital. Poor women are more likely to have no other adult earners in the household and to have a higher dependency ratio and may be especially vulnerable to the removal of subsidies and increasing charges for services and rising prices, leaving them in deepening poverty.

Box 3: Stabilisation, adjustment and poverty in Peru

A study of the impact of adjustment on women in urban Lima, using household survey and employment data found that, because of women's disadvantaged position in the labour market, in terms of poverty incidence and in education, they are likely to be more adversely affected by stabilisation and adjustment policies.

Specifically, rates of female headship are rising, associated with greater poverty (47.5 percent of female-headed households are poor compared to 43.5 percent of male-headed households), higher dependency ratios and lower earnings. The loss of formal sector employment is affecting women who are likely to lose jobs first, or through increased competition in the informal sector, as unemployed men move in, forcing women to work longer hours to compete.

Source: Tanski 1994

4.2 Poverty reducing effects of economic reform are mediated by gender relations

Poverty reducing benefits of economic reform may not reach women. For example, benefits to poor rural farmers from increased prices of cash crops accrue directly to men, but may have limited positive, or negative impacts for women, whose labour is intensified to increase production, but who are not always recompensed for this additional effort, as demonstrated in contrasting studies of sugar commercialisation in the Philippines and Kenya (Kennedy and Bouer, cited in Haddad *et al.* 1995). In addition, reduced direct control over incomes undermines women's bargaining power in the household and influence over economic decision-making, as found with the intensification of traditional cash crops (e.g. tobacco) in Uganda (Elson and Evers 1997).

Where women do benefit directly from economic reform and liberalisation (e.g. in the expansion of female intensive export manufacturing, through gaining access to the labour market for the first time, and earning a higher income than would be available in alternative forms of employment), these gains are often in the context of discriminatory practices in labour markets and often harsh working conditions (see e.g. Moghadam 1997). Also, these benefits often do not accrue to poor women (those most likely to be employed are younger, more educated women) and are not always durable.

4.3 The supply response issue

A failure to consider the systemic barriers to increased production faced by women, in response to price incentives, may lead to over-optimistic assumptions about their impact (World Bank 1996). A variety of interlocking, gender-related constraints limit the extent to which women are willing, or able, to increase their output, or to market their increased output. These include time constraints, linked to the burden of reproductive labour, lack of command over productive resources (land, capital, labour) because of limited property rights, household power relations, and high market transactions costs as well as gender biases in marketing systems, and in the provision of associated marketing infrastructure (information, transport, storage, market facilities, credit) (Baden 1997a, 1997b). The fact that women themselves often do not receive the benefits of their own increased production (see 4.2) is an additional constraint.

Time constraints are a major limiting factor for poor women, who cannot afford to hire in labour, and are occupied with meeting immediate survival needs. A recent study of farming households in Zambia showed that discrepancies in time use between men and women were particularly marked in subsistence level households. In general, poor women are concentrated in low profit, petty trading segments of agricultural marketing, with high levels of competition and rates of wastage, often barely able to generate enough revenue to buy new stock and often buying on credit from suppliers on highly unfavourable terms. Higher up the marketing chain, the number of men increases.

4.4 Hidden costs, human development and intergenerational transfer of poverty

Often, the costs of economic transition are ‘hidden’ because they are absorbed by increases in poor women’s unpaid labour, intensity of work, reduced nutrition or energy depletion. This has severe potential costs in terms of women’s own health and well-being, and girls’ education may suffer due to mothers drawing heavily on girls’ labour in informal sector activity, agricultural work, or in household work. For example, in Uganda, women and girls are employed in the production of non-traditional exports, such as vanilla, and seasonal peaks in demand for their labour were known to affect girls’ school attendance (Elson and Evers 1997). Hence a vicious cycle of poverty, whereby girls’ future prospects are also limited, is set in train.

4.5 Gender biases in social programmes and social security systems

Safety nets tend to see women as targets for social assistance and men as targets for employment, based on a male breadwinner model. Their populist orientation and appeal to political support means that they often tend to reinforce ‘family values’. Women benefit mainly from nutritional programmes. For example, in Bolivia, 99 percent of beneficiaries of the ESF were men. In Chile, the introduction of a new scheme (POJH) targeting (male) heads of household (women were 25-30 percent of beneficiaries), and which paid 40 percent of the minimum wage, led to the feminisation of a pre-existing programme (PEM), paying only one quarter of the minimum wage (Graham 1994; Vivien 1995).

Lack of gender policies, reliance on NGOs and other organisations to carry out projects, with no systematic monitoring, mean that social funds are ill-equipped to address gender aspects of poverty. Moreover, participatory activities or community-based social provisioning in social programmes often rely on the unpaid labour of women.

Some social programmes associated with economic reform packages have a poor record on women's participation: because they have explicitly targeted the new poor, i.e. retrenched workers from privatised industries, more likely to be men; because of a male biased model of the breadwinner in either targeting or recruitment procedures; and/or because the design of programmes builds in barriers to female participation (e.g.: project site a long way from the household, or markets, lack of child care facilities; heavy 'men's' work required, such as construction). Indirect beneficiaries of social programmes are often assumed to be household members of the main earner (by implication usually women and children), which fails to consider inequities in intrahousehold resource allocation. Some safety net programmes have been more successful in targeting poor women (see Box 4).

The benefits from social infrastructure provision through public works have a gender differential impact. Local community facilities (e.g. wells, schools, nurseries, sanitation provision etc.) are likely to be of much greater benefit to women, than, for example, roads, airport runways etc.).

Social safety nets by and large have not yet taken on gender issues (see above) and, more broadly, wider social security and welfare provisions have not taken account of changes in social relations (including gender relations) which are occurring as a result of economic restructuring, as well as political and social conflict (Baud and Smyth 1997; Moghadam 1997). These include changes in patterns of household formation (such as later marriage, increased incidence of non-formal unions), dissolution (rising rates of abandonment, separation, divorce), and residence (living apart as a result of migration), as well as changes in intrahousehold expenditure patterns, due to unemployment, falling real wages, poverty and women's increased market earning capacity.

Box 4: Women's participation in safety net programmes

Some safety net programmes have been relatively successful in attracting women beneficiaries, e.g. PAIT in Peru, with 76 percent of beneficiaries women, and PUSH in Zambia, with 95 percent female beneficiaries. This is not without problems, however.

PAIT attracted many women because of the possibility of work near the home, but it also disrupted existing community kitchens or mother's clubs, because people dropped their responsibilities there. PAIT set up separate kitchens for workers rather than using existing facilities (Graham 1994: 101-3). 'Male female relations were affected by women having a salary for the first time; because the work was designed for men, women often suffered health problems' (*ibid.*).

The fact that PUSH required voluntary labour may be one explanation for the high level of involvement of women, as well as its focus on provision of sanitation facilities, which may be a higher priority for women than men.

5 Implications for policy and practice

5.1 Incorporating gender concerns into design of economic reform

5.1.1 Gender-aware economic policy-making

A variety of tools are being developed to make economic policy and planning more gender-sensitive. This includes, for example, macroeconomic models which take account of women's unpaid labour and thus are able to factor this into attempts to predict the impact of policy reform (Cagatay *et al.* 1995). Public expenditure reviews (PERs) can incorporate a gender analysis. Underpinning these approaches is a need to refine methodologies, and improve the collection, analysis and use of gender-disaggregated data for policy and planning.

Various initiatives have been taken to increase dialogue between finance ministries, other key sectoral ministries, and women's machineries, to promote the consideration of gender perspectives in economic policy formulation. The World Bank has piloted 'gender-aware' adjustment operations in three countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, attempting to ensure that gender-based constraints are taken into consideration when adjustment policies are being devised (see Box 5). Much work remains to be done in this area, so that these efforts are systematic.

Box 5: Gender in the Special Programme of Assistance for Africa

The SAGA workshop in Ottawa, in November 1995, agreed a programme of work, of which key elements were:

- pilot gender-aware adjustment operations in three countries;
- fuller integration of priority structural issues in policy dialogue, namely, protection of core public expenditures, priority to girls' education and legal reform to tackle gender disparity;
- under SPA 4, work continues on gender incidence analysis in public expenditure reviews, improved access to financial services for women, and increased participation (including of women) in the design, implementation and monitoring of economic reform in Africa.

Source: World Bank 1996

5.1.2 Increasing accountability of economic policy to (poor) women.

A second and equally important mechanism for incorporating gender concerns into the design of economic reform is to make the processes of economic policy more accountable to women and their organisations (e.g. through consulting with women's groups, economic literacy work, women's budget campaigns etc.). Examples of this approach include the work of CEEWA in Uganda, in lobbying for changes to economic legislation (the recent Financial Institutions Act 1993 and Bank of Uganda Statute 1993) enacted in the context of financial sector reform, to ensure that it does not institutionalise discrimination or biases against poor women who are the main beneficiaries of non-formal microenterprise finance (Kiggundu 1998). The setting up of consultation mechanisms during the process of formulating economic policy is also important and, alongside this, raising gender issues during policy dialogue with governments.

5.2 Monitoring of gender-differentiated impacts

The gender-disaggregated impacts of economic policies require monitoring to inform future policy development. One mechanism for this is gender-sensitive indicence analysis of public expenditure (Demery 1996). Women's budget exercises, notably that in South Africa which has gained considerable support both within the Parliament and beyond, are also possible leverage mechanisms to raise awareness of the implications of public expenditure decisions, and trace through their impacts (Budlender 1996). Other mechanisms are also required which institutionalise capacity for monitoring adjustment impacts, e.g. the collection of indicators via development programmes, social sector service provision or community based initiatives.

5.3 Reducing barriers to women's response to economic opportunities

A number of measures can be taken to reduce or remove the constraints to women's response to economic opportunities. Some of these relate to reducing the time burden on women, e.g. through improvements in the provision of social infrastructure, such as water supply, child care facilities etc. In order to improve direct returns to women's labour, there is a need to secure their property rights through legal reforms although these often have limited effectiveness at local level, unless women develop bargaining power to assert their claims.

Gender biases in financial and agricultural markets need to be tackled. In the financial sector, support to the development of non-bank financial institutions (NBFIs) which are successful in reducing transactions costs of lending to women, an emphasis on savings, as well as credit, to mobilise women's own resources, and the reform of banking institutions and legislation to remove discriminatory practices are all possible measures. The definition of financial instruments in legislation should be flexible to ensure that institutions lending to women are not negatively affected (Baden 1997a).

Initiatives needed to support women's trading include group loans for transport, storage etc. to women traders, measures to limit police harassment and excessive taxation of informal traders, and the provision of services which are located in areas where women trade (Baden 1997b).

5.4 Social security and safety nets

There is now considerable experience of the gendered impact of safety nets and of measures which can be taken to ensure greater participation of women, such as decentralised location of work sites, near homes and markets, provision of child care and health facilities, use of women's networks to publicise schemes, improved recruitment practices, hiring of women in supervisory positions (BRIDGE 1995). Programmes which specifically target female heads or women may have drawbacks in that they can institutionalise gender divisions of labour and discriminatory payment practices and, in some instances, create a political backlash.

There is a need for greater recognition of the increasing variety of household forms, and associated patterns of vulnerability, and a need to move away from the male breadwinner model underlying social security and welfare systems, as well as for legal and institutional changes which strengthen the rights of women in non-formal unions, or who are not living with, or supported by, male partners. At the same time, the coping strategies of poor women, as well as men, need to be better understood, and supported, as alternatives to top down provision of safety nets (Baud and Smyth 1997).

6. Directions for further research

Useful conceptual frameworks are now in place which can assist understanding of the linkages between economic policy, gender and poverty concerns. There are also a number of initiatives which have attempted to influence policy in this area from a gender perspective. What is now needed is detailed context specific research, and comparative empirical research, which investigates how and whether policy changes take effect in implementation and links between macro level changes and micro level responses. Some areas are suggested below.

- Monitoring of extent to which incorporation of gender considerations at policy level in economic reform impacts on actual changes through budgetary allocations, investment, changing employment patterns and resource allocation to men/women.

- Research on the linkages between economic policy and restructuring and changing household forms and relations, e.g. through changes in male/female participation rates, incomes and expenditure patterns and their effects on household relations.

- Research on how policies of trade and investment liberalisation impact on the gender intensity of the work force in different sectors, and on wage structures and working conditions. Parallel to this, research on the impact of labour legislation and labour standards provisions in redressing gender inequities in the labour force.

- Research on coping strategies in the face of insecurity caused by economic restructuring and policy changes, and the scope for improving social security provision.

- In agricultural and other product markets, analysis/mapping of gender segmentation in marketing systems, to increase understanding of the different conditions faced by women and men in trading.

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