

Measuring Poverty As If Gender Matters: Perspectives from Fieldwork in Fiji



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SSGM DISCUSSION PAPER 2014/10

Introduction

This paper presents empirical findings on one aspect of the work of a transnational feminist research project, based in Canberra, Australia, whose goal was to produce a better standard or metric for measuring poverty across the world.¹ I was a team member on this project for Fiji-based fieldwork from 2010 to 2012. The research project was aimed at synthesising and integrating various experiences and perspectives on poverty held both by poor women and men and by professional poverty experts. The project team began with a review of the professional knowledge contained in the vast multidisciplinary literature on gender and poverty, gender and development, and gender-sensitive measures of poverty. Fieldwork was carried out in six countries — Angola, Fiji, Indonesia, Malawi, Mozambique and the Philippines — in order to understand how the poorest people in some very poor countries viewed poverty and related hardships, and to what extent they saw these as gendered. This discussion paper will focus only on fieldwork conducted in Fiji.

The epistemological approach that underpins this paper is shaped by an explicit recognition that existing measures of poverty in Fiji suffer from two problems. First, they are insensitive to gender and, second, they reflect the values and priorities of experts rather than those of women and men who have experienced poverty (Bessell 2010). In addressing this shortcoming, the methodology adopted in the paper was shaped by feminist principles of participatory research. The starting point, and consistent principle throughout the research, has been that any just and justifiable measure of poverty must be able to reveal the ways in which poverty impacts differently on

women and men (Jaggar and Wisor 2013). Here gender was made central to the question of poverty measurement where research participants in sex-disaggregated groups explored the ways in which gender related to poverty and hardship and whether women and men differed in their responses to the same questions. The methodology was also guided by principles of participatory research, whereby spaces were created so that women and men could confidently engage in a process of identifying problems and ways forward (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995: 1669). In presenting the findings from phase one of the project, this paper seeks to recognise and value the knowledge of participants, and deepen our understanding of the lived experiences and priorities of poor women and men in Fiji.

In bringing together principles of feminist and participatory research, I will present qualitative evidence highlighting the individual experiences of poor women and men which has been excluded from past efforts in official measures of poverty in Fiji. This paper is aimed at moving beyond household measures of poverty by using the individual as the unit of analysis. A compelling reason to disaggregate households for the purpose of measuring poverty stems from observations concerning inequitable intra-household distribution of resources and the phenomenon of 'secondary poverty'. As argued by Muthwa:

Within the household, there is much exploitation of women by men which goes unnoticed when we use poverty measures which simply treat households as units and ignore intra-household aspects of exploitation. When we measure poverty ... we need measures



which illuminate unequal access to resources between men and women in the household. (Muthwa 1994: 168)

This gender-sensitive information that takes into account men's and women's experiences is often shaped by context and further interpretation is required to make sense of the stated views and preferences of participants.

The central argument in this discussion paper is that existing measures of poverty in Fiji and the Pacific are not sensitive to gender for three reasons. First, they use the household, rather than the individual, as the unit of analysis. This masks inequalities in the intra-household distribution of resources and burdens, resulting in inadequate understanding of gendered poverty (Bessell 2014). Second, they rely on data sources that are often gender blind, limiting the potential for understanding the gendered nature of poverty (Bessell 2014). Third, poverty studies are often informed by experts without taking into account local dimensions of poverty and reflecting the interests and views of poor women and men.

Drawing from the fieldwork in Fiji and employing a qualitative participatory approach, this paper illuminates differences in the extent and nature of poverty at the individual level based on the participants' poverty criteria. The rationale for engendering the measurement of poverty and the ways in which feminist research approaches inform research methods will be discussed. Key findings on the gendered dimensions of poverty and hardship will then be presented and what these may suggest as important steps towards the development of a new gender-sensitive measure of deprivation. In concluding, I will argue how gender perspectives could contribute to widening the concept of poverty by identifying the need to measure poverty in a way that accounts for its nuanced and individualised qualitative information.

Setting the Scene: Poverty in the Pacific

Over the past two decades, discussions of poverty and inequality in the Pacific have largely emphasised that, despite all difficulties and 'discontents of daily life' (Clark 2006: 129), there is resilience in

Pacific societies (see also Haberkorn 2004). It was often appropriate to discuss Pacific poverty as not 'real' poverty, as less likely to lead to starvation and genuine hardship than poverty visible in other parts of the world such as in Asia or Latin America. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was much controversy concerning the nature of poverty, its incidence, depth and severity in the Pacific, as those economies became increasingly monetised and traditional support systems were breaking down (Abbott and Pollard 2004). However, earlier controversies on non-existence of poverty in the Pacific were debunked with recent studies highlighting the increasing rates of poverty (Abbott and Pollard 2004; PIFS 2012; UNDP 2014; Wood and Naidu 2008). No matter how poverty is defined and measured, there are many representations of data reflecting Pacific poverty, such as statistics on child and maternal mortality, life expectancy, causes of death, access to water, sanitation and household income (Bryant-Tokalau 1995).

But the notion of measuring poverty in monetary terms through consumption or income is still seen as contentious by Pacific societies because a significant share of the population relies on self-produced or procured resources from land (often communal) and sea (Gibson 2010). Statistical measures of poverty and inequality, as well as the global list of Millennium Development Goals, may seem irrelevant to those faced with daily struggles of poverty (Bryant-Tokalau 2009). There is now widespread recognition of the inadequacy of income as a measure of wellbeing and a search for more appropriate measures. The *Alternative Indicators of Well-Being* study in Vanuatu demonstrated that resources, access, culture and community vitality are also important determinants of individual welfare (MNCC 2012). However, a term somewhat in vogue among development analysts and practitioners is 'poverty of opportunity' to describe the type of poverty found in the Pacific (Abbott and Pollard 2004: 3). The poverty of opportunity approach assumes a broader focus, the underlying idea being that many more people are denied basic human opportunities than are denied a minimum income. Even with a growing recognition that poverty encompasses

more than income alone, the measurement of poverty in the Pacific, using households as the unit of analysis, remains insensitive to gender.

Critiquing Household Poverty Analysis in Fiji

Poverty in Fiji has had many different definitions, with evidence of growing inequality, poverty and vulnerability to poverty since the 1980s (Barr 1990; Bryant 1993; Cameron 2000; Chung 2007; FIBOS 2006; Narsey 2006, 2007; Narsey et al. 2010; Stavenuiter 1983; UNDP 1996; Walsh 2002; World Bank and FIBOS 2011). One of the most persistent commentators on the social and political implications of urban growth in Fiji has been Kevin Barr (1990, 2007). Recent history of growing urbanisation and urban poverty has been well documented by urban geographers and development sociologists (Bryant-Tokalau 1995, 2010, 2012; Lingam 2005; Mohanty 2006; Naidu 2006). Many of these earlier studies have relied on income (or expenditure approaches) to distinguish 'the poor' from the non-poor, using a variety of methods to construct the income poverty line. However, household income and expenditure continue to be a forerunner among previous poverty indicators in Fiji. Most recent quantitative analyses of poverty in Fiji define poverty as the percentage of the population below the basic needs poverty line (BNPL).² In 2008–09, BNPL across Fiji was estimated at about FJ\$175 per week for a household of four adult equivalents, and 35.2 per cent of Fiji's population was living in poverty. The analysis of poverty in Fiji to date has been conducted at the level of households whereby the aggregation of income forms the basis for household income and expenditure surveys (HIESs).

Although I acknowledge that household measures of poverty continue to dominate discourses of poverty in Fiji, this paper aims to outline an alternative but complementary approach. While household poverty analysis may be appropriate at an aggregate level, it is not accurate for analysis at the level of the individual. Surveys such as HIESs, which rely on household-level data as the basis for estimating the number of people living below the poverty line, are problematic

and arguably hide rather than reveal the extent of poverty among women and men within the same household. Such measures of poverty, which focus on income alone and on the household as a unit, ignore intra-household disparities because the ways in which women and men relate to material resources are grounded in their different social relations and positions in communities and societies at large.

The Fiji HIES (as with most HIES studies across the Pacific) is referred to the household head. In both *iTaukei*³ and Indo-Fijian households in Fiji, the household head is usually a male and therefore the survey begins with a gender bias. Referencing the HIES to the senior male in the household masks the economic activity of women (unless a woman is the household head), and does not take account of multiple levels of wellbeing deprivation in low-income households. Furthermore, much of the available evidence on women's economic situations across the Pacific comes from HIESs, which usually do not disaggregate on the grounds of gender. While there is some evidence about women's income, most analysis of expenditure is conducted at the household level and it is therefore difficult to examine trends in women's and men's spending (Narsey 2007). In this study, both women and men were interviewed about their roles and controls, and it was realised that the household head is not always clear — in extended households there may be a titular head (retired father of adult children living at home) and a functional head (the one who earns income and manages finances), creating a generational bias as well as a gender bias in the HIES studies. Existing poverty studies do not capture the make-up and dynamics of households in terms of intra-household allocation and distribution of resources around 'who controls what and who gets what'.

The fallacies of aggregation that underpin household analyses of poverty are evident in large part because they are not individualistic enough. They fail to capture the intra-household dynamics of resource allocation and distribution, which may depend on sociocultural relations of gender, age, kinship, race relations, and spatial distribution of resources and opportunities (Chant 2010). The

situation for women and men in Fiji is not the same, and there are differences with regard to the roles and controls of *iTaukei* versus Indo-Fijian households. But male-dominated hierarchies are common regardless of ethnicity, which has compromised women's roles in Fiji society. Gender dynamics in Fiji are influenced by the traditional values that allow women few if any rights to inherit land or formally own property, or to take part in public decision-making. Key barriers to women's economic empowerment include poor educational attainment, patriarchal norms, customary law, lack of land or property rights, lack of access to finance, a lack of skills and knowledge, and poor infrastructure (ADB 2006; Chatter 2008; Chatter and Slatter 2012; Underhill-Sem 2010).

Such gendered inequalities are rendered invisible when poverty, deprivation or hardship is defined by household averages. Chatter (2011, 2012) argues that in analysing poverty and vulnerability in Fiji there is a need to open up the household so as to assess how resources are generated and used, how they are converted into assets, and how the returns from these assets and also income earned are distributed among household members. An in-depth study of rural households in 2008 in Fiji revealed that women assume greater responsibility than men for the management of their household finances, whereas men appear to be more spendthrift than women and men are more likely to spend money as it is received (Sibley 2010). Therefore, one has to look within the family or household to see how resources are distributed before one can judge whether all household members are in poverty.

Poverty is not a gender-neutral condition as men and women might experience poverty in distinctive ways and much can also be learnt from considering the 'individual' experiences of poverty. Here, poverty is seen not only in terms of economic or material deprivation, but also as a state of deprivation of wellbeing grounded in the lived experiences of individual women and men. Gender differentials in poverty that are almost non-existent in the household-level analysis become prominent in individual analysis. There is no way to evaluate inequalities or differences in poverty experience within households without disaggregation.

The Contribution of Gender and Feminist Analyses

Where gender research has made perhaps the most significant inroad is in giving attention to the nuances of gender relations and the dynamics of power and agency at the household level. It is now widely accepted that different members of households do not have unified interest. Rather than pooling income under the authority of a benevolent household head, households are the site of bargaining processes that involve elements of both conflict and cooperation (Sen 1990).

In many ways, focusing on household-level analysis avoids having to address the messy complexities posed by gender relations within households (Jackson 1997). The assumption that resources and/or incomes are pooled within a household and that all outcomes are equally shared among household members has been frequently scrutinised by feminists for its androcentric biases (see England 1993; Evans 1991; Folbre 1988; Jennings and Waller 1990). These observations underlie the general argument that poverty is constituted by more than income. It encompasses strong perpetual dimensions, and is better conceived as a package of assets and entitlements within which the power, inter alia, to manage expenditures, to mobilise labour and to gain access to social and community support are vital elements (Sen 1990, 1999). In addition, the lives of poor women may be characterised not only by low incomes but also by hardships related specifically to their gender, such as sexual vulnerability, excessive work burdens and culturally assigned caretaking responsibilities.

Therefore, when poverty is measured primarily in income or consumption terms, it is impossible for gendered inequalities to come into view. The empirical evidence presented in this paper will draw attention to the differences in understanding of gender patterns in poverty, depending upon the unit of analysis. Learning from feminist critiques of household analysis, the next section outlines the methods used in the first phase of fieldwork in Fiji. The significant feature of this methodology was the use of participatory methods involving local people

(participants) as experts in providing information on what constitutes poverty, vulnerability and hardship in the context of Fiji.

Location and Methodology of the Study

In each country which was part of the research project, local teams collected data at three sites: a poor urban community, a poor rural community and a marginalised community. For the purpose of this study, a marginalised community is defined as one that is not only poor, but also excluded, powerless, or subject to systematic discrimination in some distinctive way. All marginalised communities across the six countries were also shaped by their urban–rural status, and identifying a community can be difficult in countries where most communities face systematic deprivation. In the context of Fiji, an urban squatter settlement was selected as a marginalised community for study using purposive sampling. The sites that were identified as marginalised varied significantly by country, but often included displaced persons, distinct ethnic groups, squatter settlements, or groups largely excluded from the provision of state services. In Fiji, data was collected from a poor urban community (*iTaukei*) in Central Division, a poor rural community (Indo-Fijian) in Northern Division and a highly marginalised community in Suva city (squatter settlement with mixed groups of *iTaukei* and Indian participants).⁴ When selecting the sites, a purposive sampling technique was used to ensure good representation from the two major ethnic groups in Fiji: *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijians. Narsey's (2012) analysis of the 2008–09 HIES reveals that the incidence of poverty is generally evenly distributed across the two main ethnic groups. Communities were also chosen to represent a good balance between urban and rural locations and between *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijians, but the findings from these communities are not nationally representative.

The research in Fiji began with a qualitative approach to learning about specific individuals' experiences and conceptions of poverty. We were interested especially in differences that might exist between the perceptions of women and men who were otherwise similarly situated. Participants

were selected by gender and age, using three age groups: young people (between about 13 and 18 years), adults (covering the primary productive and reproductive years), and older people, giving at least six groups per site. The age at which participants were divided between young, middle-aged and older depended on the country studied, as both life expectancies and life cycles vary considerably across the six countries in this research project. For example, in 2010 when phase one fieldwork was conducted, life expectancy was highest in Fiji and Indonesia (70 years) and lowest in Mozambique (49 years). Therefore, local researchers used their knowledge and understanding of cultural contexts when grouping participants in different age cohorts. Eight male and eight female participants were selected from each of the three age groups in each of the three communities for focused group discussions; a total of 144 participants. In addition, one male and one female were selected from each age group in the three communities for in-depth interviews, amounting to 162 individuals in total who informed the first phase of the study.

The aim with different age groups was to gain insights into how poverty is understood over the life cycle. In Fiji, the local team determined what age ranges best demarcated key life stages of youth/without major responsibilities; adulthood, where productive and reproductive roles structure the lives of many women and men; and older age. Here, age of participants deepened the understanding of various ways in which women and men in different age groups within the same household experience poverty. In addition, we sought to include people from a range of life situations, such as married, widowed or single; pregnant or not; able-bodied or living with a disability; and from a large or small household. Participants were also selected from a range of poverty levels, from the very poor to those who had experienced poverty but were no longer poor. The participatory nature of the research meant that the sample size was not big enough to make generalisations about the overall picture of poverty in the selected communities and across different ethnic groups. Instead, the approach and methods in this study enabled us to 'hear women's voices' (Reinharz 1992) and 'listen carefully to how

women informants think about their lives and men's lives' (Harding 1997: 161).

Phase one research used mixed methods comprising guided group discussions, a poverty ladder (participants were asked to rank different levels of poverty and to describe what constitutes poverty at each level), household mapping (participants were asked to identify how resources within the household are allocated to various members), and semi-structured interviews with group ranking and discussion. It is important to note that all group activities asked about the factors that constitute poverty generally, rather than asking participants about their own personal circumstances. The same group of participants (from each of the different age and gender groups) participated in all four group methods in all communities.

As part of the focused group discussions, poverty ladders were constructed whereby men and women from each age and ethnic group across the three communities clarified local understandings of how someone moves out of poverty or falls into poverty and why some people in the community are rich and others poor. Since participatory principles shaped the methodology and were central to the methods used in phase one, it was important to get participants' views on different categories of poverty and dimensions in each category. Participants were asked to describe what life is like at the bottom of the ladder, which represented extreme poverty. What do men have at this level? What do women have at this level? What do men lack at this level? What do women lack at this level? Researchers ensured the focus here was on individuals and not on households or larger groups. Gradually, participants were asked to move up the rungs, identifying what men and women would have and what they would lack at each level. The following section presents a sample poverty ladder constructed by groups of men and women from one study community. The discussion that follows draws from the themes that emerged while using the ladder tool when talking to participants across all selected sites.

Identification of Poor Households Using Poverty Ladders

We used the poverty ladder and guided group discussions to establish each community's own definition of poverty and wealth and determine who in the community qualifies as poor. Six poverty ladders were constructed in each of the communities, which allowed us to gain an overall picture of poverty and wealth in a particular community. As an illustration, Table 1 shows poverty ladders constructed by participants in a rural community.

Both male and female groups had at least a 3-step poverty ladder and it was noted that, at the bottom step, households do not own land, have poor housing conditions, have more children, not all children are in school, and there is lack of employment and a permanent source of income. Across all age and gender groups, people at the bottom step seem to be identified as extremely poor, at step 2 they are still poor and at step 3 they are near poor. It was noted by both young males and females that as people move up the steps their housing conditions improve, parents can afford children's educations, household members eat good food, and by the time they reach step 3 they have a good house, land, all children are in school or completed school and they generally have good living conditions. Adult males noted 5 steps in their poverty ladder and adult females had 4 steps. In the elderly age group, males had 3 steps and females had 5 steps in their poverty ladders.

Across all communities, our qualitative evidence from the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews revealed several factors that can either help or hinder poor men and women in their efforts to become effective agents in moving out of poverty. On the positive side, assets and high aspirations for education, hard work, self-confidence and empowerment, and engagement with family and community were most frequently mentioned as important factors; on the negative side, effects of bad behaviour such as drinking *kava* (grog) and alcohol,⁵ family break-ups, death and illness were noted to push individuals into poverty. The participatory nature of the research allowed

the participants to call on their local knowledge and understanding of the context in which they lived and what dimensions or areas of life did they think were part of poverty. Here participants used local standards in evaluating poverty in their communities by making distinctions between those who do not have enough and those who are not able to achieve enough. Talking to individual women and men and using a participatory tool like poverty ladders allows one to consider the extent to which a gender analysis of poverty can shed light on intra-household inequality and hence women's poverty relative to men's.

Moving Up or Down the Ladder: Gendered Priorities to Get Out of Poverty?

Now I would like to highlight some of the gender issues that came out from the focused group discussions and the construction of poverty ladders across all communities, age groups and gender.

Wealth

As seen from the poverty ladders constructed by the participants (Table 1), a focus on wealth proved useful for the study of poverty and gender inequality within the household. In this study, participants talked about ownership of productive assets and wealth such as housing, land, farms, livestock, businesses and savings as one means of generating income and hence being able to meet daily expenditure. Our findings revealed that as incomes increase, people move up the ladder, and asset ownership is important to an individual's pathway out of poverty. Besides providing an economic foundation on which to build, poor women and men said that assets such as land and a business give them confidence to move ahead. Landownership is a critical factor affecting the economic dynamics of Fijian households and communities — both *iTaukei* and Indo-Fijian — but with considerable differences between the two. As noted by Bryant-Tokalau (2012), much of the current debate over *iTaukei* Fijian land and land rights surrounds the expiry of agricultural leases, migration of dispossessed Indo-Fijian farmers to urban areas and the growth of urban squatter settlements in Fiji. This association between asset

ownership and confidence was confirmed in the construction of the poverty ladders across the three communities as participants reflected upon their observation of others in the community. However, men tend to accumulate more assets than women including a house, land, farms, investments and a business enterprise and they no longer engage in casual labour-type jobs. A male youth from a rural community said:

A man is poor if you have land lease issue — that is, no proper house and no access to land. A man gets wealthy when he has a big farm, a good paying job, car and a good house.

Cultural Norms and Identity

Patriarchal cultural norms often limit women's access to productive resources such as land. The degree of gender inequality in land and housing ownership is considerable, with women's share of asset ownership lower than men's. Across all the communities, participants noted while women may individually own consumer durables such as sewing machines, cooking stoves and other household appliances, men individually own bigger household items such as a motor vehicle, farm equipment and the house itself. Some women may be involved in handicrafts and small-scale subsistence farming if they had access to land, while a few might own small businesses, as noted in the discussions with adult men and women in the urban community.

The gendered nature of deprivation cannot be appreciated without an understanding of the differential nature of deprivation which is largely determined by differentiated social roles and individual needs. For example, across all communities participants reported that men bore a disproportionate burden from unemployment because they were expected to provide for the family. In some instances, men often felt increased pressure to provide for their families due to their status as breadwinner. An urban male youth noted that 'for men the most important thing for them is to be able to find a job that will help them provide for the family'. Male participants named this role as a hardship when in poverty, as poverty is viewed as both a barrier to achieving this socially prescribed

Table 1: Sample poverty ladders from a rural community in Fiji

Level	Age groups			
	Youth (13–18 years)	Middle age (19–49 years)	Elderly (50 years and over)	
Step 1	Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> land lease issue — no proper house and no access to land no proper access to water and electricity limited food supply at this stage poor people work harder and for longer hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> very poor at this stage have no proper house or house block do small jobs such as a labourer no proper education don't have a house, land, job, water, electricity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> unable to pay rent for our house and land cane cutters who have low and not fixed wages cannot invest much in children's education to give them hope for a secure future
	Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no employment bad road conditions no water and electricity house conditions are bad, poor sanitation, unemployment, home with a lot of children, one breadwinner, and no income earner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> water problems lack of access to roads and transport no kitchen, bathroom and toilet in the house and mostly share it with the neighbours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> poor at present don't have a small house block, no farms, no land to do any farming no proper house, no fixed employment, no water, no electricity
Step 2	Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> food is available live in a properly built house have jobs that provided enough wages to satisfy needs and wants although people have access to school in all steps, they still need money to attend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have good employment, with enough which pays to fulfil families' requirements, needs and wants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> able to afford food items for healthy living receiving assistance from social welfare afford to go out at times
	Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> use of land for subsistence farming/commercial farming pay for education of children priority to education may be given to boys first as boys will stay behind and support the family and girls will get married into other families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> good source of employment improvement in household conditions afford children's education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> employment (fixed) land house
Step 3	Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> secure source of income can afford transportation big house with all the facilities, TV, radio, etc. children eat good food 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> education is good (i.e. higher level of education, get access to education) access to all facilities, like proper water supply, electricity, access to communication and information good housing — a good house with all the facilities land is big enough to build a house and do some kind of farming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> house with all facilities, e.g. water, electricity, road conditions education afford health services

Level	Age groups			
	Youth (13–18 years)	Middle age (19–49 years)	Elderly (50 years and over)	
Step 3	Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> access to land — invest in children's future, i.e. education improved housing conditions education leads to employment chances, and source of income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> land and farming proper housing to live in all the children in the family are educated then there is a higher chance of getting a good job have proper facilities, e.g. access to road, water, electricity, transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> has land land big enough to do some farming and build a house on it or a bigger house block where we can do some subsistence farming a proper house with all facilities like proper washroom, piped water, electricity supply
Step 4	Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not applicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> access to good roads; have own transport easy access to health services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not applicable
	Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not applicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> good health and a lot can be done in terms of having a good job and physical strength to do it may have a village shop if social welfare is provided for the elderly than other family members can use that money for investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> elderly receive social welfare assistance more cash for needs and wants
Step 5	Male	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not applicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> community service, having a community have a shop: supermarket in the community with all requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not applicable
	Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not applicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> not applicable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> have access to public health services because they have proper transport educated and wealthy

Note: Not applicable means for that particular group there were no further steps in the construction of their poverty ladder.

role and a consequence of failing to do so. Often men saw the breadwinner expectation as a burden because they were poor and their poverty was a sign that they were unsuccessful in fulfilling this role. An adult male from an urban community said, 'it is more significant for men to provide for the family and men have to work in an urban area unlike in the village where they don't have to work for wages'.

In Fiji, men's identity is closely connected with work, and their contribution to and status in the household is defined by their role as primary

breadwinners (Chattier 2014). For instance, an elderly male participant from an urban community mentioned that 'having an income was more significant for men because they have to look after the family, look for jobs and feed the family'. In constructing the poverty ladders, male participants focused on income and the fulfilment of basic needs for the family. The perception about one's socio-economic status being equal to or better than others in the community was a significant source of happiness and satisfaction for male participants. Older men considered 'the ability to meet their

own needs and those of the family members was a life achievement in itself'. Older women linked economic success to their own security and the success of their sons, on whom many were dependent in old age, to the fact that 'they had brought their sons up well'. Generally, younger men associated income as evidence of personal success, having a socio-economic status, and capacity to provide for the family. Younger women saw household income as related to 'having a good husband who could provide for the family's needs'.

Education

Ensuring children have a good upbringing, are educated and successful in life was not only a vital aspect of the reputation of individual women and men but also as pathways out of poverty. When asked what was the most important thing to get them out of poverty, education and school came out as important priorities. Participants noted that with education one could find a good job and have a decent standard of living. As seen in Table 1, on top-level steps, individuals are well educated and have good professional jobs as compared to lower or bottom rungs where participants noted illiteracy, incomplete education, school dropouts and unemployment. When participants were asked what constitutes poverty at each level of the poverty ladder, an elderly male participant from a rural community said 'at the bottom step you cannot invest in children's education to give them hope for a secure future'. Poverty ladders in Table 1 shows that at step 1 people are illiterate, and their children have difficulty attending school because of affordability. By step 3, people are a 'little bit educated', and at step 4 their children 'study in good schools'. In the bottom two steps, households can afford to give their children primary education but often it is a struggle for a family with many children. In some instances, at steps 3 and 4, children can go up to secondary school but cannot progress further because families cannot afford school fees. Households at step 5 have no problem paying the fees. Therefore, the desire to educate children appears in all the categories noted in the poverty ladders; what varies is the ability to send children to school.

There were a few noteworthy gender differences in participants' expectations for themselves and especially for their children when it comes to education. For women and girls the choices were often restricted. In a large family with a lot of children, it is a norm that the eldest daughters have to drop out of school if the parents cannot afford the education of all the children. For example, an elderly female participant from the marginalised community noted, 'during our times, in olden days when we were small, our parents couldn't afford to send all the children to school. So because I was an elder girl, I didn't attend many years of school like my brothers.' In remembering their younger days, generally all adult groups mentioned that schooling was a scarcity for many girls in the previous generations. Unequal allocation of resources based on gender was reflected in the lack of investment in education for girls. Many participants echoed a similar view that 'whenever the question of affordability pops up in a poor household, it was an agreed norm that eldest girls would be the first dropouts, followed by eldest sons who were not performing well in school'.

Even today, shortage of household income is one reason for low educational achievements among girls in rural Fiji. In this study, participants noted that parents place more emphasis on educating sons because poverty is still reported as 'interfering with girls' education when choices have to be made in payment of fees and purchase of essential items such as uniforms and books for all the children'. An adult female participant from the rural community spoke about how 'they are married off young to lessen the burden on the family once their schooling is stopped due to poverty and hardship'. Important contributory factors were the pervasive normative ideal that men should be the principal breadwinners and providers of accommodation — the latter being due to male-biased inheritance cultural practices (Chatter 2013).

However, parents are now seeing the positive correlation between years of schooling and increased lifelong income. Bryant-Tokalau (2012) notes that despite major difficulties, many poor

people in Fiji are resilient, and continue to educate their children to protect themselves from poverty and hardships. It was noted in all the discussion groups that the previous trend regarding female education is changing because parents are now investing more in the education of all their children, regardless of gender. As an adult male participant from the rural community said:

If both a girl child and a boy child are doing well at school then parents try to keep them both at school. But for the very poorest of poor, the girls may be the first ones to drop out anyway, regardless of performance because girls are often the first ones to get married and they marry into another family so the immediate family do not benefit from further education in the end.

Young women from the urban community remarked, 'education is the most important asset of people in this world. Being well educated, one can find a good job with a high standard of living.' Another young woman from the rural community said, 'I am thankful to my parents for my education. If my parents did not spend for my education, then maybe I would not have been able to finish my studies. This is the only wealth that was given to me by my parents.' Another important factor when considering gender and education is that parents often prioritise daughters' schooling because of the likelihood that they will end up working in non-farm jobs where educational qualifications are an important criterion for entry. Young girls in an urban community noted that they are often pressured to go to school so that they can secure a better future in terms of a better job. For instance, an elderly male discussion group stated:

Between whoever is doing well at school there is no gendered discrimination. Depending on the capabilities of [the] child, parents invest in children's education including primary, secondary and tertiary level schooling because of income-generation prospects.

Data from the poverty ladders reveal that parents often struggle throughout their lives to give their children an education and secure future.

Hardships and the Gendered Nature of Poverty

Poverty is gendered in terms of its effects and most household-level statistics on poverty fail to highlight the hidden details of women's poverty. Women's hidden poverty reflects their inferior position of power in the gendered division of labour and the realities of female economic dependence. Women and men across the three communities often reported on the level of hardship faced by women, which included unpaid work divided into subsistence work (food and clothing production, clothing repair), domestic work (purchasing household goods and services, cooking, laundry, ironing, cleaning, activities related to household organisation and task distribution), family care (children and the elderly), and community service or voluntary work (services provided to non-family members through religious and informal village organisations). Female youths and adults in the urban community highlighted that:

The hardships faced by men and women are different. Women have more responsibilities as they are responsible for cooking, looking after children, washing clothes, cleaning, caring for the elderly and also look after the compound.

Unpaid work in households across the three settlements was unequally distributed as echoed by the participants in all gender and age cohorts. This affected the wellbeing of many women because of reduced hours of leisure time, although the context of hardship may have differed in the three study communities. An adult male from the rural community noted that:

Women have to wake up early in the morning to cook for the family and it makes it harder for them when they have no proper facilities like electricity, water and proper cooking stoves. No proper water supply so they have to walk long distance to fetch water for cooking, washing and cleaning.

Men do not generally do the daily cooking, food processing, house cleaning, washing dishes and clothes, or care for children, the elderly or the

sick. Carswell (2003) noted that men in particular seemed very protective of their masculinity and status and would refuse to do what they regarded as 'women's work'. A differentiating characteristic of the way women's and men's work is organised in the household is that much of men's work can be located in time and place as outside work. For instance, men in the rural community finished harvesting or working on the farm for the day and could relax at home in the evenings, while women continued working into the night processing and cooking food, caring for children and other household members, sewing, and weaving mats and baskets. That is not to say that men are not involved in tasks too, but generally they have much more time to pursue leisure activities such as sport or *talanoa* (talk or converse) around a bowl or two of *kava*. Some in the rural community viewed that *kava* is a contributing factor to men's laziness and poverty (see below). Managing poverty is more difficult, time-consuming and tiring work for women than men. This means women tend to suffer time as well as income poverty.

The continued power of the gendered division of labour, which means that women continue to take the main responsibility of the everyday care of children, also has implications for the management of poverty. Participants noted that, by and large, it is women who manage poverty. An adult rural woman stated, 'managing poverty means juggling an inadequate income in a constant struggle to make ends meet'. For some, it means drawing on personal resources of resilience, resourcefulness and skill to maintain the difficult balancing act. An elderly woman from the squatter settlement noted 'the difficulty of drawing on social resources and networks when one lives in a squatter area are limited or nil social support from own kin, clan or *mataqali*. For us, poverty is exacerbated by social isolation that often result in feeling trapped and depressed.' Thus women disproportionately bear the responsibility of ensuring that the household's care needs are met.

Although women's responsibilities for coping with poverty are greater than men's, they do not seem to be gaining any ground for negotiating

greater inputs to household income or labour on the part of men, let alone reductions in their discretionary expenditure. Men continue to withhold earnings in order to finance extra-domestic and recreational pursuits such as spending time with male friends, and/or indulging in *kava*, cigarettes and alcohol. Youth male and female groups from the marginalised community spoke about:

Husbands spending too much time in drinking *kava* and [with] his friends and not spending quality time with his family. If the husband is not working and providing for the family then it becomes problematic, especially if he has a problem with alcohol abuse too.

Expectations of female altruism continue to be remarkably persistent and mean that women often remain resigned to assuming heavier burdens, without complaint and major confrontation. Across different communities, women reported a few cases of domestic violence which involved how money is spent by the husband on his leisure-time activities. For instance, a female participant from the rural community noted, 'rarely do women of any age expect or ask their menfolk to help out with "female tasks" or ask them to refrain expenses on *kava* and cigarettes no matter the harm it causes to household welfare'.

Even in a few discussion groups and poverty ladder construction, adult males and females mentioned that when a couple is in tension and they fight all the time, it is a sign of poverty and lack of money in the house. In this case, it appears that women are required to perform the roles of 'good wives', which reaffirms their identity as women, including defusing confrontational conflict. As for men, their spending on leisure-time activities may well derive from a perceived need to assert elements of 'traditional masculine behaviour' over which they still have some control — and which women may tolerate through their own perceptions of how men should be (Chant 2007).

What becomes especially apparent through this qualitative research is the importance of local context in understanding poverty and the ways in which individual variables such as age and gender

can impact deprivation, and how they interact within the collective context of the household. Both individual and collective contexts are important in understanding the complexity of poverty analysis. Here, men's and women's roles within and outside the household shaped the way poverty is experienced by individuals. Men's and women's expectations of each other are played out within the family and affected the ways that resources and tasks are distributed and how individuals feel when deprived. For example, because women are typically expected to have primary responsibility for household and care work, education was generally seen as less important for them because they would end up working in the home, doing work that is often seen as less valuable or not requiring formal education. For women and girls, their roles and responsibilities in the domestic sphere predominantly shape life choices and have lifelong implications. The gendered dimensions of poverty and hardship identified in this paper not only have important implications for further research and methodology but also for poverty alleviation programs. Poverty is different for men and women, girls and boys, depending on both individual and collective contexts, and it is imperative that we measure poverty in a way that reveals rather than obscures these differences.

Policy Implications for Poverty Measurement

The findings in this paper point us to the areas of life that are particularly important from a policy and programming perspective if we are to tackle poverty and hardship in ways that meet the needs, interests and priorities of both women and men. The results clearly demonstrate that gender-blind measures of poverty are failing to reveal important gendered dimensions of poverty and hardship and the different priorities of poor men and poor women across the life course. There are important gender dimensions of poverty such as the way in which assets are distributed, gender differences in school enrolment and educational attainment, gender biases in control and spending of income, and hardships related to gender roles and identities that provide prospects for existing poverty measures

in Fiji to include more qualitative material of this nature. This could include a range of women's and men's capabilities, assets and entitlements (such as education, health status, land and property ownership), along with resources such as *time*, which is especially scarce for women given their unpaid tasks within the household. Recognising that not all data are quantifiable, efforts to increase the space given to qualitative gender-sensitive poverty analysis which assesses subjective wellbeing have an integral part to play in gendered poverty analysis. It is essential to look within as well as beyond household units to improve poverty line approaches in ways that increase their gender responsiveness.

From a poverty measurement perspective, this study offers scope for a gender-sensitive measure of poverty going beyond the household-level analysis and taking account of differentiation between women and men in their life stages, household circumstances and location. Blindness to, or insufficient appreciation of, differentiation among individuals within the household is pertinent to gendered poverty analysis. Apart from collecting sex-disaggregated data, age disaggregation would be of particular importance in helping to determine whether there are major generational differences in the incidence of poverty among women relative to men over time, as well as pointing to the key underlying processes. Empirical evidence in this paper shows how prevailing notions of gendered roles and identities within the household place women of all ages under greater pressure than men to subordinate their own needs to those of others. Clearly much remains to be done in respect of determining different types of gendered poverty and to devise policies which are sensitive to variations among women and between women and men in the household. The gendered impacts of poverty and of household responses to impoverishment are often missed in the design of anti-poverty policies and programs. Only by understanding the deeper knowledge of how women's wellbeing is affected by the social relations of gender within households, are anti-poverty interventions more likely to be effective in eliminating gendered poverty and hardships.

The collection of more gender-based information using qualitative tools can be a way to improve our understanding of the various ways in which women and men experience poverty within the household. In moving towards gender-sensitive measures of poverty in Fiji, this study is distinct from existing measures of poverty in three important ways. First, while existing studies of poverty in Fiji explore causes, ‘experiences and impacts of poverty in great depth, there are no studies of how the poor think poverty should be measured’ (Bessell 2014). Using participatory methods, this research paid greater attention to the lived experiences and priorities of individuals for whom poverty is a daily struggle. Second, poverty has always been measured at the household level but, as discussed in this paper, there is a need to reveal the extent and nature of poverty experienced by individuals within the household. Using the individual as the unit of analysis will not only pick up sex and age disaggregation in the collection, analysis and reporting of national surveys, but also offer insights into gender and generational nuances on the distribution and control mechanisms within the household. Such approaches are capable of producing additional data necessary to understand how poverty is experienced by women and men, and reveal the intersection between gender, poverty and other markers of identity such as age and ethnicity (Bessell 2010). Third, using feminist analysis of poverty this research moves beyond the limitations of existing data on poverty conceptualisation and measurement by contributing to the identification of dimensions and indicators capable of revealing the gendered nature of poverty in Fiji. Here the aim is not to dismiss the significance of existing studies such as the HIESs but to illuminate the poverty of individuals within the household as the basis for effective interventions.⁶

Conclusion

This paper draws out gender considerations in approaches to poverty measurement and conceptualisation by highlighting women’s and men’s experiences of poverty in Fiji. This required moving beyond money-metric measures of poverty

at the household level and taking into consideration experiences of poverty using qualitative and participatory methods. Aside from intra-household scrutiny, and consideration of factors beyond income, participatory tools such as the poverty ladder were useful in assessing the gender dimensions of poverty in Fiji. While it has not been possible in this paper to cover all the contributions made by feminist research to ‘engendering’ poverty analysis (Chant 2007), it has definitely expanded the understanding of poverty in ways that expose and illuminate its gendered dimensions. Findings from fieldwork in Fiji reveal that broader concepts of poverty are more useful than a focus purely on household income levels because they allow a better grasp of the gender disadvantage such as lack of power to control and make decisions about one’s life.

The gendered approach employed in this study provided for a more comprehensive understanding of poverty, and supported an integrated and dynamic approach that acknowledged the heterogeneous aspects of poverty not captured in typical household income-based measurements of poverty. The gender perspective allowed us to highlight the material, symbolic and cultural components of power relationships, which in turn determine gendered access to resources (material, social and cultural). The findings in this paper show that poverty is not only about money but also about factors such as power differences, which determine access to resources and opportunities. Women and men in this study almost never talked about income, but they frequently referred to assets they considered important. The set of assets poor people handle is diverse: physical, human, social and ecological, and these assets comprise a wide range of tangible and intangible resources — material and social — that individuals, households and communities use during moments of crisis (Narayan et al. 2009). The data provide not only a grounded demonstration that monetary incomes are for many of the poor in Fiji only a parcel of a much wider set of possible assets, but also how gender conveys the complexity of women’s and men’s lives in poor households.

The idea that gender-sensitive frameworks for poverty analysis should become broader is highly

desirable, although this does not necessarily entail the rejection of existing frameworks. While poverty lines using income and expenditure approaches fall short of representing key dimensions of gendered poverty, it remains vital to know about income and consumption, and how these are changing among women and men and within households over time. Nevertheless, there is clearly scope to improve poverty line approaches in ways that increase gender responsiveness. It is hoped that findings from this study will lead to the review of more conventional measurement methods and an exploration of 'gendered alternatives', thus making a significant contribution to the ongoing debate on poverty definitions and measurement in Fiji and the Pacific. This is a complex area in which examples of best practices to date are limited, but this should not detract from confronting the challenge. As indicated in this paper, for example, the private sphere of intra-household relations is often a major obstacle to women's assertion of power and access to wellbeing. Recalling Kabeer's (1999) cautionary observations on strategies for female empowerment, it is clear that men's responses and reactions are a vital part of the picture in gendered meanings, conceptualisation and measurement of poverty.

This research also represents a potentially important step towards enhancing the gender responsiveness of poverty assessment. If poverty is taken to be an essentially contested concept, it is to be expected that people's understandings of what it means to be poor will vary. In all communities, prevailing conceptions of poverty will be shaped by customary ideas about what is necessary for supporting life and for social respectability. This means that it makes no sense to seek a single best metric capable of identifying poverty at all times and in all places. As Bryant-Tokalau (2012: 200) notes, while recognising that statistics do not provide the full picture of poverty in Fiji, personal stories of people living in conditions of hardship may provide a deeper understanding of daily life. Different poverty standards must be developed in different contexts to measure poverty among diverse populations for different purposes.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by the Australian Research Council-funded linkage project Assessing Development: Designing Better Indices of Poverty and Gender Equity (LP: 0989385), made possible by partnerships with the Australian National University, Oxfam Great Britain Southern Africa, International Women's Development Agency, Philippine Health and Social Science Association, the University of Colorado at Boulder, and Oxfam America. Most of the information in this paper draws heavily from the national and site reports and data from two phases of data collection from Fiji. Above all, many thanks to the participants who have been more than generous sharing their lives and experiences.

Although the paper draws on the project's work, all errors remain the author's.

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Endnotes

- 1 <www.iwda.org.au/research/individual-deprivation-measure/>.
- 2 The process is to first estimate what income would be needed to ensure a minimum living standard for a 'standard household or family' comprising two adults (assumed working) and three children (who are the equivalent of two adults), making a total of four adult equivalents for the standard family. This process includes calculating the food poverty line (which is

the cost of a basket of foods necessary to provide the basic nutritional diet for the standard family) and a 'non-food poverty line' (which is the cost of the basic non-food requirements such as housing, clothing and education).

- 3 The descendants of the early settlers in Fiji are known as *iTaukei* and are the 'native' people in Fiji. The other main ethnic group is Indo-Fijians, who first arrived in Fiji as indentured labourers, brought by British colonisers to work on sugarcane plantations. As of 2013, it is estimated that *iTaukei* make up 57 per cent of the Fijian population and Indo-Fijians 38 per cent.
- 4 Throughout the paper, no names of places and participants are used to protect anonymity.
- 5 In Fiji, the term 'grog' refers to an intoxicating drink made by pounding sun-dried kava root into a fine powder and mixing it with cold water. Traditionally, grog is drunk from the half-shell of a coconut, called a *bilo*, whereas alcohol in Fiji refers to beer, rum, gin and whisky. In the Australian context, grog may refer to any alcoholic drink.
- 6 This first phase of research findings from Fiji informed the conceptualisation and development of a gender-sensitive individual deprivation measure (IDM) as part of the transnational feminist research project. A pilot of the IDM is planned for Fiji in 2015, with the aim of further testing and refining the measure.

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The State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program acknowledges the generous support from the Australian Government for the production of this Discussion Paper.

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