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## INTRA-HOUSEHOLD IMPACT ASSESSMENT: ISSUES AND PARTICIPATORY TOOLS

*Linda Mayoux, WISE Associate*

Many impact assessments attempt to collect data only at the household level. This is true of most donor and government poverty assessments<sup>1</sup>. Justifications for the focus on the household have varied. On the one hand it is asserted that looking at intra-household processes is too complex for the limited budgets and skills of practitioners and programmes (eg Zeller 2004). On the other there is a lot of resistance from practitioners on the

grounds that asking such questions is socially divisive.<sup>2</sup>

However, although household-level analysis may appear to have an intuitive and universal basis, it ignores the realities of interpersonal relations in many cultures and contexts. The assumption that there are easily-identifiable entities which can be called 'households' which have the same level of importance in determining peoples' poverty by income

1 See for example the World Bank Livelihood Statistics Management Surveys (LSMS), most PRSPs and the current USAID/IRIS project to devise tools for monitoring poverty targeting. See also overview of poverty assessment tools in Zeller 2004.

2 This has been a common response from many male and female senior staff at workshops facilitated by the author on Microfinance and Gender – though the importance of looking at inequalities within the household is often asserted by field staff (male and female) who deal directly with the consequences of intra-household conflicts for repayment as well as women themselves.



and/or other measures across cultures and contexts, or even for individuals in the same locality is misplaced. Theoretical literature, empirical research and methodological advances has increasingly demonstrated that any attempt to extrapolate from household data to individuals is highly misleading. This is particularly evident in the gender literature<sup>3</sup> but also implications for other dimensions of intra-household inequality: age, disability and other dimensions of discrimination (Bolt and Bird 2003). Moreover intrahousehold inequalities have implications not only for individual-level assessment (Cloke 2001), but also for the accuracy of household-level data and also for aggregate levels of poverty<sup>4</sup>.

Understanding intra-household inequalities is not only of academic importance in terms of the rigour and accuracy of assessment findings. It is also of practical policy importance:

<sup>3</sup> See overview of debates in for example Chant 2003 and references therein and papers on the family in Dwyer and Bruce eds 1988, Beneria and Bisnath eds 2001 and Kabeer ed 1997 amongst many others.

<sup>4</sup> See a World Bank study by Haddad and Kanbur 1990 which found that measuring at the household level underestimated poverty by over 25-30%.

- assessing poverty at the household level may lead to mistargeting of poverty interventions like micro-finance through over or underestimating poverty levels of individuals within these households.
- existing patterns of intra household inequality will affect the poverty outcomes of enterprise interventions, the impact on gender equity and women's empowerment and is also likely to affect impact on children.
- enterprise development may have positive or negative impacts on patterns of intra-household decision-making. In some cases it may promote gender equity within the household. In others it may further disadvantage women or lead to undesirable changes in men's roles and responsibilities.
- intrahousehold inequalities affect the very success and sustainability of

interventions because of differing degrees of support and resistance to interventions which may positively or adversely impact the interests of particular individuals (Haddad et al eds 1997).

It is important therefore that impact assessments look not only at impacts at an aggregate household or enterprise level, but on individuals and relations within the household. Understanding intra-household inequalities is important not only for measuring impacts on incomes. It is particularly important when assessment is in terms of wider definitions of poverty: vulnerability, voice and empowerment. These are critical dimensions of longer term sustainability of any income impacts. Moreover impacts on intra-household relations are often of themselves the subject of impact assessment, not only in terms of gender but also other dimensions of intra-household discrimination such as age (children and elderly).

At the same time intra-household assessment poses many challenges. There is wide cultural, and also individual, variation in:



- **What 'households' are:** Boundaries, structures and relationships between households, family and wider kinship networks.
- **What they are supposed to do:** The degree of specificity with which (often competing) customary norms and/or formal legal codes allocate individual or collective responsibilities/ rights to different levels in these structures.
- **What they actually do:** The degree and ways in which these norms, structures and networks determine actual individual access to and control over power and resources: incomes, assets, expenditure, consumption and decision-making.
- **Possibilities for change in inequality:** The degree to which individuals are able to bargain and negotiate according to different and often competing codes in relation to individual circumstances in order to defend their interests and/or counter perceived or actual inequalities and injustice.

This new paper for the EDIAIS website attempts to address some of these issues.

Part 1 gives an overview of the main debates, evidence and key challenges for intrahousehold assessment.

Part 2 proposes an integrated participatory, qualitative and quantitative methodology for looking at one specific dimension: intra-household economic decision-making.

Part 3 looks at some of the implications for other dimensions of intra-household difference and inequality and particularly at how 'extractive' investigation can form the basis for ongoing action learning by communities and practitioners.

## REFERENCES

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Sen, A. (1990). Gender and Cooperative Conflicts. In I. Tinker (Ed.), Persistent Inequalities: Women and World Development (pp. 123-149). Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Zeller, M. (2004). Review of Poverty Assessment Tools. Washington DC: IRIS.

## Related resources

### **The intrahousehold disadvantages framework: framework for the analysis of intra-household difference and inequality.**

*Bolt, V.J. and Bird, K. CPRC Working paper No 32 Chronic Poverty Research Centre 2003*

[www.chronicpoverty.org/pdfs/KBNo32.pdf](http://www.chronicpoverty.org/pdfs/KBNo32.pdf)

Numerous culturally, temporally and spatially specific dimensions of social difference affect intrahousehold decision-making and resource allocation. To date development research has tended to focus on gender. This paper presents a critical analysis of existing gender

frameworks, focusing on their applicability to analysing other dimensions of intrahousehold difference. This identifies a set of tools and concepts which provide a starting point from which to examine these other asymmetries. A two-tier framework is proposed. The first tier is designed to identify various clusters of disadvantage that exist within the community; to examine what individuals continue to do, and with what resources, despite their disadvantages; to locate their disadvantage in the wider socio-economic context and to identify their practical and strategic needs. The second tier examines in detail two or three households in which a member characterised by a "cluster of disadvantage" lives. These tools and concepts are a starting point for the critical analysis of intrahousehold inequality. The Intrahousehold Disadvantages Framework should provide a schematic map showing the implications of disadvantage at the community and intrahousehold level – to

which detail can be added.

### **Gender, household decisions, and development: a synthesis of recent research**

*Quisumbing, A. (Ed). International Food Policy Research Institute 2003*  
[www.ifpri.org/pubs/jhu/householdsgender.htm](http://www.ifpri.org/pubs/jhu/householdsgender.htm)

Since the early 1990s, a growing literature has paid increasing attention to the role that intrahousehold resource allocation plays in affecting the outcome of development policy. The growth of this literature has been catalyzed by many factors: (1) the development of new models of household decisionmaking; (2) an increased awareness that paying attention to intrahousehold allocation issues matters in the design and implementation of development policy; (3) the growing availability of data from developing and developed countries with which to test alternative household models; and (4) the use of qualitative methods, arising from increased collaboration with anthropologists and other social scientists, to understand non-economic dimensions of human behaviour. The main objective of this book is to synthesize new knowledge on intrahousehold



allocation, drawing from the gender and intrahousehold research program of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and based on specially-designed household surveys in developing countries

### **Gender and rural households in Malawi.**

*Malusi, M. Laurentian University. Ontario, Canada 2004.*

[www.prgaprogram.org/modules/DownloadsPlus/uploads/Hosted\\_documents/gender\\_analysis\\_in\\_Malawi.pdf](http://www.prgaprogram.org/modules/DownloadsPlus/uploads/Hosted_documents/gender_analysis_in_Malawi.pdf)

There is growing interest in understanding gender relations in rural households. This document brings together information that should help in understanding of the day-to-day lives of rural men and women and how their conditions are influenced and shaped by gender. Priority has been given to information that is relevant to understanding household differentiation including structures and composition, headship status, income generation and resource distribution, decision responsibilities and patterns. The document attempts to pinpoint major issues related to household circumstances such as the dominance of men in controlling income and resources, economic insecurity and vulnerability of women in male headed

households, power struggles within decision making levels and patterns and the problem of hunger and food insecurity repeatedly experienced by rural families.

### **New contributions to the analysis of poverty: methodological and conceptual challenges to understanding poverty from a gender perspective**

*Chant, S. United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) 2003*

[www.siyanda.org/static/chant\\_povanalysis.htm](http://www.siyanda.org/static/chant_povanalysis.htm)

Three decades of feminist research have had an impact on poverty analysis. However, the impact on poverty itself has been weaker. Women still make up an estimated two thirds of the poor and this proportion appears to be rising. This trend is exacerbated by the gender blindness which persists in parts of mainstream poverty analysis in spite of the feminist insights. Simplistic reactions against the gender blindness have also posed problems. For example, assumptions have been made that

female headed households are the poorest of the poor. However, some female headed households are not worse off than male headed households, and focusing resources on female headed households may not be the most effective way to combat poverty. Instead, interventions may be more effective if they strive to redress gender inequalities in different arenas such as the labour market, legal institutions, and the home. With a focus on Latin America, this paper outlines concepts and methodologies needed to understand poverty from a gender perspective, continued obstacles to the inclusion of gender, and future directions for policy and research.

### **Power and privileges - on gender discrimination and poverty and power and privileges**

*Johnsson-Latham, G. Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Sweden 2004*

[www.siyanda.org/static/johnsson\\_powerandprivileges.htm](http://www.siyanda.org/static/johnsson_powerandprivileges.htm)

How can mainstream approaches to poverty analysis become more gender-sensitive? This document highlights the ways in which mainstream approaches to poverty analysis overlook the



unique ways in which women and men experience poverty. Power imbalances between women and men are identified as the principle barrier, where existing power structures favour men and therefore overlook the costs to women of poverty in terms of death, violence and lack of respect. Some issues highlighted include that there is unequal resource distribution within families, particularly poor ones; and there are no 'neutral' poverty reduction strategies, since where gender is overlooked, existing gender inequality will be reproduced, invariably leaving women in relative disadvantage. Recent legislation coming out of Sweden emphasises the need for a rights-based approach to tackling women's poverty and their right to equality

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<http://www.enterprise-impact.org.uk/newsletter/index.shtml>

