

The 'Feminisation of Poverty'

The use of a concept

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This study is one of a series of working papers commissioned by the Poverty Project at Sida's Division for Policy and Socio-Economic Analysis or closely related to its objectives. The project was initiated in 1999 in order to follow-up and revise Sida's Poverty Programme which was adopted in 1996. The aim of the studies is twofold: i) to document and discuss Sida's experiences of working with poverty reduction; ii) to present analyses concerning areas deemed to be of particular relevance for efforts to reduce poverty.

A list of the working papers is attached in an appendix. For more information please contact the Policy Division, Sida, Se-105 25, Stockholm, Sweden.

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Acronyms

DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
GAD	Gender and Development
GNP	Gross National Product
HDR	Human Development Report
HDI	Human Development Index
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IYW	International Year for Women (1975)
ICRW	International Centre for Research on Women
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
POA	Platform of Action (here referring to the outcome of the 4 th International Conference of Women, Beijing 1995)
Sida	Swedish International Development Authority
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Fund for Children
WB	World Bank
WID	Women in Development
WDR	World Development Report
WW II	World War II

I. Executive Summary

The concept of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ is used extensively in the development debate and it has meant three distinct things: that women compared to men have a higher incidence of poverty; that women’s poverty is more severe than men’s; and that the incidence of poverty among women is increasing compared to that of men. However, within the framework of Sida’s revision of the Action Programme to reduce poverty and the forthcoming revision of the Action Programme on gender equality, the present study attempts to give an initial overview of how the concept has been used, by whom, in what context, and where possible, why it has been used the way it has. Recognising the complexity in this process, the aim here is to shed some light on the process and to make the reader question the use of ‘assumed concepts’.

The study has been divided in two phases, including a visit to the UK to search the literature and interview key researchers in the field of women/gender and poverty. The present study is a desk study based on literature in the women/gender and development field as well as key Sida policy documents. The study follows the debate in historical order from the 1950–60s to the present.

Tracing the origins of the term ‘feminisation of poverty’

The conceptualisation of ‘feminisation of poverty’ as a term has in this study been traced to the debate encompassing women/gender and poverty. Even though other issues might be contributing to the process, it is argued here that the use and the conceptualisation of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ has been coloured by two broad areas of concern: the general development debate and feminists’ interests. The intersection of these two concerns with poverty has paved the ground for the ‘feminisation of poverty’ as a concept, both to how the term has been conceptualised as well as to the critique of its use. This study has summarised the debate in terms of both the (a) actors and interests and the (b) main issues that have been debated over time.

Actors and interests

General development debate

The different actors in the debate have different roles and interests. Multilateral actors such as the UN and the World Bank, through their national government members, formulate policies which reflect their priorities and awareness. However, researchers and advocacy groups within civil society also influence the debate, often in terms of critique. The shift from the early modernisation theories, through the Basic Needs Strategy and the Structural Adjustment Programmes framed by an income-based definition of poverty, towards a multidimensional notion of poverty requiring a complex array of measures, reflects this process.

Feminist interests

The voices and arguments of the women’s movement have been pivotal in highlighting the issues important to women in low-income countries. Feminist interests, however, have been raised both within multilaterals and other decision- and policymaking bodies and outside them by researchers, NGOs, and other advocacy groups. The international conferences for women’s issues have been important for the exchange of experiences and the development of strategies and issues that needed to be addressed in and by the women’s movement. Since the early days of ‘women in development’ (WID) in the 1970s women’s different interests have become interwoven. From a period of clear distinction between so-called Northern women’s calls for equality, Southern women’s concern for addressing everyday needs, and Eastern

women's concern for peace, an awareness of the complexities of gender power relations other aspects of discrimination and vulnerability has evolved. The distinction between the voices arguing for the different aspects cannot easily be disentangled. Commonalties and differences are integrated in the discourse. Gender equality remains a goal of the women's movement; yet poverty, violence, and conflict are recurring themes in many contexts. The best ways to achieve change have been and continue to be debated.

An important shift since the 1950s is that the interests of the women's movement and those of the general debate have increasingly coincided, and these interests are today largely interwoven. At the intersection of these interests is the common concern for poor women.

Main issues over time

The increasing awareness during the 1970s of the existence and vulnerability of female-headed households has over the years alarmed researchers and advocates. Thus, the concept of the 'feminisation of poverty' has, since the then and throughout the 1980s and 1990s, been used and linked to the debate about the vulnerability of female-headed households.

The impact of macro-economic policies on women has also been an area of concern. During the 1980s the 'feminisation of poverty' concept was largely used to highlight the impact of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) on poor women; it was argued that SAPs increased women's already heavy burden.

During the 1990s the term continued to be used, but increasingly researchers questioned the meaning and use of the term. Criticisms stressed the variety in female-headed households, and highlighted how other dimensions of women's vulnerability influenced the situation of poor women too, quite differently from men. Then the long-assumed definition of poverty – which was limited to economic terms – grew during the 1990s into a multidimensional definition which encompassed the complexity of factors which influence the situation of poor women and men. Furthermore, the increasing focus on *gender* in the field of development, as opposed to the earlier focus on *women*, demonstrated the complex link between gender and poverty, and that there were no simple or general answers on how to best address the situation of poor women.

Thus, the conceptualisation of the 'feminisation of poverty' has in this process emerged as a term that:

- increased awareness of the existence of female-headed households (1970s);
- illustrated the vulnerability of these households (late 1970s and 1980s);
- illustrated the great number of women living in poverty;
- illustrating the impact of macro-economic policies on women; and
- called for women to be recognised in the development process (from 1970s until present).

Sidas policies

Sidas policies and priorities tend to reflect the overall changes in the development debate globally. Sida has been quick to address gender equality in the framework of development cooperation.

In terms of the use of the 'feminisation of poverty', it is noteworthy that it was addressed in Sida's Action Plan for the Women's Dimension in Development Assistance (from 1985) and in the Poverty Action Programme (from 1996). The complex link between gender and poverty was given far more nuance in the Gender Action Programme (from 1997) as well as in the background analysis to the Poverty Action Programme in the report 'Promoting Sustainable Livelihoods'. Also important is the priority given in the

Poverty Action Programme to the target groups of women-headed households, and mothers and children. The focus on these specific groups is noteworthy given the thorough analysis of the link between poverty and gender, particularly as relates to the diversity among female-headed households as described in the report 'Promoting Sustainable Livelihoods'.

Lastly it is observed that given Sida's call for integrating the poverty reduction and gender equality programmes, the link between poverty and gender was incorporated in the analysis and the work preceding the Action Programmes on Poverty and Gender respectively in 1996. However, it is noteworthy that the Action Programme on Poverty does not reflect the thorough analysis of the link between poverty and gender; instead the focus is on addressing '*specifically poor women and children*'. This reflects a process of simplification that could be counterproductive to the original analysis.

Conclusions

Perceptions and discourses

Throughout the debate there has been a tendency to visualise the vulnerability of women, to focus in terms of 'their needs' and to stress their poverty.

Various actors have contributed to this:

- Western/Northern researchers and policymakers have generalised perceptions of women in the South as having the same roles as western women.
- Western/Northern feminists have advocated for the 'poor sisters' in the South.
- Southern women have called for their specific needs.
- 'Femocrats' have adapted to male-biased organisational language and culture.

Conflation of goals and means

At the intersection of poverty and gender concerns there is a conflation of goals and means. This seems to relate to the:

- definition of poverty, that is the pure economic notion of poverty has obscured other aspects of vulnerability;
- focus in development on 'people in need', limiting also the focus on women to 'poor women'; and
- construction of women in general and Southern women in particular as 'needy'.

Sweeping generalisations vs. context specific analysis

The 'Women in Development' (WID) and later 'Gender and Development' (GAD) research has evidenced the diversity between women as well as the impact of gender on all aspects of human life. Thus, any generalisation must always be refined for context-specific exceptions. Furthermore the generalisations that describe women as poor risk obscuring women's potential and strength. Kabeer's statement from 1996 remains valid in the development context: '*not all women are poor and not all poor people are women... all women suffer from discrimination*' (Kabeer 1996:20 in Chant 1997:43). Far too many women are poor, and in some contexts the number of women in poverty is increasing. Yet, given the diversity among women and the specificity of each context, it seems more important to have a gender-aware approach to poverty than to generalise and simplify the problems.

Instrumentalism vs. strategy

During the 1990s it was increasingly argued that the conflation of poverty with gender goals and the portrayal of women as poor was an instrumental use of women's situation to achieve other ends. Instrumentalism may be another word for strategy, however. An adapted language and use of terms may be strategic in order to achieve at least something in an institutional context which is coloured by diverse interests.

Implications for Sida

Sida's aim in integrating the focus on poverty reduction with the promotion of gender equality remains central. Yet this study indicates that a few issues are worth stressing:

- Generalisations should be used with care and should always be complemented with context-specific analysis.
- There is a need for a continuous exploration of the complex link between poverty, gender, and other socio-cultural aspects. This is particularly important in the local context.
- The choice of priority target group in the present Poverty Action Programme reflects the interest in and focus on female-headed households as well as on women as mothers. In the forthcoming Poverty Strategy there should be an overall gender perspective, and a focus on minority groups in generalised terms should be avoided.
- There is a need for a continuous exploration and development of methods for overcoming gender blindness in the institutional context of development policy, planning, and practice.

Recommendations

Recommendations for further studies are given in Section VI and relate to:

- a theoretically oriented continuation of the present study complemented with interviews and research into original documentation;
- institutional aspects on the conceptualisation of the term 'feminisation of poverty';
- the interdependency between donors, researchers, and NGOs and its impact on the term 'feminisation of poverty';
- the implications of the process as described in this study for programming and implementation of policy; and
- the representation of women in the and media.

II.introduction

Objective and scope

‘Gender’ and/or ‘Women and poverty’ have been the subject of much attention in development literature and the international development debate. It has been argued that Diane Pearce coined the term ‘feminisation of poverty’ in 1978, a term which has since become a catch phrase (Allen 1992:107).¹ The concept ‘feminisation of poverty’ is used extensively and has, according to Cagatay (1998:1), meant three distinct things:

- *Women compared to men have a higher incidence of poverty.*
- *Women’s poverty is more severe than men’s.*
- *Over time, the incidence of poverty among women is increasing compared to men.*

Research explores continuously the meaning and use of these notions,² but there is a lack of a systematic analysis of the process of the conceptualisation and use of the term. Thus, this paper attempts to give an initial overview of how the concept has been used, by whom, in what context, and, where possible, why it has been used as it has. Recognising the complexity in this process, the aim here is to shed some light on the process and to make the reader question the use of ‘assumed concepts’.

This study has been commissioned by Sida/Policy as an input into the revision of Sida’s current Action Programme to reduce poverty, as well as for the upcoming task of revising the Action Programme on gender equality.

The aims of the study include:

- To identify the origin of the concept of the ‘feminisation of poverty’.
- To identify the most important actors who have contributed to the process of the development and application of the concept.
- To identify the major strategies used by key stakeholders in this process, institutions as well as individuals, e.g. influential researchers and policymakers.
- To identify and analyse the major consequences of the this process for a development agency such as Sida, e.g. what understandings of the situation of women and men it has given rise to, and if/ how the concept has been operationalised, applied, and empirically validated.

Methodology

Methods and activities

The study has been divided in two phases. In May 2001 the consultant conducted a study trip to the UK. Interviews were held at the University of Sussex, IDS and the University of East Anglia with some of the leading experts in the field of poverty and gender. An inception report was prepared for Sida (11/07/01) which presented the results of the study trip. The inception report was discussed with Sida/Policy representatives in August 2001. With reference to these discussions and an initial overview reading of the literature, a modified outline of the study was presented.

¹ Allen (1992) cites Diane Pearce (1978) in a paper discussing women’s poverty and economic development in industrialised and development countries. No reference is made to the context in which Pearce used the term.

² See for instance overviews by Baden et al. I and II (1998a, b), Moghadam (1997), and Cagatay (1998).

Sida commissioned a briefing paper on the feminisation of poverty from IDS/BRIDGE, which serves as background to the present paper (BRIDGE 2001).

This study is a desk study based on development literature and relevant documentation, particularly within the field of women/gender and development. The literature has been reviewed in an historical order from pre-1970 to the present by asking the following main questions:

- Who has used the concept ‘feminisation of poverty’? Have there been various actors? Who were they? How can they be distinguished?
- How has it been used? Has it had different meaning for different actors? If so, why?
- What has the concept meant? Has it had different meanings to different users? What were the differences?
- Why has it been used as it has? Is it possible to single out specific reasons? Specific single events? What other questions may be posed?
- What other issues are interlinked and may have had an impact on the conceptualisation process?

There is a full list of the literature reviewed in Annex B. The search for relevant material has centred on words such as ‘feminisation of poverty’, ‘women in poverty’, ‘gender and poverty’, poverty, feminisation. The *UNDP Human Development Reports* (HDR) and the *World Bank Reports* have been reviewed from 1990 to the present.

The study has further reviewed some key Sida policy documents to learn how Sida has conceptualised women and poverty, particularly focusing on the concept the ‘feminisation of poverty’.

During the study questions arose which may enlighten the process of conceptualisation. How were women perceived in the development context during different periods? What were the underlying assumptions about women? Were there any differences between different types of women? What other terms have been used instead of poverty (vulnerable groups, low-income, etc.)?

Limitations

The study gives an insight into the trends and issues related to the women/gender and poverty debate as it seems to have impacted on the conceptualisation of the ‘feminisation of poverty’. However for a full account of the research and debate related to gender and poverty please refer to overviews made elsewhere (Moghadan 1997, Baden et. al. (1998a, b), Cagatay 1998).

The study would have benefited from a more thorough discussion of the different understandings and definitions of poverty over the years as well as different approaches to poverty reduction and eradication. Such a focus is recommended for a future, complementary study.

Development researchers who have done overview studies and retrospective research – such as Buvinic, Moser, Tinker, and Parpart have provided a useful overview of the first development decades, as it has been difficult to trace original texts. The later literature, from the mid-80s onwards, has been difficult to cover fully because of its quantity and richness- however, an overview is provided of the key issues in the debate.

Definitions of terms

As this study explores the definition of terms, the term ‘feminisation of poverty’ is defined throughout the report whenever relevant. There is a list of examples of definitions of the feminisation of poverty in Annex A.

Box 1 defines the two main approaches in the ‘women/gender and development discourse’ – ‘Women in Development’ (WID) and ‘Gender and Development’ (GAD) – to which reference is made throughout the report.

Box 1: Definition of WID and GAD

Women in Development: WID

‘The WID approach usually seeks to integrate women in development by making more resources available to women, in an effort to increase women’s efficiency in their existing roles’ (Williams 1999:7).

The WID approach tends to view women as a special group that needs specific activities, inputs, and support. The approach risks considering women as a homogenous group and not recognising the differences between women. Another risk is that the approach focuses on ‘women only’ activities. These are often planned separately from the main interventions and tend to marginalise the women involved. The WID approach evolved during the 1970s.

Gender and Development-GAD

‘The GAD approach seeks to base interventions on the analysis of men’s and women’s roles in an effort to empower women to improve their position relative to men in ways which will benefit and transform society as a whole’ (ibid).

The basic assumption of the GAD approach is that women’s situation is framed by gender relations which are socially constructed. Gender relations determine the division of labour, responsibilities, opportunities, and rights. Thus the situation for women and men, and how they relate to each other, varies according to ethnicity, culture, age, socio-economic status, class, and other kinds of social differentiation. Gender relations are therefore context- and situation-specific.

Women and men have different life courses and development policies affect them differently. Therefore, the GAD approach focuses less on providing equal treatment for men and women, as this does not ensure equal outcomes, but rather takes those steps that are needed to ensure equal outcomes (Moser 1993; Rathgeber 1995). The GAD approach developed during the late 1980s and 1990s.

‘Gender analysis’ entails observing, visualising and analysing differences between men and women. A ‘gender perspective’ considers these differences and adapts the activities accordingly in order to meet the different needs most efficiently and fairly.

III. The ‘Feminisation of Poverty’: the use of a concept

In this chapter the key trends and issues are presented which seem to be linked or have an impact on the conceptualisation of the ‘feminisation of poverty’. The focus is on answering the questions who, how, and what. The chapter is divided into four sections, which are in chronological order. Each section introduces the general trends in the development discourse and describes how poverty has been addressed. The main elements in the development of the WID/GAD field are addressed. General perceptions about women, and specifically assumptions about women in the South, are also illustrated. The role and voice of both the different actors and the key events are interwoven in the text.

Before 1970: Where are the women? At home!

The lack of interest in women in development policy

The ‘feminisation of poverty’ concept has been difficult to trace in the period before the 1970s. It has been argued that women were noticeably absent from discussion of development theory and practice during the first UN Decade (1960–70) (Young 1993). Poor women had been beneficiaries of welfare programmes since World War II, however (Buvinic 1983). It is therefore important to explore the general development discussions as well as those specifically related to women during this period to see if there was anything in the discussion that may have impacted on the conceptualisation of the ‘feminisation of poverty’.

Moser (1993) has analysed the many interventions and policy initiatives designed to assist low-income women since this period. Building on the work of Mayra Buvinic (1983) she distinguishes between approaches in terms of ‘welfare’, ‘equity’, ‘anti-poverty’, ‘efficiency’, and ‘empowerment’. She argues that the concern for low-income women’s needs coincides historically with the recognition of women’s important role in development. Thus the approaches that target women specifically mirror general trends in Third World Development policy,³ from modernisation policies of accelerated growth through basic needs strategies associated with distribution, to the compensatory measures associated with structural adjustment (Buvinic 1993:55).⁴

The pre-WID approach: mothers’ needs

Before the 1970s the traditional approaches to economic modernisation and social welfare in both the West and the developing world neglected the contributions and concerns of women (Bandarage 1984). At that time ideas of development and modernisation could be traced back to the nineteenth century when ‘civilisation’ (i.e. adopting western values) and development were equated. Economic and political development were seen as the key features of modernity. This approach informed early ‘Third World development’ from the beginning of the twentieth century up to the 1960s (Papart 1995). In the 1960s poverty was discussed in terms of income level, with an emphasis on growth, reflected in macro-economic indicators like GNP/head (Maxwell 1999).

Moser argues that the welfare approach is the earliest approach towards women in the development process and was introduced in the 1950s and 1960s. It can be identified as ‘pre-WID’. Its origins can be traced to models of social welfare which were first introduced by colonial authorities in many Third World countries prior to independence (Moser 1993:58). Social welfare during this period a low priority,

³ The ‘Third World’, ‘developing countries’ and the ‘South’ are used interchangeably as they are used in the texts reviewed.

⁴ Moser’s framework is useful for framing and contextualising the various approaches to women in the development debate. While the framework is mentioned whenever relevant, it is not used consistently to frame this study.

as it was the maintenance of stable conditions for trade and agricultural and mineral expansion that was considered important. After the end of WWII, the welfare programmes initiated in Europe and specifically targeted at 'vulnerable groups' identified women as beneficiaries. Emergency relief aid was targeted at women as they were primarily concerned with their family's welfare. The mainstream approach towards development was financial aid for economic growth. Thus, these two approaches were replicated in development policy towards the Third World.

Women were identified as 'vulnerable' groups along with the disabled, sick, orphaned, and elderly and were treated differently than the male population. The target group of development was the homogeneous community, where women's need were taken care by the 'the family', a homogeneous unit where the benefit of all was assumed (Young 1993:18–19).

The welfare approach was based on a number of assumptions (Young 1993:19; Moser 1993:58), which reveal how the role of women in development was perceived:

- 'Women are passive recipients of development rather than participants.'
- 'Motherhood is the most important role for women in society, women were seen as mothers and housewives.'
- 'Child bearing and -rearing is the most effective role for women in all aspects of economic development.'

Typical programmes targeting women at the time involved health, family planning, and instruction on nutrition, childcare, and home economics. Home economics '*at times meant flower arranging and cake-baking in contexts where there were few flowers and no ovens*' (Germaine 1977:163). Programmes and policies for women ignored the role of women as producers.

The term 'poverty' is not much addressed in the literature reviewed from this time. A few years later Adrienne Germaine addressed the issue of poor rural women in 'Poor rural women: A policy perspective' (1977). She describes five 'myths' about the nature of the reality of poor women which dominated the discussion at the time on whether and how to act on this (1977:165–8):

- 'An interest in women in any roles other than mother is culturally imperialistic, imposing a Western feminist ideology on other quite different cultures.'
- 'Support for women's non-mothering roles must necessarily lead toward destruction of the family.'
- 'Development problems must be resolved first and then we can worry about equal opportunities, rights and benefits for women.'
- 'Attempts to employ women will necessarily exacerbate unemployment problems.'
- 'Take care of development and women's roles and status will automatically be improved'.

Such assumptions illustrate well the prevailing climate which feminists like Margaret Mead, Esther Bose-rup, Adrienne Germaine and many others deconstructed by the end of the 1960s and beginning of early 1970s.

Key issues that seem to have had an impact on the conceptualisation of 'feminisation of poverty' before the 1970s.

Development

- Economic and political development were seen as key features of modernity.
- The priority in Third World policy was the maintenance of stable conditions for trade and agricultural and mineral expansion.
- The mainstream approach was financial aid for economic growth.

Poverty

- Poverty was discussed in terms of level of income (GNP/head).
- The target group of development was the homogeneous community in which all members of its family units were taken care of.

Gender

- Poor women were seen as beneficiaries of welfare programmes (not agents).
- Women were identified as a 'vulnerable' group alongside the disabled, orphaned, sick, etc.
- Assumptions were made that women's needs would be taken care of by the homogenous 'family'.
- Assumptions about women globally were based on western ideas about the roles of women and men.

The 1970s: Who are the Poor? They must produce!

During the 1970s the concern for women's issues developed dramatically. The women's movement grew in strength within the UN, bilateral organisations, and NGOs (Young 1993). Researchers, the women's movement, and other advocates lobbied, argued loudly, and demanded attention. During this period the interest in poverty, learning about the poor, and addressing their needs also became important. Various trends and concerns developed and were discussed among researchers, practitioners, and decisionmakers. During this period the 'feminisation of poverty' as a concept was first heard, and was very much linked to the growing awareness on the vulnerability of female-headed households, primarily in the USA.

It was during the 1970s that distinguished actors in the 'Women in Development' field emerged. Irene Tinker argues that the field encompasses the thoughts and goals of 'advocates', 'practitioners', and 'scholars' who may have different goals and activities, depending on their role. During the 1970s the role of development agencies, the so-called 'practitioners', became important. Even though anthropological research was important during the 1960s for the early advocates of women's concerns, the studies of the impact of development on women during the 1970s was stimulated and often funded by development agencies. On the other hand, through such studies, the agencies were carrying out policy directives which had resulted from earlier advocacy (Tinker 1990).

The 'Basic Needs Strategy'

In the so-called 'Second Development Decade', 1970–80, women's issues and development were conceptually linked. Development planners shifted from looking at economic growth to issues of equity in distributional patterns, and targeting of the poor (Young 1993). It had been widely recognised by the early

1970s that modernisation theory had not succeeded. The strategies based on accelerated growth and maximising GNP had failed either to redistribute income or to solve the problems of Third World poverty and unemployment. Financial benefits had not ‘trickled down’ to the poor. In 1972 the World Bank officially shifted from a preoccupation with economic growth to a broader concern with the eradication of absolute poverty and the promotion of ‘Redistribution with Growth’ (Moser 1993:67).

Strategies for poverty eradication were part of a belief in the importance of ‘growth with distribution’ and of meeting basic needs through focused government policies (Sen 1999).

A new strategy was designed to improve directly the income levels of the poor: the ‘Basic Needs Strategy’, the main purpose of which was to meet the basic needs of the population. The concept of income-poverty broadened to a wider set of needs, including lack of access to health, education, and other services (Maxwell 1999).

The greater concern with distribution led to research into the condition of the poor and the poorest. It became necessary to ask: Who are the poor? Low-income women were identified as a key target group for two main reasons. First, the failure of ‘trickle down’ was partially attributed to the fact that women had been ignored in the previous development plans. Second, it was acknowledged that women in the poorest strata were the ones who contributed most significantly to their family’s basic needs (Moser 1993, Young 1993, Buvinic 1983). Thus, low-income women became a particular target of special assistance.

Women are underrated: bring them in!

During this period widespread dissatisfaction with the welfare approach to programmes aimed at women grew, although different actors saw different limitations. Moser (1993:61) distinguishes between the development economists, US female professionals, and the UN system. The development economists were concerned with the failure of modernisation theory and the ‘trickle down’ effect. The US female professionals were concerned with the increasing evidence that Third World women’s development projects were negatively affecting women. The WID group in the US challenged the prevailing assumption that modernisation was equated with increasing gender equality. Recognition of the damaging effect of ignoring women in USAID projects in the First Development Decade (1960–70) prompted the WID group to influence USAID policy. This resulted in the Percy Amendment to the US Foreign Assistance Act, which has been much cited as a key event in the promotion of women’s issues in development.

Among feminist researchers the critique of the earlier focus on women as reproducers and beneficiaries of welfare programmes grew around themes such as recognising the role of women as producers, the invisibility of women in statistics, and the concern for the poorest women, which became more or less synonymous with female-headed households. Different arguments and voices can be identified from this period.

In 1975 the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW) in the US organised a workshop on the condition of poor women in developing countries as a preparation for the UN conference in Mexico City the same year (Tinker and Bramsen 1976). The themes that were explored were:

- women’s contribution to the economy of poor households;
- the extent of women’s poverty; and
- the situation of poor women who are heads of households and who are disproportionately represented among the poor households.

Other feminist researchers, such as Esther Boserup, showed that although women were often the main contributors to basic productivity in the community, they were not visible in the statistics and even less so in the planning and implementation of projects. At the same time modernisation projects with new methods and technologies were affecting women negatively, often displacing women from traditional productive functions (Moser 1993:63).

According to Lourdes Beneria, the analysis of the 'Women Question' during this period focused on the nature of women's participation in the labour market and issues falling outside the domestic economy (1982:xii). The solution to women's oppression was being outside the household in the sphere of paid production.

From a more instrumentalist perspective, Adrienne Germaine focused on poor women as underrated resources: *'Women, especially low-income rural women, are possibly the most underrated development resource of "resource poor" Third World countries'* (1977:161).

The increasing marginalisation of female subsistence farmers and the feminisation of the labour force in manufacturing plants and industries were other issues that were stressed in this period (Mair 1986).

The poorest of the poor: female-headed households

Tinker, in retrospect, defines the 'feminisation of poverty' during this period as the growing trend of women heading households which were particularly disadvantaged (1990:35). Studies from both Western and developing countries showed that the fastest growing type of family structure was that of female-headed households comprised of poor women with children (Moghadan 1997). At the same time various American studies pointed out that class and race were not the only determinants of poverty, but gender also played a role (Gimenez 1987:7 in Moghadan 1997:6).

Furthermore many working women experienced extreme poverty, particularly those living on their own without a male partner and bringing up children as well as maintaining older relatives (Safilios Rotschild 1980, Buvinic and Youssef 1978 in Young 1989:xv). WID researchers therefore stressed the importance of focusing on female headship in development planning (Moghadan 1997, Buvinic 1983).

Limit fertility to reduce poverty

Welfare programmes, which during the 1960s focused on nutrition and relief work, were during the 1970s extended to population control through family planning. A growing awareness of a world population problem and the assumption that women determine population trends resulted in family planning programmes targeted at women. Furthermore it was assumed that simply limiting fertility could reduce poverty. Women were targeted by family planning programmes which argued that the aim was to improve family welfare (Buvinic 1983). This would be achieved through the dissemination of contraceptive information and technology to women (Moser 1993).

These programmes were criticised and failed, in part because they failed to consider the factors that influenced women's status and impacted on their fertility, such as education and labour force participation. This link between women's autonomy over their own lives and fertility control was recognised by, among others, the World Bank in its *World Development Report 1984* (Moser 1993:61). Furthermore, later research and experience has shown how gender power relations impact on family planning practices, involving both women and men in the decision-making process.

The International Women's Conference, Mexico 1975: equity for women!

A key event during the 1970s was the first International Women's Conference, held in Mexico City in 1975. The voices of US professionals, researchers, and women's movement activists as well as long and insistent lobbying within the UN eventually led to the UN Commission on the Status of Women declaring 1975 International Women's Year (IWY). The first 'Women's Conference' was held in Mexico City the same year. 'Equality, Development, and Peace' were the themes for the conference and reflected the diversity of both how women's issues were approached and what their concerns were:

- Equality, a concern for the West;
- Peace, a request from Eastern societies; and
- Development, the key to improvement for women in the South.

This conference was crucial in that it both required governments to put women's concerns on the agenda and mobilised women (Tinker 1990, Bunch and Carillo 1990).

Policies for women: through equity, towards the anti-poverty approach

In formulating the 'World Plan of Action for the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Women's Year' there was a shift to a new area for policies in the development context: policies for women. The Plan of Action reflected the equity approach, calling for equality between women and men, and requiring that women got their share of the benefits of development.

The equity approach was furthermore a policy response to the critique on how modernisation projects had affected women negatively and welfare programmes had omitted the productive role of women in the Third World. The basis for this approach was that women provided an unacknowledged contribution to economic growth. Women would be 'brought into' development and the market. The purpose was to gain equity for women in the development process. However, this approach was concerned with the inequality between women and men and stressed economic independence as a prerequisite for equity. Thus, by bringing women into development, here understood as economic growth, greater equality and an increase in economic growth would be achieved. The equity approach reflected the concerns of the so-called First World Feminists, which became evident during the first World Conference for Women in Mexico City in 1975 (Moser 1993).

The equity programme derived from the Mexico conference encountered problems from the outset (Moser 1993:63):

- There was a lack of defined indicators and standards against which success could be measured.
- The majority of the development agencies were hostile to equity programmes because of the implicit redistribution of power.
- Third World governments were sceptical as they saw this as Western-exported feminism to Third World women *'to take feminism to a woman who has no water, no food, and no home is to talk nonsense'* (Bunch 1980:27 in Moser 1993:65).

As a 'toned down' version of the 'Equity Approach', the 'Anti-Poverty Approach' was introduced during the 1970s and onwards. *'Its purpose was to ensure that poor women increased their productivity. Women's poverty is seen as the problem of underdevelopment, not of subordination'* (Moser 1993:66).

Key issues that seem to have had an impact on the conceptualisation of the 'feminisation of poverty' during the 1970s.

Development

- Development planners shifted from economic growth to issues of equity in distributional patterns, targeting the poor.
- The World Bank officially shifted from a preoccupation with economic growth to a broader concern with the eradication of absolute poverty and the promotion of 'redistribution with growth'.

Poverty

- Poverty was defined as lack of income and lack of access to health, education, and social services.
- There was a focus on poverty and an interest in 'who are the poor'?
- The 'Basic Needs Approach' was developed.
- There was an awareness of women as providers of basic needs and thus important to address in order to address poverty.
- There was a growing awareness of women as head of household – seen as the poorest of the poor.
- The Anti-Poverty Approach was introduced as a toned-down version of the Equity Approach.
- The 'feminisation of poverty' is linked to female-headed households and becomes the focus of WID advocates to ensure economic development.

Gender specific

- There was a new awareness of women as participants in development, i.e. the link between women's issues and development.
- There was an awareness of women as economic actors.
- There was an IYW and the First International Conferences for Women took place in Mexico 1975.
- The role of the women's movement manifested in the First International Conference on Women.
- The WID approach was developed with a focus on equity.

The 1980s: Structural Adjustment and Efficiency: women are the poorest!

A growing concern for the complexities of poverty

Much of the early optimism about development's ability to alter the lives of the poor women in developing countries had been moderated by the end of the International Decade for Women. Despite new agricultural crops and new technologies, many women had not been helped (Tinker 1990). There was a shift away from redistribution and basic needs to structural adjustment and market-oriented economic reform. Poverty eradication was relatively low on the agenda (Sen 1999). Yet the complexities of poverty became clearer during the 1980s. Maxwell (1999:3) highlights various innovations:

- The incorporation of non-monetary aspects, stressing powerlessness and isolation. Participation became important.
- New interest in vulnerability vs. security, with better understanding of seasonality.

- Focus on coping strategies.
- Broadening of the concept of poverty to livelihood.

At the Follow-up Conference for Women in Copenhagen in 1980 the divisions between WID professionals and global feminists prevailed in relation to the key concerns of 'Equality', 'Development', and 'Peace'. The debates concentrated on what constituted a 'women's issue' (Bunch and Carrillo 1990:71). By 1985, at the End of Decade Conference for Women in Nairobi, many women rejected this division of women's concern into three separate areas. Rather the inter-linkage between the concerns was analysed and stressed:

Women everywhere had come to see that peace is impossible without the development and economic justices and an end to the everyday threats of gender based inequality and violence against women world wide. Women learned that equality, peace and development are interrelated and that all issues affecting human life are 'women's issues' (ibid:72).

The anti-poverty approach: but how many are they?

The anti-poverty approach still had some impact in the 1980s. As mentioned earlier, there was a strategic shift in the late 1970s and early 1980s towards the anti-poverty approach (Buvinic 1983), which is interesting in terms of the conceptualisation of the feminisation of poverty. In this approach the economic inequality between women and men is linked to poverty instead of the subordination of women. Thus, interventions should shift their focus to reduce income inequality instead of the inequality between men and women. Thus *'women's issues are separated from equity issues and linked to the concern of the majority of Third World women as the 'poorest of the poor'*. Buvinic has argued that this toned-down version of the equity approach arose out of the reluctance of the development agencies to interfere with the manner in which relations between men and women are constructed in a given society (Buvinic 1983 in Moser 1993:67).

Furthermore, Buvinic argues that a lack of communication between researchers on economic development and those researching women's issues in development contributed to the shift. Apparently the economic theorists were not interested in the equity approach, as this relied on research based on qualitative data. Buvinic argues that an alternative approach evolved, which linked women's issues to poverty and to attempts to quantify the positive effects that may result from incorporating women's concerns into economic development. Thus, Buvinic argues that phrasing women's issues in terms of poverty and economic growth facilitates the translation of women's issues into development policy and strategies. It may also be analysed as an instrumentalisation of poor women for economic growth, avoiding the more threatening feminist concerns.

The basic premises for the anti-poverty approach were thus:

- *'The ratio of women relative to men is greater in the poorest income groups than in the population as a whole.*
- *The economic performance of households in the lowest income brackets is directly related to the economic activity of women in these households.*
- *The importance of women's productive role increases with poverty – but not their reproductive functions, which involves a dual burden for women.*
- *To promote balanced economic growth a goal of development policy should be the increase of productivity and income of women in the lower income households' (Buvinic 1983:16).*

Another characteristic of the poverty approach was that it restricted those being studied to women in economic need.

Within the anti-poverty approach, however, two issues became important in the formulation of policies (ibid:16):

- the magnitude of women's poverty; and
- the measurement and valuation of women's productive work in the home and in the market place.

The issue of the high incidence of poverty among female-headed household was in this context highlighted: *'the evidence to date is inconclusive but suggests that female-headed household tend to have the lowest income and that it is due in large part to lack of productive resources'* (ibid:17).

An interesting issue in this context was, as Buvinic pointed out, that the concern about the poverty of these women has tended to overshadow the concern about other categories of women in policy statements. Thus it may be argued that there is a conflation between gender issues and 'poor people's concerns. The focus is here on poor women, bypassing gender concerns of other for instance, non-poor women from the same context, but equally oppressed' (ibid).

According to Moser, it has been most popular among NGOs and seeks generally to meet practical gender needs to earn an income through small-sale income-generating projects.

Women's double role and double burden: poor women!

Another argument, which was raised during this period, was that women were prone to poverty due to their double roles, i.e. their productive and reproductive role.⁵ According to Lourdes Beneria (1982), reflecting in retrospect, the so-called 'traditional analysis' of the 'Women Question' saw the solution to women's oppression in the sphere of paid production. However, the critique stressed that just by incorporating women in, for instance, income-generating programmes, without understanding and addressing the role and responsibilities of the women in the home (care of children, domestic work, water and fuel collection, etc.), would just add to the burden of women in terms of, for instance, leisure time and general well-being. Beneria's edited volume *Women in Development*' (ibid) is a timely critique in which it is argued that to understand women's position in the labour market, the significance of women's role in the household and in the reproductive field must be analysed, as well as the interaction between production and reproduction (ibid:xiii). In this context gender concerns such as the sexual division of labour and the relationship between the sexes is also brought up.⁶

The link between women's double role and poverty was stressed by Birdsall and McGreevey (1983). They argued that the contemporary research was *'evidence that poverty is very much a women's issue, at least in part because of women's double roles. Poor women have needs and make contributions that are different from those of poor men; thus, their problems command qualitatively different solutions'* (1983:3). Furthermore they argued that women are both affected by and affect development processes and the 'Women issue' affects prospects for efficiency, growth, and development.

⁵ Women's productive role generally refers to income-generating activities outside the home. Women's reproductive role generally refers to activities related to the domestic sphere such as childbearing and rearing, cooking, washing, water collection, and so on. Sometimes the differences between the different roles cannot be distinguished.

⁶ The volume edited by Beneria (1982) highlights some themes that have become central in the later feminist analysis of development, including:

- women's reproductive activities as determinants of women's work;
- the wide variations with respect to the sexual division of labour;
- the changing nature of the sexual division of labour as a result of changes taking place in the overall economy;
- women's subordination has not only to do with male domination, but also with basic economic and political structures, i.e. class and gender; and the extent to which women's economic activities are underestimated in labour force and national income statistics.

Poor women without husbands

The interest in female-headed households continued during the 1980s, even though there was a growing critique against the generalised assumptions about their vulnerability. In their analysis of women and work, Birdsall and McGreevey (1983) bring up the situation of female-headed households and their special vulnerability to poverty. The main factors contributing to this are the gender differences in time allocation, the lack of market for work done by women and the gender differentials in the informal versus the formal labour market contributions. They argue that female-headed households are caught in a cycle of poverty. Female-headed households are more likely to work in the informal sector in order to gain the flexibility needed to care for children, however in this sector they cannot earn very much (ibid:5–9).

However, these arguments were deconstructed by Chant (1985), among others, who in her research in Mexican shanty towns found that single-parent structures were the outcome of a deliberate positive choice of low-income women. These households, she argued, showed other positive aspects that mediated their economic difficult situation:

- Female-headed households often become more secure and stable.
- The children's cooperation boosted the women's low earnings.
- The women had difficulties in fulfilling two roles, but they were helped by children.
- The absence of violence and abuse of authority gave greater psychological security.
- The inter-generational reproduction of poverty was mediated by the fact that the children generally worked anyway – thus the new family situation was not as devastating on their education as could be thought.

Thus Chant and others brought to the debate the importance of context-specificity and the evidence of variations between female-headed households. Furthermore, the notions of different interest and aspects of well-being, which made some women choose to be the sole economic provider of the family was discussed. Chant further highlighted the agency of these women in deconstructing the notion of 'passive, poor and victims'.

'Structural Adjustment Policies': poor women must bear it all!

In the early 1980s critical voices were heard arguing that adjustment and stabilisation programmes were having adverse effects on women (Moghadan 1997). *'Poor women, especially those with families, have had to bear the major brunt of the economic crisis and structural adjustment policies'* (Safa and Antrobus 1992:49). In the name of greater efficiency the IMF and World Bank introduced conditionality policies which aimed to reduce the balance of payments deficit by increasing exports and reducing imports. Typically this involved cuts in public expenditure, reductions in public sector employment, higher prices for food and other crops, and a reduced role for government intervention in the economy. This had resulted in a decline in income levels and severe cuts in governments social expenditure programmes, which meant severe cuts in the practical every day needs of women (Moser 1993:71).

Critical voices were raised, however, which may have contributed to the conceptualisation of the 'feminisation of poverty'. In 1987 UNICEF presented the report 'Adjustment with a Human Face' (Cornia et al. 1987). The argument it presented was that the costs of adjustment were too great and that poor households were unable to absorb them, which was leading to an absolute decline in living standards. The UNICEF proposal was that SAPs could be redesigned so that the costs to poor households were reduced and their capacity to survive would be enhanced. The UNICEF report argued that the number of female-headed households had grown (Elson 1992:31).

Feminist researchers (Elson 1992, Moser 1992, Beneria 1992) showed how SAPs had a negative impact on women. Elson argued that underlying these policies was a male bias. The analysis was ‘depersonalised’, meaning that neither men nor women were made visible – they were degraded to producers and suppliers of resources. As one of the consequences there was a lack of consideration of unpaid labour, mostly carried out by women. Antrobus and Safa (1992:52) have summarised the impact of SAPs on women as including:

- a sharp fall in real wages combined with rising unemployment;
- the unequal burden that the rising costs of living imposed on women; and
- the reduction in public spending for services that women rely on.

Moser has highlighted the impact of SAPs on women’s triple roles⁷ and the balance between their productive and reproductive vs. managing roles, often with the consequence of the extra burden falling on their daughters.

Elson’s critique also encompassed the UNICEF report (1992:34). She argued that women were indeed visible in this report, but only as a vulnerable group. However, gender and social relations were not addressed and further the household is addressed as a unit, without disaggregating the different position and access to power of women and men. A closer look at this report confirms that neither ‘the poor’ nor ‘the vulnerable’ are defined (Cornia et al. 1987), and vagueness in the terms permeates the report. It is furthermore not disaggregated by gender.

Towards the efficiency approach

The predominant WID approach in the late 1980s and early 1990s was the ‘Efficiency Approach’, which Moser argues had a direct link to the 1980s debt crisis. This approach says that development is more efficient and effective when it includes women’s economic contribution (Moser 1993). The underlying assumption is *‘that increased economic participation for Third World Women is automatically linked with increased equity’* (Moser 1993:67).

This approach focuses on development as a response to address poverty. The shift coincided with the deterioration in the world economy, particularly in Latin America and Africa, with problems of falling export prices, protectionism, and mounting burdens of debt. Moser argues that the efficiency approach to address ‘women’s issues’ gained ground amongst international development agencies and national governments in this context.

The approach and the underlying assumptions have met wide criticism for being simplistic and essentialist. To assume that economic participation automatically increases women’s status and leads to equity is to ignore how other factors, such as lack of education or under-productive technologies, may constrain women’s participation.

Southern women’s voices: DAWN

The voices of Southern women grew strong during the 1980s. Towards the end of the UN Decade for Women, the awareness of the feminist community led to a *‘deeper awareness of both the complexities of the goals and the limitation of conventional concepts to capture the reality and needs of women’* (Antrobus 1985:1 in Bunch and Carillo 1990:72). Feminists around the world argued that there was a need to redefine the fundamental questions, concepts, and approaches of a society in order to achieve justice.

⁷ Moser (1993, 27) distinguishes between three roles in terms of women’s work:- the productive role- relates to income earning activities;- the reproductive role – relates childbearing and rearing responsibilities, the maintenance of the labour force; - and the community management role- relates to activities within the community.

Even though this interest arose globally, women's movements in the South were important in this respect (Mair 1986, Bunch and Carrillo 1990). Various efforts were made, documented in manifestos and declarations such as the 'Bangkok Paper 1979' and the 'Dakar Declaration 1982' (Bunch and Carrillo 1990:77–8). However, the group that may have made the most impact was the so-called 'DAWN group' (Development Alternative with Women for a New Era). Its 22 founding members were activists, researchers, and policymakers from all regions of the Third World (mainly South Asia). The goal was to define the issues of development from the vantage point of women. They prepared a book (Sen and Grown 1988) that addresses specific issues in economic development as well as an overall alternative feminist vision. The DAWN group stressed the value of diversity and the differing but equal validity of feminism in each society. Furthermore it stressed that women themselves must define their needs, goal, and strategies.

In 1985 DAWN questioned the vision of development presented at the Nairobi Follow-up Conference of the International Decade for Women. DAWN also created one of various alternative visions of development in response to the structural adjustment policies. *'The crisis of survival challenged women to pull their networks more tightly together and to begin to synthesise alternative vision of development'* (Mair 1986:590–1). Western women found common interest in this and saw also the reality of the 'feminisation of poverty'.

DAWN developed a complex analysis of poverty, stressing that throughout the world women experience poverty differently from the men in their group since gender inequality mediates the effects of, for instance, structural adjustment programmes. Thus the DAWN group were pivotal in bringing up poverty as a multifaceted issue, which not only relates to gender but also to race, class, and other issues (Alloo and Harcourt 1997:11).

It is interesting to note here how the voices of and among feminists and WID professionals shifted across time and in relation to different experiences. Alloo and Harcourt (1997) have noted this in their discussion on how women from South and the North view each other as well as how they view poverty and gender. During the early 1980s international donors sent WID experts to the South believing that the best way to alleviate poverty was to assist 'the poor sisters out there'. However, by the end of the 1980s there was a strong rejection of the idea of women as 'needy', and Northern women began to question their own role, joining Southern feminists who were critical of the WID approach. This clearly illustrates how poverty had different meanings to different actors and has been used for different purposes, but also how these positions have met and developed into something new. Alloo and Harcourt, representing the South and the North respectively, argue that the various UN conferences during the first half of the 1990s were pivotal for developing the dialogue between the groups. The recognition that development is crucial to both the North and the South grew during this period (Bunch and Carrillo 1990).

Key issues that seem to have had an impact on the conceptualisation of the 'feminisation of poverty' during the 1980s.

Development

- There was a shift away from redistribution and basic needs to structural adjustment and market-oriented economic reform.
- Poverty eradication was relatively low on the agenda.

Poverty

- The definition of poverty included non-monetary aspects, vulnerability vs. security, and a focus on coping strategies.
- The definition of poverty broadened to livelihood.
- There was a shift from the Equity Approach to an Anti-poverty Approach in lobbying for women's inclusion in the development debate.
- The anti-poverty approach focused on women as participants rather than beneficiaries and restricted those being studied to women in economic need.
- 'Adjustment with a Human Face' – there was a new focus on the impact of structural adjustment programmes on women.
- Strong feminist voices from the 'South' emerged.
- WID professionals approached 'those poor sisters which we need to help' – the same approach as the traditional welfare approach.
- Debate ensued on the situation of female-headed households: female-headed households are the poorest of the poor vs. not all female-headed households are poor!

Gender specific

- There was a shift in focus from women alone (WID) to wider gender relations (GAD).
- The role of reproduction and the link between reproduction and production was highlighted.
- There was a growing awareness of intra-household dynamics.
- The sexual division of labour became an issue.
- The dominance/subordination relationship between the sexes became an issue.
- There was a further shift to an Efficiency Approach.
- The link was made between women's poverty and women's dual roles.

1990s: are all women really poor?

'The incorporation of gender in research on development issues has further established the significance of gender as a central dimension of poverty' (Kabeer 1995:108). This captures much of the new awareness expressed during the 1990s among researchers on the complex link between poverty and gender. New conceptualisations of poverty frame much of the debate during this period, as well as the new attempts to measure development and poverty. During the nineties researchers increasingly question what they argue is the 'confla-

tion of gender concerns with poverty issues', a situation described by some as a problem of instrumentalism. Methods for measurement and definitions are questioned and deconstructed in the search for more inclusive approaches.

During the nineties various journals published special issues on poverty and gender, including *World Development* (1995), *Gender and Development* (1997), *IDS Bulletin* (1997), and *Development and Change* (1999), which somehow reflects a broader interest in the issue and in which much of the research is gathered. Both UNDP and the World Bank publish important special issues on poverty reflecting policy statements, including the *WBR 1990*, and the *HDR* in 1990, 1995 and 1997.

An important event is the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 where the feminisation of poverty is one of the main issues addressed, both by government and agencies, as well as by NGOs.

The 'New Poverty Agenda'

In the early 1990s policy institutions pronounced a renewed interest in addressing problems of global poverty. In the late 1980s the interest in 'Adjustment with a Human Face' paved the way for renewed commitment to poverty reduction (Lipton and Maxwell 1992). Poverty issues and concerns were voiced through the series of global summits during the early 1990s (Vienna 1993, Cairo 1994, Beijing 1995, Copenhagen 1996) (Razavi 1999). One outcome was the 'New Poverty Agenda' which was launched by the World Bank in the *World Development Report* in 1990. It presented a strategy with two equally important elements: to promote the productive use of the poor's most abundant asset labour and to provide basic social services to the poor (WB 1990:3, Lipton and Maxwell 1992:1). It stressed the importance of market-led growth itself as the most important method to address poverty. The role of the state was limited to implementing policies in social sectors (health, education) and providing safety nets for those who were particularly vulnerable (Sen 1999). NGOs were given a growing role in service delivery. New development directions were discussed in terms of governance, civil society, sustainability, democratisation, accountability, efficiency, and the market.

The new approach was criticised for lacking a gender perspective, however (Lipton and Maxwell 1992). The feminist critique argued that the burden of managing everyday life had fallen on women. Female-headed households had been overlooked and if poverty strategies had considered women at all, it was only as passive victims (Heyzer 1994).

Alternative conceptualisations of poverty

In the 'New Poverty Agenda' the concept of 'poverty' was broadened to include '*the absence of a secure and sustainable livelihood*' (Lipton and Maxwell 1992:19). Another issue which had been identified in the 1980s but which was given increased importance during the 1990s, was social science methods, and rapid and participatory appraisals in particular, which increased the understanding of the poor (ibid). The idea of well-being developed as a metaphor for absence of poverty, with emphasis on how poor people themselves view their situation.

A key event in the search for a new conceptualisation was the development and launching of the Human Development Index, the 'HDI', in UNDP's *Human Development Report* 1990. The focus is on development rather than poverty. Based on Amartya Sen's analysis UNDP defined human development as '*a process of enlarging people's choices*' (UNDP 1990:1). In 1997 it added, '*... as well as raising the level of well being achieved*' (UNDP 1997:15). The concept of human development derived from two strands of thought: the poverty

⁸ Amartya Sen introduced the 'capabilities approach' (1990:43-4). Human life is seen as being defined by 'beings and doings', also called functionings. A functioning may be getting nourished, avoiding ill health, pursuing knowledge, etc. The capability then reflects the freedom of choice between different ways of living.

and inequality discussion and the concern that income alone was not enough to describe human development. The former was largely influenced by Amartya Sen,⁸ and the latter by UNICEF (Desai 1991) and other international organisations like UNRISD and the OECD (Morris 1979). The number of choices relates to access to the resources and the capabilities to do something with these. It was agreed that the three most important capabilities are to *'live a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge, and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living'* (UNDP 1990:10). If these are not achieved many choices will not be accessible. Economic growth is a means and not the end of development. The focus of human development must therefore be people.

Among feminist researchers gender as a cross-cutting variable to poverty was stressed (Allen 1992, Kabeer 1994, Heyzer and Sen 1994). Derived out of this insight, some of the following conceptualisations were highlighted (Heyzer 1994:22–3):

- *'Women's poverty is shaped by the interaction between gender, class, ethnicity, and religion and by unequal relations in the international economy.'*
- *'Women experience poverty differently from men due to gender inequalities in entitlements and responsibilities.'*
- *'Poverty alleviation programmes must respond to these different gender experiences of poverty.'*

In 1997 UNDP introduced in the *HDR* the concept of 'Human Poverty': *'Human Poverty' does not focus on what people do or do not have, but on what they can or cannot do. It is deprivation in the most essential capabilities of life, including leading a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable, having adequate economic provisioning and participating fully in the life of the community'* (HDR 2000:22).

Measuring poverty and human development: the UNDP

The new conceptualisations of poverty and development had implications for its measurement, moving beyond measurement based on income and the long-used poverty line.

The interest in measuring human development and the attempts to measure poverty had been tried for a long time (UNDP 1990:106).⁹ The development of the HDIs, however, was the first attempt to make a yearly international index of human development with a broader approach to development than just measuring it in economic terms. The HDI contemplates three variables: longevity, education, and income. It is widely seen as the first serious attempt to incorporate a social dimension other than economic growth in measuring development. However, the literature indicates that others were paving the way as early as the 1940s (Srinivasan 1994).¹⁰ It seems that the impact of the HDI relates to it being launched by UNDP and therefore reflects an international agreement on what is to be included in measuring human development.

In the first published HDI (1990), however, gender differences are only addressed superficially. Still, this very influential report, when addressing the issue of changing household patterns, said that *'the increasing number of female headed households has led to a feminisation of poverty'* (1990:40). This includes the conditions both in the North and the South, generalising the analysis as follows: *'Women are typically less qualified than men; tending to go into lower paying jobs, having fewer opportunities to be upwardly mobile, leaving them less able than men to provide a decent living to their families'* (ibid.).

Based on the gendered conceptualisations of poverty, the HDI was criticised by researchers. It did not capture the great variety of ways in which deprivation can occur and which may have different consequences

⁹ Various ways to measure development have been tried (Desai 1991, Srinivasan 1994, Morris 1979:21).

¹⁰ A further important contribution has been the development of the Physical Quality of Life Index (Desai 1991, Morris 1979).

for different subgroups (Kabeer 1994a). Razavi (1997) argued that well-being indicators may fail to capture different aspects of gender discrimination. She found in her research from south-eastern Iran that rising levels of household income may have contradictory implications for women. In her study the increased level of income improved their survival chances and reduced their work burden, but made them more dependent on their husband's income and made them more insecure within the marriage. She therefore discusses 'vulnerability' instead of poverty, highlighting women's own accounts of well-being.

Another influential report is the *World Development Report* published by the World Bank. The 1990 issue focused on poverty. This report recognises that poverty falls most heavily on certain groups and that women in general are disadvantaged. The attention to women is limited to posing the question of whether women are poorer than men (WDR 1990:31). However, *'data incomes are too weak to give a clear answer. But available figures on health, nutrition, education and labour-force participation show that women are often severely disadvantaged'* (ibid).

However, in 1995, the year of the Fourth International Conference for Women, UNDP introduced the Gender Development Index (GDI) which intends to measure gender inequality, and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), which focuses on women's participation in political decision-making, their access to professional opportunities, and their earning power. In the report presenting these indexes it is argued that *'poverty has a woman's face – of 1.3 billion people in poverty 70% are women'* (UNDP 1995:4). However, there is no reference for the basis for that statement. Further *'the increasing poverty among women has been linked to their unequal situation in the labour market, their treatment under social welfare systems and their status and power in the family'* (ibid). Later in the document, it is clarified that this refers both to the South and the North, even though there is a distinction in terms of reasons: for the South it is argued that the feminisation of poverty is *'the tragic consequence of women's unequal access to economic opportunities'* and when referring to industrial countries it is linked to *'the unequal situation in the labour market, their treatment under social welfare systems, and status power in the families'*. Specific reference is here made to conditions in the US (ibid:36).

Female-headed households: many, but not all of them are poor!

The situation of female-headed households continues to be a main theme during the first half of the nineties and the term 'feminisation of poverty' appears repeatedly in this context.

In the Platform for Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing 1995 the issue of female-headed households is addressed as follows:

'One fourth of all households worldwide are headed by women and many other households are dependent on female income even where men are present. Female-maintained households are very often among the poorest because of wage discrimination, occupational segregation pattern in the labour market and other gender-based barriers.' (§ 22, UN 1996:25)

It is argued during this period that there is growing evidence not only of a substantial increase in female-headed households all over the world, but also of the severely disadvantaged economic condition of these households (Cho 1994, Moore 1994, Mohiuddin 1992, Kabeer 1994). *'These women are the poorest of the poor – belonging to what may be termed the "Fifth World"'* (Mohiuddin 1992:61). *'...it is widely known that the proportion of female headed households is higher among the poor'* Cho writes under the sub-title 'the feminisation of poverty' which focuses on poverty and female-headed households (Cho 1994:116). Cho argued further that the high proportion of female-headed households among the poor indicates that becoming a female-headed household can itself be a cause for poverty. Also Kabeer, who later provided a more complex analysis of gender and poverty, argues in a 1995 article that there is *'persuasive evidence to show that women are disproportionately represented among the poorer sections of world's population and that households maintained by women tend on balance to be poorer than households with male breadwinners'* (Kabeer 1995:108). She further holds that women are making up an increasing proportion of the poor, and that this is leading to a *'feminisation*

of poverty' (ibid). In the volume *Gender, Economic Growth, and Poverty* (1994) edited by Heyzer and Sen the discussion on poverty and gender centres around the disproportionate incidence of poverty among women-headed households as well as on the issue of intra-household distribution of poverty.

Buvinic and Berger noted in the Latin American context '*that available data on incomes of households by sex of head of households shows that women-headed households are poorer than those headed by men*' (1990:4). Referring to Latin American research they argued that the number of female-headed households had increased during the 1980s. They also noted that the occupations of women-headed households were often found in the informal sector, yielding low earnings.

However, researchers increasingly joined Chant in her early critique (1985) against the tendency to equate women or female-headed households with the vulnerable or the poor (see 1980s section). Evidence of the diversity among female-headed households as well as the deconstruction of the notion of the female-headed household as always the poorest of the poor, victimising the women, were common themes for feminist poverty researchers (Moore 1994, Chant 1997, Mohiuddin 1992, Razavi 1997 and 1999).

In Baden and Milward's overview of the gender and poverty debate they review the empirical studies on female headship and poverty (1995:19–21). They highlight firstly the difference between *de jure* female-headed households such as widows, officially separated, or divorced women and *de facto* female-headed households such as migrants, abandoned women, single mothers, or refugees. In fact in both cases the female-headed households may be better off than the male-headed households, due to remittances from a partner for instance (in migrant labour cases), or when traditional customs sanction the headship of women (areas of tradition of matriliney, where polygamy is widespread and polygamous wives have separate residences, in some cases of widowhood) or if there is a tradition social support (familial, community,

Box 2: Assumptions and critique related to female-headed households and their link to poverty.

Women-headed households form a disproportionate number of the poor in the majority of societies worldwide.

Women-headed households are prone to experience greater extremes of poverty than male-headed units.

Women-headed households are an automatic outcome of poverty (due to migration, conjugal breakdown during economic stress, etc.).

Female headship itself exacerbates poverty (women are disadvantaged with respect to employment and earnings).

The assumed association of female-headed households with poverty and the long-term consequences this might have for the welfare of the children.

That it is a new phenomenon.

The idea that the definition of female headship is unproblematic.

Data on poverty by household headship is not available for all countries. Neither can it be compared, given the differences in definitions and modes of measurement.

Statistical data is often based on total household income. However:

- it does not tend to include non-market work and other assets like community support networks, savings, housing, and land ownership; and
- male-headed households are often larger than female-headed households as they often include two or more earners. Therefore it is difficult to compare these household types.

Given the extreme poverty in many countries in the South, considerably larger proportions of women-headed households should be expected. But the overall average incidence of female headship is higher in the richer, ‘developed’ countries.

Female-headed households are as likely to be present among other income groups as among the poor.

There is evidence that the presence of women-headed households among low-income households is no greater than among national populations in general.

Sometimes the children are better off with only the mother in the home.

It has always existed, and in some contexts has been more common than it is today (Moore gives examples from Brazil).

There is great variation among female-headed households as well as in the definitions. For instance, women are rarely classified as heads if there is also a man, even if they are major economic providers, whereas men are heads even when they are not the major economic provider. (See also Mohiuddin (1992:66-7) who distinguishes between five categories of households headed by women). By aggregating the distinct categories of households headed by women it becomes impossible to interpret the evidence in a meaningful manner (Razavi 1999:413)

Sources: Moore 1994, and Chant 1997:28–9 if not cited otherwise

state, etc.). They further refer to studies where female-headed households are found among the very poorest of the local population: widows in Ghana; *de jure* female-headed households (widows or divorced) in Zambia; widows in Uganda; female-headed households with dependent children in Brazil. Thus they stress the need for a more systematic analysis, with information on the gender and age composition of households, and flows of income within and among household including issues of distribution of full income (market work, non-market work, transfers and property).

Henrietta Moore prepared the report 'Is there a crisis in the family?' (1994) for the World Social Summit in Copenhagen, and in it she uses the sub-title 'the feminisation of poverty'. Here she discusses the reported rise of the proportion of households headed by women '*a trend noted for many different countries in the world in varying stages of economic development*' (ibid:7). Chant states that the portrayal of poor women-headed households has gained ground in the discussions about '*the so-called feminisation of poverty in the wake of world recession and economic restructuring*' (1997:27). However, both Moore (1994) and Chant (1997) argued that the debate on the causes and origins of female-headed households has been clouded by assumptions, which they deconstruct. Box w is a summary of these assumptions with the corresponding critique.

Important though it is that the same researchers recognise the disadvantaged position of women who are heads of household in relation to defined aspects such as property, capital, income and credit (Moore 1994). Female-headed households also suffer from the female disadvantage in '*relation to entitlements and capabilities, heavier work burdens, and lower earnings and constraints on upward mobility due to cultural, legal, and labour market barriers*' (Moghadam 1996:31 in Chant 1997:29). Many of these women's inability to cope is not because they are 'dysfunctional families', i.e. that they are female-headed *per se*, but a result of the discrimination women suffer in the labour market and the unequal distribution of labour and income within the families (Moore 1994).

Razavi (1999) confirms that there is some validity in the equation between female-headed households being poor, as well in the notion of investing in women as an effective means for increasing welfare or, as she notes, in reducing fertility. However while such linkages vary in degree in different contexts they tend to be invoked in a highly generalised manner, which may have an impact on development policy and practice. Razavi emphasises that generalisations have tended to replace contextualised social analyses of how poverty is created and reproduced. Her analysis is that there are both methodological and political reasons for this.

Thus, what is stressed in these discussions is how gender mediates poverty (Moore 1994, Jackson 1998), that there is a need for a deeper understanding of this relationship (Razavi 1999:410), and that there is a need for '*policymakers to be clear, consistent, and well informed about the conditions of the target group*' (Kabeer 1995:110).

Questioning the 'feminisation of poverty'

It is during the nineties that the term the 'feminisation of poverty' is discussed as a specific concept and has its meaning questioned.

Allen (1992:107) highlights that the term 'feminisation of poverty' is used as catch-all label for a variety of problems, where it is not always clear 'what is what'. She distinguishes thus between:

- *The feminisation of poverty: the increase in the number or share of women among the poor and*
The impoverishment of women: the worsening of women's living standards, i.e. women in general are poor and poor women in particular are getting poorer.

However, she further argues that international comparisons of feminised poverty and the feminisation of poverty are still rare and existing data is not comparable. Still, she argues that empirical evidence con-

firms that the problem is getting worse, irrespective of the level of economic development of the country. However, she argues that the standard literature on poverty rarely considered the position of women as an issue of importance, i.e. gender differences in terms of poverty. She argues there is a need for treating gender as a force of its own in poverty research.

Moghadan (1997) explored the concept in the report 'Notes and trends related to the "feminisation of poverty"', where she defined the concept as the *disproportional increase of women in poverty vis-à-vis men*. She argues that three contributing factors have been underscored in the WID/GAD literature:

- *the rise and expansion of female-headed households in a context of inadequate social support for mothers and children;*
- *intra-household inequalities and bias against girls; and*
- *neo-liberal economic policies, including structural adjustment, flexibilisation, and post-socialist transition.*

She found, however, that the claim that the vast majority of the world's poor are women could not be substantiated. '*Still the disadvantaged position of women is incontestable*' (1997:1).

Kabeer questioned whether there had been a '*feminisation of poverty or an impoverishment of households*' (1994a:27). She argued that it is difficult to disentangle gender from class when it comes to establishing whether there has been any worldwide feminisation of poverty.

Jackson contributes importantly to the debate in her article 'Rescuing gender from the poverty trap' (1996). Citing the World Bank definition of the feminisation of poverty as '*women tend to be disproportionately represented among the poor*' (WB 1989: iv in Jackson 1998:4) she links the concept to the discourse on female-headed households. Among others she criticises the methods of the much-cited IFAD review on the 'State of the World Poverty' (Jazairy et al. 1992 in Jackson 1998:11). In the study the number of rural women below the poverty line in 114 countries was estimated. However, both the number of households headed by women and the expected number of women in households classified as falling below the poverty line were included in the results. The assumption, argues Jackson, is that all women heads of households are poor. Her deconstruction focuses on the issue of female-headed households, highlighting the variability among those, but also to the different definitions of households headed by women across time, which makes comparisons over time invalid. Jackson's key argument is thus that the feminisation of poverty is not just about the concentration of women among those under the poverty line, but that gender mediates and transcends the poverty debate (ibid:11).

Baden (1999) highlights the 'feminisation of poverty' in a paper exploring the presumed link between gender inequality and poverty and governance and poverty reduction. She concludes however that a 'win-win-win' approach cannot be assumed.

Conflating poverty with women: strategic or instrumental?

'Does this mean that where poverty is not feminised then there is no justification for GAD? Are there no gender issues among those who are not the deserving poor? Must all GAD activities be focused on poor women? Will poverty alleviation improve the position of women?'

(Jackson 1998:43)

As indicated above, during the second half of the 1990s some researchers questioned the equalisation between poverty and women (Jackson 1996,1997,1998, Kabeer 1997, Razavi 1997, Chant 1997), and it was argued that gender concerns had been instrumental for development goals (Jackson 1998, Chant 1997). This debate is closely linked to the discussion around female-headed households and the questioning of the feminisation of poverty.

In her article cited earlier, Jackson (1996, 1998) challenges the conflation of women and poverty and how development agencies have merged poverty alleviation and integrated gender in development programmes and policies. She refers to multilaterals like the World Bank and the UNFPA, which focus on women and gender within the anti-poverty/efficiency approach as a means to achieve goals such as sustainable development, controlling population, and alleviating poverty. *'The combined instrumentalist interest in women as a means to end poverty and the feminisation of poverty discourse has led to an erosion between gender disadvantage and poverty'* she concludes (1998:46).

Kabeer summarises the research on the issue in her editorial of the *IDS Bulletin* special issue on poverty (1997). As seen earlier in this paper the early research singled out female-headed households as a category disproportionately represented among the poor. Kabeer argues that the visibility of those in conventional poverty line measurements contributed to this. Female-headed households were easily accommodated. On the grounds of 'welfare', 'basic needs', and 'intra-household equity', powerful arguments have been formulated to invest in women. The impact of such arguments on policy has led to a concern with women as the 'poorest of the poor', routinely referred to in official policy discourse. Analysis has thus been replaced by sweeping generalisations with the automatic inclusion of women in the category of vulnerable groups (Kabeer 1997).

Jackson (1997) brings up in the same *Bulletin* the issue of representation of women and poverty and how *'gender has become institutionally married to poverty'* (ibid:151). She illustrates how women's needs have been argued successfully by different actors using a recognised vocabulary. Describing women as the 'poorest of the poor', for example, is discursively very effective as poverty is central in development studies and practice. She further recalls (1998) the early WID narratives from the 1970s, which constructed women as victims of development and how this was sustained in the critique against structural adjustment. She concludes that in order for 'gender' to survive in gendered, i.e. male-dominated institutions like the development agencies, it has been instrumental to argue in terms of poverty, rather than on grounds of equity or on gender as cutting across boundaries of class, ethnicity, and even institutions.

Clearly, the conflation of gender issues with matters of poverty carries the risk that gender-specific concerns such as discrimination and injustice – which affect the situation of women – are missed or misinterpreted (Razavi 1997) and may disappear from the agenda (Kabeer 1997). Even though it might be strategic to highlight the poverty of female-headed households in order to shed light on gender inequality in a wider context it carries the risk of misrepresenting many women and devaluing their agency for survival (Chant 1997). Thus, there is a *'need to back up instrumentalist and generalised arguments with empirical analysis and the development of sound analytical frameworks'* (Kabeer 1997: 3).

The Beijing Summit 1995

Women in poverty occupied a central place in the Fourth International Conference on Women in Beijing 1995 and in the Platform for Action (POA) which resulted. The 'feminisation of poverty' was highlighted as a key concern and used as a concept both among the government representatives (UD/Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1996) as well as in the NGO Forum (Friedlander 1996). The concept is used repeatedly in the Conference Document:

'Absolute poverty and the feminization of poverty, unemployment, the increasing fragility of environment, continued violence against women and the widespread exclusion of half of humanity from institutions of power and governance underscore the need to continue the search for development, peace and security and for ways of assuring people-centred sustainable development' (POA, Global Framework § 17, UN 1996: 24).

The POA presented a 12-point list of areas of concern of which *'The persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women'* is the first (ibid:34). In the chapter presenting the strategic objectives and actions (IV), the concept is addressed specifically: *'In the past decade the number of women living in poverty has increased disproportionately*

to the number of men, particularly in the developing countries. The feminization of poverty has also recently become a significant problem in the countries with economies in transition as a short-term consequence of the process of political, economic and social transformation (§ 48, *ibid*:39).

Even though the concept may seem to be presented in a rather simplistic way, a detailed reading reveals that poverty is addressed as a complex issue with great variations, and that regional differences are under-scored. The risk however is that the POA is cited only partially in policy and programme formulation.

Further it may be emphasised that in the NGO Forum, the issue of most importance was that of diversity, calling for the acknowledgement of *'the wide range of circumstances in which women find themselves ...only by dealing with the specific realities of women's lives and experiences is it possible to avoid the tyranny of the well-intended yet often tortuous, imposition of ideas and wills on others'* (Friedlander 1996:xxvii).

North-South dialogue: affirming and questioning the 'vulnerable other women'

The many UN conferences facilitated the dialogue between Northern and Southern feminist,s and Northern women began to question their own role, criticising the WID approach (Alloo and Harcourt 1997). Furthermore, in the link between poverty in the South and poverty and social exclusion in the North, commonalities were increasingly highlighted.¹¹

Parpart (1995:28) argues that throughout the development discourse Third World women have been portrayed as the 'vulnerable other'. She shows this with the Commonwealth Expert Group on Women and Structural Adjustment (1989) that publicised the phrase 'vulnerable groups' to describe the consequences of SAPs for women in the South. She argues that this was an effective weapon against the World Bank used by development experts, but nevertheless this entrenched the image of the helpless, pre-modern vulnerable Third World woman. Statistics were used to show the many problems of women, their high mortality, their lack of education, their poverty and powerlessness. Third World women were constructed as a homogenous group desperately in need of Northern technical assistance. This discourse further legitimised the need for development aid.

There was also the view of the WID expert as the saviour of the vulnerable group, and some of the actors within the so-called WAD approach¹² tended to represent Third World women as helpless and vulnerable. Parpart argues that even if the GAD approach is a breakthrough in many ways, still Third World women tend to be portrayed as the impoverished, vulnerable 'other'. For instance *'the DAWN group portrays women as helpless victims who need to be saved from poverty and backwardness'* (1995:236). Parpart calls for a new definition on development grounded on the experience and knowledge of women in the South.

'Development theory and planning for women must exhibit greater sensitivity to difference and awareness of the multiple oppressions – particularly race, class, ethnicity, and gender which define women's lives in the South' (Papart 1995:237).

¹¹ For instance the 'Gender and Development Special Issue on Poverty' 1997, IDS Bulletin on Poverty and Social Exclusion in North and South 1998.

¹² The Women and Development approach (WAD) is based on ideas of avoiding government interventions, to keep projects small, and to listen to local knowledge (Parpart 1995).

Key issues that seem to have had an impact on the conceptualisation of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ during the 1990s.

Development

- A renewed interest in solving problems of global poverty.
- The ‘New Poverty Agenda’ launched by the World Bank with a strategy with two equally important elements: to promote the productive use of the poor’s most abundant asset, labour, and to provide basic social services to the poor.
- The creation of the Human Development Index, the ‘HDI’, in the Human Development Report 1990. The focus is on development rather than poverty.

Poverty

- The development of new conceptualisations of poverty: well-being and Human Development
- A new multidimensional definition of poverty appears.
- The development of development reports by the WB and UNDP and the development of an index for measuring purposes.

Gender

- Encouragement of a more frequent use of the concept ‘feminisation of poverty’.
- Use of the concept by UN agencies and governments, as well as NGOs. Used in the Platform for Action from the Fourth World Conference for Women in Beijing in 1995.
- A deeper understanding of the complex inter-linkage between gender and poverty.
- The diversity among female-headed households is highlighted.
- Deconstruction of the overall assumed link between poverty and female-headed households.
- A questioning of the use and meaning of the concept ‘the feminisation of poverty’.
- Development of gendered conceptualisations of poverty.

Some recent trends and issues

Poverty continues to be an issue of key importance in the first years of the New Millennium. Although much of the debate from the 1990s remains valid, some issues related to global poverty policy and research are worth mentioning briefly.

Poverty: a multidimensional phenomenon

‘Poverty is increasingly seen as a multidimensional phenomenon, which includes market-based consumption (or income) as well as the public provision of goods and services, access to common property resources, and the intangible dimension of a good life such as clean air, dignity, autonomy, low levels of disease and crime’ (Razavi 1999:410).

As Peck and Tobisson highlight in their review of the conceptualisation of poverty, there is a lack of delimiting definitions of poverty (forthcoming 2001:17). As with the other agencies in their review¹³ the tendency is to describe poverty in ‘definition-like’ statements (ibid). Both the World Bank *WDR* 2000/2001 and UNDP (2000) have published ambitious documents which addresses poverty. Both the *WDR*

¹³ Including the bilateral agencies for Denmark, Finland, Norway, UK, the WB, UNDP, OECD/DAC, EC and IFAD.

2000/2001 *Attacking Poverty*' and the *UNDP Poverty Report 2000* embrace a multidimensional approach towards the constituents of poverty. The WB thus includes material deprivation and low achievement in education and health as well as vulnerability and exposure to risk and voicelessness and powerlessness (2000/01:15). UNDP maintains the definition of 'human poverty' from 1997.

In the UNDP review of national poverty programmes, which happened as a response to the commitments made at the Social Summit in Copenhagen 1995, two main lessons are stressed:

- Anti-poverty programmes must be multisectoral and comprehensive given the multidimensionality of the issue.
- Programmes need to be strategic and closely co-ordinated by government ministries. The importance of accountable governance is stressed.

The active participation of civil society and the private sector is further stressed.

The World Bank (2000/2001:vi) recommends actions in three areas:

- Promoting opportunity – expansion of economic opportunities by stimulating overall growth.
- Facilitating empowerment – making state institutions accountable and strengthening participation in local decision-making. Removing social barriers (including gender).
- Enhancing security – ensure effective safety nets to mitigate the impact of personal and national calamities.

How to combine policies of poverty with policies of gender?

Both agencies address gender as a crosscutting issue, whereas the 'feminisation of poverty' is not mentioned nor used as a concept. Rather, UNDP highlights the lack of integration of poverty reduction programmes with gender policies. It is argued that '*combating gender inequality is not the same thing as combating poverty*' (UNDP 2000: 94). However, both poverty programmes as well as gender programmes have '*neglected the intersection between them – poor women*' (ibid).

Poverty among female-headed households

The interest in female-headed households remains. Research published during 2001 (Fuwa 2001; Quisumbing et al. 2001) calls for more systematic comparative analysis to disentangle the particular disadvantage of female-headed households vis-à-vis male-headed households. Furthermore such analysis is crucial to identify so called 'pockets of poverty' that might deserve policy attention (Fuwa 2001).

Women's empowerment as a strategy for poverty eradication

In November 2001 the UN invited an expert group to discuss 'Women's Empowerment as Transformative Strategies for Poverty Eradication' in Delhi, India. The unpublished paper highlights the complex inter-linkage between gender, poverty, and the empowerment process, and the differentiation in terms of vulnerability across the life cycle, which is recurrent. The 'feminisation of poverty' is addressed as a central concern by Ocharova in the context of Russia¹⁴ and the perception of women as the poorest is assumed citing UN references¹⁵ (Saadallah 2001). Attempts to develop the measurement of the empowerment process of poor women were also discussed at the seminar (Kvinnoforum 2001).

¹⁴ This is not surprising as the 'feminisation of poverty' is commonly used in the context of women's situation in the Former Soviet Union, often when describing the reasons for the dramatic increase of cases of trafficking in women (the author worked as a project manager for a networking project against trafficking in the Baltic Sea Region).

¹⁵ The notion that 70 per cent of the world's poor are women.

70 per cent of the world's poor are women: or?

The notion that 70 per cent of the world's poor are women has been argued in speeches and documents during the 1990s and is still cited. This is questioned by recent research in 10 developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, however, where it is argued that there is little evidence to supporting such an assertion (Quisumbing et al. 2001:1).

Beijing +5

Violence and poverty were highlighted as the major obstacles to gender equality worldwide at the UN General Assembly Special Session of Beijing +5 in July 2000 in New York (§22 Beijing +5 Process and Beyond). Notably the feminisation of poverty is not used as a concept nor addressed specifically.

Summing up the debate

The historical overview presented here indicates that the voices of a number of actors and concerns have been interwoven across time. It seems that the impact of the different actors has varied, some being more influential during certain periods than during others. The actors have left their historical marks through events, documents, and publications, a sample of which have been reviewed here.

The term 'feminisation of poverty' was first heard during the 1970s and was increasingly used during the 1980s and 1990s. However, by the mid-1990s research questioned the use and meaning of the term. Still, the concept continues to be used by policymakers, practitioners, and advocacy groups, often with vague references.

The conceptualisation of 'feminisation of poverty' as a term has in this study been traced to the debate encompassing women/gender and poverty. Even though other issues may have contributed to the process, it is here proposed that the use and the conceptualisation of the 'feminisation of poverty' has been coloured by two broad areas of concern: the general development debate and feminist's interests. The intersection of these two concerns with poverty has paved the way for the 'feminisation of poverty' as a concept.

Actors and interests

The general development debate

The influence of the general development debate on the conceptualisation of the 'feminisation of poverty' relates to the importance given to poverty as well as the analysis of how to best reduce it across time. The different actors in the debate have different roles and interests. Multilateral actors such as the UN and the World Bank, through national government members, formulate policies which reflect their priorities and awareness. However researchers and advocacy groups also influence the debate, often in terms of critique.

The shift from the early modernisation theories, through the Basic Needs Strategy and the Structural Adjustment Programmes framed by an income-based definition of poverty, towards a multidimensional notion of poverty requiring a complex array of measures, reflects this process.

Feminist interests

If the general development debate sets the agenda in terms of which issues are seen as central for the development process, the voices and arguments of the women's movement have been pivotal in highlighting the issues relevant for women in low-income countries. Feminist interests, however, have been raised both within multilaterals and other decision- and policymaking bodies as well as outside among researchers, NGOs, and other advocacy groups.

The international conferences for women's issues have been key to the exchange of experiences and the development of strategies and issues to address within the women's movement. Since the early WID days in the 1970s women's different interests have become interwoven. From a period of clear distinction between so-called Northern women's call for equality, Southern women's concern for addressing everyday needs, and Eastern women's concern for peace, an awareness of the complexities of gender discrimination and other aspects of vulnerability has evolved. The distinction between the voices arguing for different aspects cannot so easily be disentangled. Commonalities and differences are integrated in the discourse. Gender equality remains a goal of the women's movement. Yet, poverty and violence and conflict are recurring themes. The means to achieve change has been and continues to be debated.

It is clear, however, that the tendency to highlight women's vulnerability, weakness, and poverty has been present in the debate from the early development decades to the present. The conceptualisation of the 'feminisation of poverty' has emerged in this process:

- as a term for the new awareness of the existence of female-headed households (1970s);
- to illustrate the vulnerability of these households (late 1970s and 1980s);
- to illustrate the great number of women living in poverty;
- to illustrate the impact of macro-economic policies on women; and
- in calling for the attention to women in the development process (from 1970s until present).

The role of feminist development researchers has been pivotal in gathering evidence to illustrate the situation of women. The role of women activists outside the policymaking institutions has been pivotal in making use of such evidence. The increasing role of Southern women in this context, as well as the meetings between women across the world, has contributed to the debate and knowledge. The so-called 'femocrats', i.e. officials within the policymaking bodies with feminist interests, also seem to have played an important role in the conceptualisation of the term. In adapting to the organisational language and culture they have formulated women's interests in order to visualise women at all. Whether this might be considered as an instrumental use of feminist concerns or a strategic choice is discussed in the conclusions.

Issues: the development of WID/GAD as a field

At the intersection of the general development debate and feminist interests, WID/GAD has developed as a specialised field with its own areas of research, policy formulation, and practices with its corresponding evaluations and critique. During the early development decades – the so-called pre-WID and WID-influenced periods (the 1950–60s and 1970s and early 1980s respectively) the focus undoubtedly was on 'poor women', 'women in low-income countries', or 'women in developing countries' and the tendency was to bulk them in a homogenous group. With the development of GAD methodologies for analysis, the diversity among women has been a focus, as well as the social relations between women and men. This has also been reflected in the debate around women's poverty, where the complex link between poverty and gender differentiation have been debated.

The 'feminisation of poverty' as a concept has in this study primarily been identified in relation to both the concern for female-headed households and macro-economic policies' impact on women.

Female-headed households

The vulnerability of female-headed households can be traced back to the 1970s when it was argued that the number of households led by women was increasing and the poverty of these households was highlighted. Researchers, primarily from the US, were some of those who raised their voices for this group of women. During the 1980s female-headed households were still generalised as the ‘poorest of the poor’, even though single voices among researchers argued that in some of these cases it was a deliberate choice by the women to head their household alone. Researchers further stressed the great diversity between households headed by women in the 1990s. Still, their vulnerability remained a concern in policy terms, exemplified for instance in the Beijing POA from 1995 as well as in a number of UN documents.

Macro-economic policies

The impact of structural adjustment policies on low-income women was a central theme around which the feminisation of poverty has been argued. The argument was that the impact of the SAPs on women was an increased burden on their daily chores. Researchers and advocacy groups among feminist NGOs, particularly from the South, shared this concern.

IV. Sida’s policies

Some of Sida’s key policy documents¹⁶ related to poverty and gender have been reviewed and they most relevant ones are listed here. A review of a larger sample of Sida documentation would provide further evidence of the use of the term, and this is recommended for a future study.

Development targets

The fight against poverty has been at the heart of Swedish Development Cooperation since Government Bill 1962:100 was passed, which stated that *‘the objective of Sweden’s development assistance is to raise the living standards of the poor’* (Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1997:34). In 1977 Parliament adopted a new definition, saying that Sweden’s Development Cooperation should aim to *‘achieve a higher standard of living and fairer living condition for poor people, as to satisfy their basic needs and involve them in political decisions that govern societal development’* (UU 1978/79, *ibid*:1). The main objective was then broken down into four targets:

- Economic growth
- Economic and social equality
- Economic and political independence
- Democratic development

Two other targets have been added:

- Environmental protection (adopted in 1988)
- Gender equality (adopted in 1996)

There is no prioritisation between the targets, but the interaction between them is stressed.

¹⁶ Relevant documents from the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs are also included.

Poverty reduction

In the document 'The Rights of the Poor – our Common Responsibility' the Swedish Government sets out its policy for combating poverty (Government Report 1996/97:169). In an opening statement it is argued that among the 1.3 billion people living in acute poverty, women and children suffer the most (1997:7). Yet, poverty is recognised as a multidimensional phenomenon and thus defined in terms of three basic dimensions: *security, capacity, and opportunities* (ibid:11). The gendered character of poverty is highlighted in the section 'Who are the poor' (ibid:14–17), both in terms of sex, but also age, socio-economic conditions, household construction, intra-household relations, and other factors. Even though the situation of some groups of women is highlighted as prone to particular aspects of poverty, it is not generalised.

Gender equality is presented as one of six prerequisites for fighting poverty. Under that heading the 'feminisation of poverty' is mentioned: *'The majority of the world's poor (according to the UN estimates 70%) are women. Poverty has therefore become a typically female attribute and there is increasing talk of the feminisation of poverty'* (ibid:30). Gender equality is argued as a means to overcome poverty: *'Greater equality between women and men improves the prospects of sustainable development'* (ibid:31) and further *'Integrating the gender equality aspect into different policy areas will create a sustainable basis of political, economic, social and cultural changes in society that will help to establish greater equality between women and men and promote the fight against poverty'* (ibid:31–2).

Sida formulated a Poverty Programme in 1996 called the 'Action Programme to Promote Sustainable Livelihoods for the Poor and to Combat Poverty'. Here the overall goal of Sida is defined as *'to improve the quality of poor peoples'*. Referring to the development goals, *'raising the quality of life is not a matter of simply improving the incomes of the poor. It also consists of guaranteeing the poor, particularly women and children, their human rights and freedom, opening up their range of choices, improving their environment and security and enabling poor women and men to participate in development processes. Most of all it means increasing people's capacity to provide for themselves and lift themselves out of poverty'* (1996:2).

Reference is made to the gender equality goal and it is said that particular focus must be given to improve the situation of poor women (ibid:4). Reference is also made to the Action Programme for Gender, which was being developed at the time.

The Action Programme calls for the prioritisation of five groups of poor people (§4.2):

- Women-headed households
- Mothers and children
- Households in areas treated inequitably by economic development
- Ethnic groups threatened by marginalisation
- People with physical or mental disabilities

The Action Plan included in this document states clearly that Sida's aim is to improve the quality of life of poor people: women, men, and children.

The Action Programme was preceded by a process conducted by the Task Force on Poverty Reduction, including a number of hearings, seminars, and studies.¹⁷ The work of the Task Force was documented in the report 'Promoting Sustainable Livelihoods' (Sida 1996b) in which gender concerns are well integrated into most of the chapters. The report includes a chapter on social development visions, which presents a thorough analysis of the link between poverty and gender. *'Sida is convinced that development assistance can only contribute to social development if it is based on a sound analysis of the structure of society and a well in-*

¹⁷ The overview report on Gender and Poverty by Baden and Milward 1995 was commissioned by the Task Force.

formed understanding of the potential of poor women and men, as competent and motivated social actors, to take charge of their own lives. Such an approach bridges the micro-macro divide, incorporating specific, locally contextualised analysis as well as broader and more generalised synthesis and macro-level analyses. It encompasses the study of socio-cultural, political and economic processes, and it has the potential for shaping policy which is cognizant of the specificity of different processes in particular societies' (Sida 1996b:51).

The report highlights some key issues concerning the links between gender and poverty:

- There is a lack of disaggregated data, which makes it difficult to make comprehensive empirical analyses. Particular difficulties in measuring intra-household differences are brought up in this context. *'At the same time the often used expression 'feminisation of poverty' assumes that women increasingly predominate among the poorest of the poor. However, just as it is difficult to generalise about the impact of economic recession and structural adjustment on women, it is also hazardous to draw wide and categorical conclusions about the incidence and impact of female poverty without supporting data' (ibid:53).*
- There is an erroneous perception of women solely as passive victims.
- There is an unproven conflation of female-headed households and poverty. *'The overemphasised focus on female-headed households lead to a neglect of gender perspective on poverty in other kinds of households. This neglect and the complexity of the notion of 'female-headness' points to the need for improve gender analysis at household level with regard to the internal distribution of resources and to patterns of decision-making' (ibid:53).*
- There is a tendency to view gender inequality as a sub-criteria of poverty, *'with attention being focused on poor women rather than on gender relations in society as a whole. Gender subordination can be exacerbated by, but does not arise out of, poverty. The narrowing of gender concerns into a poverty agenda reduces the scope for working with gender equality generally, and is hereby in fact also a hindrance to the identification of adequate poverty reduction interventions' (ibid:53).*

The final recommendations of the report on a strategy for poverty reduction are introduced as follows: *'While poverty reduction has long been a primary goal of Swedish development cooperation and important achievements have been made, effectiveness in reaching that goal could be significantly enhanced by a more systematic and gender-sensitive approach' (ibid: 135).* Gender concerns are central in the recommendations and in the final recommendations on which areas should be of particular relevance for support in the future, *'gender-sensitive strategies to combat poverty'* is the second of eight prioritised areas.

Gender equality

'The promotion of equality between women and men has been an important issue for Swedish bilateral cooperation since the 1960s. The objective itself has remained unchanged over the years – stated clearly as the 'promotion of equality between women and men' (Sida 1997a:1). In 1996 it was included as a development target.

In 1985 Sida formulated the first action programme in 'The Women's Dimension in Development Assistance – Sida's Plan of Action'.¹⁸ The action programme aimed to make development aid more focused on women and to integrate women's aspects in the different sectors and projects. The target group for the action programme was spelled out clearly: *'primary consideration is given to rural women who are landless or who have cultivation rights to small plots, to women in refugee camps, to urban women in the low-income group and to unemployed women' (1985:1).* Two strategies are presented which should complement each other. The welfare strategy aimed to reach women and children with social and health-oriented inputs and the strategy focusing on the productivity of women aimed to achieve economic independence for women (ibid).

In the Programme's introduction, the 'feminisation of poverty' is mentioned in the following context: *'In*

¹⁸ Handlingsprogram för ett kvinnoinriktat bistånd

many developing countries, up to a third of the rural households have women as head; in southern Africa the figures considerably higher. Women ensure the day-to-day survival of their families while the men are employed as migrant workers elsewhere, or have abandoned their families altogether. Around 80% of the people living in refugee camps are women. Unemployed, impoverished women in the urban areas live in wretched housing and are often forced into prostitution and a life of degradation. It is against this background that the 'feminisation of poverty is being discussed today' (ibid:6). Poverty as such is not referred to elsewhere in the Action Programme; rather issues are discussed by sector.¹⁹

In 1997 Sida's Action Programme for Promoting Equality Between Women and Men was presented. It comprised three parts: an Experience Analysis, a Policy, and an Action Plan. The Action Programme covers a five-year period from 1997–2001. The Action Programme is based on the Beijing POA from 1995. However the concept 'feminisation of poverty' is not used or even referred to. A GAD perspective permeates the documents, stressing the relationship between women and men and the importance of mainstreaming gender equality goals throughout the activities of Sida. Specific strategies and commitments relate to the cooperating countries commitments and priorities vis a vis the Beijing POA. It is stressed as an objective that *'the promotion of equality between women and men must be an integral part of the work undertaken in the context of Sida's other Action Programmes on promotion of sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction; on peace, democracy and human rights; and environmentally sustainable development'* (Sida 1997c:1).

The Policy document highlights three areas related to structural and systemic causes of gender inequality which need to be specifically addressed (Sida 1997a:5):

- Human rights of women
- Equal participation in political decision-making
- Equal participation in economic decision-making and economic independence

Poverty related gender inequality is also prioritised in the Policy (ibid).

In the Action Plan *promoting sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction* is highlighted as a priority and the link between poverty and gender is understood as follows: *'it is important to understand the gender disparities in relation to causes, extent, nature and effects of poverty. Women have different survival strategies and different potentials for reducing their poverty compared with men. This is related to inequalities in other areas, in securing human rights and political and economic power. An interdisciplinary approach is called for, with a strong emphasis on women's empowerment at all levels'* (Sida 1997c:5).

The Action Plan further acknowledges that poverty may aggravate gender inequality. However *'it does not mean inequality automatically stems out of poverty or that simply reducing poverty will lead to improvements in equality between women and men...Sida's support to the promotion of sustainable livelihoods will have a clear focus on equality between women and men'* (ibid:7).

Concluding observations

From this review it may be concluded that Sida's policies and priorities tend to reflect the overall changes in the development debate globally.

In terms of the use of the 'feminisation of poverty', it is noteworthy that it was addressed in the Action Plan from 1985 and in the Poverty Action Programme from 1996. The complex link between gender and poverty was given far more nuance in the 'Promoting Sustainable Livelihoods' report preceding the Poverty Action Programme and the Gender Action Programme from 1997.

¹⁹ The following sectors are addressed: social welfare programmes, development of human resources, culture and media, agriculture and production, fishing, income-generating projects, industry and employment, productive resources, and housing.

A third observation is the prioritisation made in the Poverty Action Programme in terms of target groups: women-headed households and mother and children. It is noteworthy that these target groups were selected, given the thorough analysis on the link between poverty and gender presented in the Task Force Report, and specifically the analysis of female-headed households which do not conform to a unitary 'model' of always being poor. Furthermore the Task Force Report stressed the need for *specific, locally contextualised analysis*, given the extreme variations of social contexts in which development occurs.

Lastly, it is observed that given the call for integrating the poverty reduction and gender equality programmes, the link between poverty and gender was incorporated in the analysis and work preceding the Action Programmes on Poverty and Gender respectively in 1996. However it is noteworthy that in just reading the Action Programme on Poverty, the thorough analysis of the link between poverty and gender is lost. Instead, the focus is on addressing '*specifically poor women and children*' as well as the above-mentioned selection of prioritised target groups. This process of simplification makes the reader miss the excellent analysis made as a preparation for the programme.

V. Conclusions

The actors contributing to and the issues around which the ‘feminisation of poverty’ has been conceptualised and used have been summarised in this study. Other questions have also emerged, which deserve attention and which may have implications for the future.

Perceptions and discourses

‘Footage of starving women and children are more likely to increase donations than pictures of women labouring in the fields’ (Jaquette 1990:63).

The perception of women’s neediness and vulnerability is powerful and effective. It seems that generalised assumptions about women’s and men’s roles, responsibilities, and interests have been important in the conceptualisation of the ‘feminisation of poverty’. Women have been portrayed as ‘needy’, ‘vulnerable’, and the ‘poorest of the poor’ since the post-World War II period and this continues today. The early ideas were of women as mothers confined to the domestic sphere, which in the 1970s evolved into an acknowledgment of the link between the productive and reproductive sphere through the awareness of women’s productive role, or, as Moser defined it, in women’s ‘triple roles’. Despite the GAD contribution to clarifying the impact of the construction of gender in the life of women and men globally, the welfare approach continues to underly the perceptions of women in developing countries as well as undercut other efforts to address women’s strength, capacity, and agency in development policy and practice.

Various actors have contributed to this:

- Western/Northern researchers generalised perceptions of women in the South as having the same roles as Western women.
- Western/Northern feminists advocated for their ‘poor sisters’ in the South.
- Southern women called for their specific needs.
- ‘Femocrats’ adapted to male-biased organisational language and culture.

Researchers have documented evidence and formulated critiques in this debate. Diversity among women and the impact of constructed gender and power relations crosscutting other vulnerability variables have been two of the central issues stressed over and over again. Yet, male bias and gender blindness in the institutional context of development policy and practice remain as obstacles to a full gender perspective in development.

Conflation of goals and means

As pointed out by various researchers during the 1990s, there is a conflation of goals and means at the intersection of poverty and gender concerns. This seems to relate to:

- The definition of poverty – the pure economic notion of poverty has obscured other aspects of vulnerability.
- The focus in development generally on ‘people in need’, influenced the focus on women to ‘poor women’: *Far more has been written about poor women than those belonging to the middle and upper income groups*’ (Brydon and Chant 1989:2).
- The construction of women in general and Southern women in particular as ‘needy’.

The ‘feminisation of poverty’ has been constructed, used, and critiqued in this context.

Sweeping generalisations vs. context-specific analysis

A clear lesson is the importance of context-specific analyses about the gendered impact on poverty. The WID and later GAD research has evidenced the diversity between women as well as the impact of gender on all aspects of human life. Thus, any generalisation must always be opened up to context-specific exceptions; as Chant stated, the *'focus should be on gender rather than on minority groups such as female-headed households'* (1997:43).

Furthermore the generalisations that describe women as poor risk obscuring women's potential and strength.

Kabeer's statement from 1996 remains valid in the development context: *'not all women are poor and not all poor people are women ... all women suffer from discrimination'* (Kabeer 1996:20 in Chant 1997:43). Far too many women are poor, in some contexts the number of women in poverty is increasing. Yet, given the diversity among women and the specificity of each context it seems more important to have a gender-aware approach to poverty than to just generalise and simplify the problems.

Instrumentalism vs. strategy

The instrumentalist use of women's concerns for pursuing overall development goals has been highlighted over the years. During the 1990s, the voices of mainly researchers argued increasingly that the conflation of poverty with gender goals and the portrayal of women as poor was a instrumental use of women's situation. The 'feminisation of poverty' was deconstructed in this context.

However, as argued by Razavi (1997), instrumentalism may be another word for strategy. In a male-biased and gender-blind organisation, an adapted language and use of terms may be strategic in order to achieve at least something.

Implications for Sida

Sida's aim to integrate the focus on poverty reduction with promotion of gender equality remains central. Yet, this study indicates that a few issues are worth stressing:

- Generalisations should be used with care and should always be complemented with context-specific analysis.
- There is a need for a continuous exploration of the complex link between poverty, gender, and other socio-cultural aspects. This is particularly important in the local context.
- The choice of target group in the present Poverty Programme reflects the interest and focus on female-headed household as well as on women as mothers over time. In the forthcoming Poverty Programme an overall gender perspective should be ensured whereas a focus on minority groups in generalised terms should be avoided.
- There is a need for a continuous exploration and development of methods for overcoming gender-blindness in the institutional context of development policy, planning, and practice.

²⁰ Interviews in the UK in May 2001. See inception report for the present study.

VI. Recommendations for further studies

The present study aimed to give an initial overview of the process of conceptualisation of the concept 'feminisation of poverty'. Given the complexity of the issue and the large number of actors, much remains to be addressed. Therefore some issues that have emerged as relevant are recommended for future study.

Theoretically oriented

A continuation of the present study is suggested which should include a significant number of interviews with researchers and actors as well as an historical and discursive analysis of original texts and documentation. Such a study would further benefit from a more theoretically oriented frame.

Institutional aspects

It is widely acknowledged that gender-blind and male-biased institutions remain major obstacles for implementing a gender-aware development process. As this is a field of research in itself it has been mentioned only briefly in this study. A future study, which linked the lessons learned from the gender analysis of institutions with a discursive analysis of the use of the 'feminisation of poverty', would further illustrate the conceptualisation of the term. Interviews with both key actors and 'normal' practitioners would illustrate these aspects.

Interdependency between donors and researchers and NGOs

Another issue to explore seems to be the role of agencies and donors in the process of conceptualisation. What can agencies do and what do feminist researchers and advocates think they should do? (Kabeer interview and Kabeer 1999). Furthermore, what is the link between academics and donors? Elisabeth Harrison and Caroline Moser²⁰ argue that there is an interdependency between donors and researchers, as well as with NGOs (academics' dependency on donors and the impact of whom is selected by the donors). Is it possible to trace an impact of such links on the use of 'feminisation of poverty'?

Implications for programming

The present study has reviewed only the key Policy documents pertinent for the present study. A study which included sector-specific strategy documents as well as project documents would further clarify how the concept of the 'feminisation of poverty' has been used and what impact this concept may have had on programming and implementation.

Representation of women and media

How much has the representation of women as needy in media contexts contributed to the conceptualisation of the 'feminisation of poverty'?

Annex A

Examples of definitions or understandings of ‘feminisation of poverty’ across time

- 1970s *‘The growing number of women-headed household who were particularly disadvantaged’* (Tinker 1990:35).
- 1983 *‘The evidence to date is inconclusive but suggests that female-headed household tend to have the lowest income and that it is due in large part to lack of productive resources’* (Buvinic 1983:17).
- 1992 Allen argues there is a conflation of its meaning. She distinguishes between:
Feminisation of poverty – the increase in the number of or share of women among the poor and the Impoverishment of women – worsening of women’s living standard (1992)
- 1994 The ‘*feminisation of poverty*’ becomes a heading for describing poverty and female-headed households. *‘It is widely known that the proportion of female-headed households is higher among the poor’* (Cho 1994:116).
- 1994 The ‘*feminisation of poverty*’ is a subtitle under which Moore discusses the reported rise in the proportion of households headed by women. (Moore 1994).
- 1994 Kabeer: *Feminisation of poverty was coined by D. Pearce to indicate that the increasing proportions of women and female-headed households in the ranks of the poor during the recession of the eighties and the cutback of state welfare programmes* (1994:26).
- 1995 Kabeer: *There is evidence suggesting that women are making up an increasing proportion of the poor, this leading to a feminisation of poverty* (1995:108).
- 1995 ‘Feminisation of Poverty’; that women constitute a growing number among the world’s poor (UD 1996:30, own translation).
- 1995 *‘In the past decade the number of women living in poverty has increased disproportionately to the number of men, particularly in the developing countries. The feminization of poverty has also recently become a significant problem in the countries with economies in transition as a short-term consequence of the process of political, economic and social transformation* (§ 48, UN POA 1996:39).
- 1998 Jackson: *‘The feminisation of poverty has come to mean not (as gender analysis would suggest, that poverty is a gendered experience), but that the poor are mostly women* (1998:43).
- 1998 Cagatay (1998:1) says that it has been used to mean three distinct things:
- *Women compared to men have a higher incidence of poverty.*
 - *Women’s poverty is more severe than men’s.*
 - *Over time, the incidence of poverty among women is increasing compared to men.*

Annex B

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