Meeting on Women and Political Participation: 21st Century

Challenges

United Nations Development Programme

24-26 March 1999

New Delhi, India

Background Paper Nol. 2

Gender,Governance and the 'Feminisation of Poverty'

By Sally Baden

Institute of Development Studies

3/9/99

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of UNDP.

Abstract:

This paper summarises current thinking on the theoretical and empirical relationships between gender inequality and poverty, including reflection on how these relationships have been articulated in development policy discourse. It goes on to examine the potential for governance structures and processes, as currently defined, to promote poverty reduction in a way which recognises and responds to women's gendered experience of poverty. In doing so, the paper reviews interpretations of 'governance' and explores feminist and other critiques of conventional approaches to governance. It asks whether and how the governance agenda needs to be reconstituted if it is to succeed in addressing women's gender specific needs and interests. Finally, the paper highlights some strategic entry points in the governance agenda which provide opportunities for promoting poor women's gender interests.

Table of contents

Abbreviations

CEEWA Council for the Economic Empowerment of Women in Africa

DAC Development Assistance Committee of the OECD

DFID Department for International Development (UK)

GDI Gender Development Index

HDI Human Development Index

IFAD International Fund for Agricultural Development

IFI International Financial Institution

IMF International Monetary Fund

NGO Non-government Organization

OECD Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development

SAPAP South Asian Poverty Alleviation Programme

SSA Sub-Saharan Africa

UNDP United Nations Development Programme

WBI Women's Budget Initiative

Executive summary

Recent development policy literature has highlighted the importance of governance in poverty reduction efforts. It has also been argued recently that poverty reduction and sustainable human development should be the goal of governance. Links have been made between strong political representation of women and a high incidence of female poverty, suggesting that increasing women's political representation may be instrumental to reducing women's poverty.

Here, the links between gender inequality and poverty and between governance and poverty reduction are traced and questioned. Governance efforts will not necessarily lead to poverty reduction and, further, poverty reduction efforts do not necessarily reduce gender inequalities. These synergies cannot be assumed. A 'win-win-win' approach to gender, poverty and governance tends to obscure the gender-specific mechanisms, which create women's disadvantage.

Re-examining governance debates from a gender perspective highlights constraints to poor women's effective participation in governance processes and, consequently, suggests how governance structures and processes can be made more accountable to poor women. 'Gender accountability,' however, does not flow simply from increased participation of women in governance processes. The effectiveness of women's participation in terms of their ability to articulate gender interests, and the impact of this on actual resource allocation processes and decisions, are also critical.

Understanding of the role of institutional rules, norms and practices in determining entitlements is key to understanding gendered experiences and processes of poverty. The 'feminisation of poverty' argument is not helpful if it is used to justify poverty reduction efforts which uncritically target female headed households or even 'women,' but which do not challenge the underlying 'rules of the game'. Gendered institutional analysis can provide an entry point for rethinking governance debates from the perspective of poor women.

Development cooperation efforts to support governance raises issues of internal versus external accountability and potential ideological bias. These are heightened in the context of support to gender objectives, where accusations of cultural imperialism are easily raised. External aid programmes need to take into consideration internal political agendas and proceed with caution. At a more practical level, the small scale, fragmentary and often informal nature of women's organising also poses problems for external support where bureaucratic application requirements and reporting procedures are in place .

Some broad principles for development cooperation to support increased accountability of institutions to poor women are set out below:

- The apparent gender neutrality of governance structures and processes should be questioned at all levels in order to identify constraints to the institutionalisation of gender equitable outcomes;
- The different forms in which women organise, and varied issues around which they mobilise, particularly at local level, need to be recognised as political processes and institutional spaces created for women's gender interests to be articulated, for example in local government;
- Incorporating a gender perspective into governance analysis and policy should not be restricted to any one domain (e.g. civil society) but should cut across all domains, and make links between them;
- Higher priority should be given in governance debates to issues of family governance not as a separate 'women's' domain, but in recognition of the ways that gender biases in this domain permeate wider social institutions.

Possible areas for support, dependent on the context, are:

State

Democratisation

Promoting women in political life (at national or local level) requires attention to promoting links and dialogue between women inside and outside political structures to build accountability, particularly in periods of legislative change. Equally, support is required to develop the technical and political skills of women representatives to intervene in processes of legislative change. Beyond these specific measures, more detailed assessments of the gender equity impact of different voting systems are required to inform debates over electoral reform and changes to the culture of political institutions are required.

Legal rights and institutions

A stronger focus is needed on economic and social rights and on their implementation, for example issues of land reform and redistribution and claims for maintenance or social security benefits. Support mechanisms are needed for women to claim their legal entitlements (awareness raising; legal aid; resources for land titling etc.). Research on localised interpretations of customary or personal law may reveal possibilities for increasing women's choices, or strategies which women have evolved to turn legal measures to their advantage. 'Test cases' should be promoted and supported where conflicts arise between national or constitutional provisions and customary or personal law over issues of gender equality and entitlement claims.

Economic policy and the budgetary process

Gains made in advancing feminist economic analysis and lobbying efforts aimed at macroeconomic policy could be built upon, particularly by continued efforts to institutionalise gender budgets in government and to revise macroeconomic models and policy frameworks to incorporate gender concerns. However it is equally important to maintain support for 'outside' government initiatives, and particularly to build links between feminist economic analysis and grassroots mobilising of women.

More broadly, efforts to increase the transparency and accountability of budgetary processes are required, driven by objectives of equity and participation rather than fiscal restraint. In their dialogue with governments, donors and other external agencies could give far greater prominence to poverty reduction and gender equity concerns. They could also set a much improved example, through more far reaching redistribution of aid allocation towards the social sectors and between levels of service provision.

Decentralisation

Priority should been given to improving accountability systems and budgetary analysis skills at local and provincial government levels. Support to local government federations to develop and promote improved practice with regard to gender analysis and planning, aimed at poverty reduction, may be an appropriate mechanism. Local planning processes need to recognise the links between home and work in poor women's livelihood strategies and this should be reflected in transport and other infrastructure provision, as well as economic development plans. These interests may be usefully explored through

dialogue between poor women's community groups, traders associations and similar, and local councillors.

Safety nets and public sector restructuring

User charges, whether formal or informal charges used to supplement low wages have been shown to discourage service use by low income groups. Where possible, basic level services used by the majority and specifically those most likely to benefit poor women, should be provided free at the point of delivery.

To improve the quality of service provision and thus take up of services by poor people, particularly women, greater emphasis should be placed on relationships between clients and service providers. Sexual harassment and exploitation (e.g. of school girls by teachers) and abuse and violence (e.g. by nurses towards patients) are extreme ways in which beneficiaries are disempowered and which specifically affect women as users of services. Incentive systems which incorporate targets for equitable as well as efficient service provision should be put in place.

Private sector

More research is needed on the gendered outcomes of market processes, drawing on innovative analyses of feminist economists. Possible interventions with benefits to poor women include the extension of labour legislation to cover unprotected workers, but this must be matched by real enforcement powers. Support to the development of informal sector unions and associations of casual workers in different sectors is another. The creation of statutory bodies with oversight over gender equality issues in the private, as well as public sectors is important in terms of monitoring corporate governance. In this context, support to the development and institutionalisation of gender auditing methodologies relevant to private sector organisations would also be valuable.

Civil society

External support to civil society should include encouragement of networking, association and federation of, e.g., existing small scale credit and informal sector unions, where low income women are likely to be concentrated, while recognising that 'scaling up' may introduce new problems. A higher proportion of support should be channeled to NGOs active in lobbying and advocacy work on gender from a pro-poor perspective, not just those engaged in direct service delivery to the poor. This should include support for these organisations to engage in dialogue with government ministries, donors, and other stakeholders on the formulation of policies and programmes to address poverty.

Lastly , there is a case for encouraging the development of grassroots women' s organisations in localities or regions where gender disparities are particularly marked and social indicators poor. However, such efforts need to start from 'where women are' and build long-term, sustainable relationships, possibly around community or group assets, rather than provide short-term financial support.

Family governance

Legislative and policy frameworks are required which promote choice and flexibility in family arrangements (e.g. facilitating female-initiated divorce) which recognise the wide variety of households that exist and their fluid nature, and which grant equal or parallel status to different family types, irrespective of their perceived moral legitimacy. Linked to this, there should be stronger measures to prevent women from falling into poverty or destitution in the event of family breakdown or bereavement. At the same time it should be remembered that family breakdown may leave single men highly vulnerable where they have limited networks of social support.

1. Introduction and overview

In development policy discourse, links are often made between gender and poverty, which suggest that women are poorer than men. According to UNDP (1995: 4): Poverty has a women's face - of 1.3 billion people living in poverty, 70 percent are women.' It is also asserted that there is a 'feminisation of poverty' occurring, i.e. that poverty among women is rising faster than poverty among men. For example, IFAD (1992: 22) found that between 1965-70 and the mid-1980s, the number of rural women living in poverty increased by 48 percent, while the number of rural men living in poverty increased by 30 percent in the same period. At the same time, there is a general perception of an increasing incidence of female headship of households on a global scale and an association of this trend with the 'feminisation of poverty' (Buvinic and Gupta, 1997).

This elision between being poor and being female, has been extended to draw a relationship between lack of representation of women in political systems and the disproportionate poverty of women. 'Evidence suggests that there is a close relationship between the small number of women parliamentarians and the large numbers of women in poverty' (UNDP, 1997c: 8). This elision reflects the broader being made between governance and poverty reduction or sustainable human development: 'the attainment of economic and social objectives in developing countries will depend largely on their ability to strengthen their governance institutions and processes' (*ibid*.: 3).

However, the lack of systematic data which disaggregates expenditure or consumption by gender means that such broad statements are often based on questionable assumptions. Moreover, the idea that poverty has become feminised is conceptually confused, as well as empirically difficult to establish, with recent studies coming to conflicting conclusions (Buvinic and Gupta, 1997; Chant, 1997; Quisumbing *et al*, 1995).

Whilst 'good government' as a goal is at face value hard to disagree with, it cannot be assumed necessarily to be functional for poverty reduction. In a similar way, poverty reduction efforts may not always serve the advancement of gender equality; indeed it has been argued that poverty reduction may under some circumstances intensify gender inequality (Jackson, 1996; Kabeer, 1997). There may be synergies which can be built on but this cannot be assumed.

Increasingly, promoting choice and participation for women as well as men is explicitly part of the governance agenda. However, there remains a tendency to assume that promoting participation for women and men revolves around the same mechanisms and that accountability to women's, as well as men's, interests will flow from this (Ashworth, 1996). There are two key weaknesses in this approach: firstly, the assumption that accountability revolves largely around increasing participation *per se*; and secondly, the failure to recognise the gendered nature of institutions themselves.

The paper first reviews the nature of gender-poverty relationships and, following this, the conceptual and empirical basis for the alleged 'feminisation' of poverty. Following Kabeer (1997), the importance of institutional rules norms and practices in determining entitlements is highlighted and specifically the way in which the rules, norms and practices which govern families underpin wider social institutions.

The paper goes on to review recent debates on governance, drawing on gendered institutional analysis. Specifically, it focuses on the three commonly identified 'domains' of governance: the state, the private sector and civil society. In each case, governance structures and processes which impede the institutionalisation of rules, norms and practices to support women's gender interests are highlighted, as well as processes likely to support poverty reduction among women. It is often implicit that governance concerns only the 'public' sphere and issues of family governance are relatively absent from the debate, or are couched in highly charged moral arguments used for political purposes. This is a key limitation on the capacity of current governance analysis to illuminate the processes which intensify female poverty. Finally, the paper makes some tentative suggestions about ways in which development co-operation efforts could more effectively support governance structures and processes which are accountable to the interests of women, particularly poor women.

2. Gender and poverty

2.1 Income poverty and gender inequality

Conventional approaches to poverty definition and measurement based on income-consumption measures have been widely criticised for failing to capture human development outcomes (Sen, 1983; 1990; UNDP, 1997a). The use of the household as the

unit of analysis in poverty measurement has also been the subject of much criticism from gender advocates. At household level, income and consumption-based measures do not provide a good predictor of women's well-being because of intrahousehold inequalities in resource distribution and other institutional biases. Gender inequality is not necessarily strongly correlated with household poverty. It is possible for women to be deprived in rich households and also for increases in household incomes to results in greater gender inequality in well-being (Kabeer, 1996; Jackson, 1996).

Gender inequality and poverty, then, are the result of distinct though interlocking, social relations and processes. Women's experience of poverty is mediated by social relations of gender. This implies that it is only by looking at context that we can deduce whether social relations of gender act to exacerbate or relieve scarcity (Kabeer, 1996; 1997).

2.2 Human poverty and gender inequality

Given the unreliability of household income based measures as a guide to women's as well as men's, well-being , a broader approach is required which looks at poverty in terms of ends as well as means. The entitlements and capabilities framework of Amartya Sen provides a way forward here, stressing as it does the whole range of means, not just income, available to achieve human capabilities (i.e. different bundles of functionings or 'beings' and 'doings') (Sen, 1990). These might include 'intangibles' such as personal security and community participation as well as basic functionings such as literacy, longevity and access to income, as captured in the Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 1997a). In Sen's framework, well being in the form of choice over capabilities is acheived through a combination of entitlements (marked based exchanges entitlements and other claims) and endowments (assets of various kinds as well as human resources). Poverty and deprivation is thus a result of entitlement failure, rather than scarcity *per se*. (Sen, *op cit.*). Implicit in this approach is the idea of human agency to exercise choice over different combinations of capabilities.

UNDP's 1997 adoption of the Human Poverty concept and approach has created a broader understanding of poverty rooted in Sen's framework described above, as well as a specific indicator (the Human Poverty Index or HPI) which can monitor and compare experiences of human poverty over time (UNDP, 1997a; 1998). It has been argued that the HPI, alongside the HDI and GDI (Gender Development Index), provides the basis for comparing gendered experiences of well-being and deprivation, including within the household (Cagatay, 1998).

The HPI does allow us to capture the magnitude of differences in actual well-being between men and women. However, it also implicitly assumes that men and women experience deprivation in the same ways, and face the same trade-offs. But, for example, lack of access to water has different implications for men than for women. A truly gendered understanding of well-being would need to look at additional factors, particularly issues of time use, or experiences of violence, which are not captured in this

index. While useful as a descriptive tool, the HPI is limited in its capacity to analyse the gendered processes through which women and men experience well being or deprivation.

2.3 Gendered institutional analysis of poverty and well-being

Gender analysts have developed Sen's framework to focus on the institutional rules, norms and unruly practices from which entitlements are derived and specifically the gender biases that these embody (Kabeer, 1994).

In a given context, the range of entitlements that women can draw on may be circumscribed by rules, norms and practices, which limit their market engagement, for example. These include legal or other restrictions on occupations in which women may work, prevailing ideas about appropriate gender divisions of labour, or husbands' prohibitions on wives' working. Women may have lesser endowments, for example due to biases in feeding practices, unequal educational investments, or inheritance patterns. They often get lower returns on the endowments they do have, for example, because of gender segregation in the labour market or or wage discrimination. And unruly practices often mean that women's claims on endowments can be subverted, as, for example, when in-laws appropriate property, leaving bereaved or abandoned wives destitute, or when women give up inheritances to brothers, in exchange for hoped for security in old age.

The gender bias in institutions, which leads to differential entitlements and capabilities is characterised by:

   a. more constrained and weaker entitlements;
   b. more frequent entitlement failure, or lower returns from translating entitlements and endowments into capabilities;
   c. a lesser degree of choice over determining capabilities.

The institutional rules, norms and practices governing families are of particular significance in reproducing gender differentials in entitlements and endowments. Women's engagement in paid labour, for example, is constrained by their care responsibilities in the home, while women's domestic work frees men to engage in market production. Whilst this is by no means the only institutional context through which gender relations operate to determine differential entitlements to women and men, the family is a key site of gender disadvantage which underlies and reinforces (and is reinforced by) institutional biases in the 'public' sphere.

Institutional rules, norms and practices are not externally imposed, immovable constraints, but resources which are constantly drawn on and reconstituted in a variety of organisational settings. Women's exclusion from patriarchal decision making structures, itself due to institutional biases, in turn limits their capacity to influence rules, norms and practices which would bring about more gender equitable policies and practices (Kabeer and Murthy 1996).

3. Feminisation of poverty

3.2 Are women poorer than men?

The idea that there is a 'feminisation of poverty' has become influential in development policy and practice, for example, in the targeting of subsidies or micro-credit at women. But as Cagatay (1998) points out, it has been used to mean three distinct things:

- women have a higher <u>incidence</u> of poverty then men;
- women's poverty is more <u>severe</u> that than of men;
- there is a <u>trend</u> to greater poverty among women, particularly associated with rising rates of female headship of household.

Most measurement of income poverty has focused on the household as the unit of analysis. The evidence for a feminisation of poverty rests heavily on the rising incidence of female-headship of households and the allied suggestion that such households are generally less well-off than their male headed counterparts. Much controversy has ensued, with conflicting results emerging from different studies, in part related to the non-comparability of concepts and methods employed. At the very least, such evidence as does exist casts considerable doubt on any universal association between female headship and poverty. For this reason, many analysts have questioned the utility of female headship as basis for targeting in poverty reduction strategies (Quisumbing *et al*, 1995; Chant, 1997).

A review of the empirical evidence for the association between female headship and poverty highlights both the heterogeneity among this category, such the the validity of the concept has itself been questioned, and the dangers of assuming that female headship always represents disadvantage. The processes which lead women to head households are many and in some cases this may represent a positive choice, so that the connotations of powerlessness and victimhood are inappropriate. In female headed households women often have greater autonomy and control over resources. Well-being outcomes for women and children in these households may be better than in male-headed households at the same level of income.

This does not mean that it is never appropriate to design interventions to address the problems faced by female heads of household. Certain categories of female headed household (this differs considerably with the context) are disproportionately found among the extremely or chronically impoverished (Baden with Milward, 1995) and therefore <u>are</u> potentially valid targets for anti poverty interventions, providing a careful contextual analysis is carried out. This does not necessarily imply, however, that targeting individuals as recipients of resources (whether transfers or loans) is the best means to tackle poverty and disadvantage among this group.

Although women are not <u>always</u> poorer than men, because of the weaker basis of their entitlements, they are generally more <u>vulnerable</u> and, once poor, may have less options in terms of escape (Baden with Milward, 1995). This suggests the need for policy responses to poverty to incorporate a gendered understanding of poverty and its causes in order to be effective in addressing women's as well as men's poverty. It also suggests a need for specific measures which reduce women's vulnerability to poverty.

3.2 Implications for responses to poverty

The 'feminisation of poverty' idea can be problematic where it informs poverty reduction approaches which target resources at women - in particular microcredit interventions - without attempting to change the underlying 'rules of the game' (Goetz, 1995; Fraser, 1989 cited in Jackson, 1997). Where women are targeted with resources, it is often assumed that welfare benefits accrue directly to them and also to their children, to a greater extent than resources targeted at men (Buvinic and Gupta, 1997). It has also been argued that where women gain access to external resources, perceptions of their value to the household may change, increasing their bargaining power, and leading to more equitable allocation of resources and decision making power within the household (Sen, 1990). Beyond this, claims have been made, for example, that credit programmes empower women economically, socially and politically, as well as in the context of the family (Hashemi *et al*, 1996).

But it is important to consider how power embedded in gender relations may, in some circumstances, mediate these desired outcomes. It may be that benefits from targeting resources at women are siphoned off by men (Goetz and Sen Gupta, 1994), or that men reduce their levels of contribution to household expenditure as women's access to resources increases (Bruce, 1989). Even where women do gain greater access to resources, this may be at the expense of increases in their burden of labour, leaving them exhausted. Where they have control over resources, they may be unable to effectively mobilise these resources to support sustainable livelihoods. Women may feel compelled to invest resources, including their labour, in 'family' businesses, or in children, identifying their own interests with those of other household members, but thereby leaving themselves vulnerable in the event of family breakdown.

As these issues have come to the fore, the limitations of traditional micro-credit programmes in addressing women's poverty have been realised. In UNDP's South Asian Poverty Alleviation Programme (SAPAP), for example, village development organsiations form the basis for the savings and allocation of loans by groups themselves, including for capacity building and consumption purposes. It has also invested in women's leadership and management skills (UNDP, 1998).

4. Governance and poverty reduction

4.1 The origins and meanings of the governance debate

The governance debate in development policy took off in the early 1990s, with different influences and interpretations of the issues. The failure of governments, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, to effectively implement the economic adjustment programmes prescribed by IFIs was one motivation for examining the effectiveness and accountability of governments. A distinct influence on the debate was a more directly political concern with promoting liberal democracy in the post Cold War period after 1989 and associated with this a rise in political (as well as economic) neoliberalism. To some extent, this political concern was inspired by the growth of pro-democracy movements, although much of the democratisation in the developing world predated 1989 (Moore, 1993).

A distinction is commonly made between narrow definitions of governance which centre on economic and administrative governance (i.e. providing an enabling environment for private sector activity and reform of public administration); and broader definitions which encompass political governance, including the promotion of democratic political structures and human rights. The former definition, until recently, has been associated with the position of the World Bank, which was reluctant to give direct support to political objectives. The latter definition is closely associated more closely with bilateral donor agencies, as well as UNDP.

UNDP's definition incorporates economic, political and administrative aspects of governance.

Governance is *'the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms processes and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences.'* (UNDP, 1997a).

A wide range of measures have been employed by donor agencies under the banner of promoting good government. Some have been punitive: i.e. the attachment of political conditionality to development aid or loans; and others 'positive,' mostly involving support to various kinds of institution building processes. These include: improving public sector management, civil service reforms, strengthening legal and police systems; and political reforms, such as promoting a free press, support to civil society organisations, election monitoring, constitutional reform, and assisting the setting up of new political parties (IDS, 1995).

Governance has become increasingly important in UNDP activities with about one third of spending on governance related activities in 1997. Five main priorities for activities in this area are: support to governing institutions; public/ private sector management; decentralisation/ local governance; societies in transition and civil society. (UNDP, 1997c).

4.2 Governance and poverty reduction strategies

Policy agendas on governance and those focused on poverty reduction are not always clearly articulated. Reviewing the World Bank's approaches to governance and to poverty reduction, Goetz and O'Brien (1995: 22) found that: 'the approach to institutional change in the Governance agenda does not identify poverty reduction as an explicit objective while the poverty agenda underspecifies the politics of institutional change in poverty reduction strategies.'

Bilateral agency members of the OECD-DAC (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Development Assistance Committee) have made more explicit linkages between political and economic objectives and made more direct claims for the developmental potential of political reform (DAC, 1994, cited in Goetz and O'Brien 1995). In recent UNDP literature, governance is increasingly posed as one, if not the, key means to effective poverty reduction. Further, poverty reduction, or sustainable human development, is posed as the goal of governance (UNDP, 1997b; UNDP, 1998). Rights based approaches to poverty reduction have been adopted by some development agencies (e.g. DFID, 1997) Similarly, according to UNDP 'Poverty needs to be redefined so as to include access to decision making by both women and men and information on human rights' (UNDP, 1997c: 104). Current UNDP approaches to poverty reduction also stress the importance of empowerment as a means to address poverty, including that of women (UNDP, 1998).

This convergence, or articulation of the governance and poverty reduction agendas in part flows from a rethinking of the nature of well being, drawing on the capabilities and entitlements framework of Amartya Sen. This approach has been central to the construction of the human development paradigm, in contrast to the economistic, growth-focused approach typified by the IMF/World Bank. It is also consequent on broader interpretations of governance to encompass political accountability and popular participation. Thus, to the extent that improved governance structures and processes lead to greater participation of the poor, this, by definition, improves their well being.

4.3 Critical analyses of governance concept from a poverty perspective

Not all analysts support the contention that 'good government' as currently defined is the route to social and economic objectives linked to poverty reduction.

An underlying assumption of many efforts to promote political and administrative reform is that this will have economic and social payoffs. The evidence to support this contention is weak, however. It has been argued that strong 'developmental states,' whether democratic or not, have a comparative advantage in promoting both economic growth and human development, even in the absence of systems of openness, accountability and human rights (Leftwich, 1994). In order to be independent of powerful vested interests and push through unpopular redistributive change, a strong state may be

required (*ibid.*). At the same time, the attempt to present governance as a politically neutral tends to reinforce a notion that governance issues are technical and managerial, rather than political, and militates against analysis of conflicts of interests between particular social groups, including men and women.

In linking the promotion of governance to poverty reduction, there is an overemphasis on participation, as an aspect of accountability, rather than effectiveness and impact. It is often unclear how the participation of the poor is expected to lead to the articulation of their interests in ways which can influence institutional rules and practices (effectiveness), and consequently to different decisions about resource use which lead to poverty reduction in a material sense (impact).

4.4 Gendered institutional analysis and its relevance to governance debates

Typically, gender perspectives in mainstream governance literature are limited to an examination of the need for more women in formal political life and strategies to achieve this, without consideration of the need for transformation of the institutions of power. This weakness becomes particularly important when focusing on the links between improved governance and the gendered causes and consequences of women's poverty. Here, numbers alone may be a necessary, but are certainly not a sufficient, condition either for the articulation of (poor) women's gender interests, or to achieve an impact on resource allocation decisions and processes.

Governance is about 'getting institutions right for development' but rarely considers how to 'get institutions right for women in development' (Goetz, 1995). Outside the family, where the gendering of roles and behaviours is explicit but often assumed to be 'natural', there is a tendency to assume that institutions are neutral with respect to gender. Governance debates are no exception to this (Ashworth, 1996). However, 'Familial norms and values are constantly drawn on in constructing the terms under which women and men enter and participate in public life and the market place' (Kabeer, 1994: 63). The public-private split has institutionalised women's exclusion from the public sphere and is also drawn on to reinforce gendered power relations in the public sphere. For example, women are confined to 'typically' female tasks closely associated with their domestic roles, or more insidiously, subjected to sexual harassment or violence which both symbolically and literally threaten and contains women's identity as public actors (Goetz 1995).

Men's physical and historical dominance of the public sphere has meant that their needs and interests have become embedded in public institutions (*ibid*.). What Lovenduski (1994) calls 'nominal' gender bias is thus closely linked to 'substantive' and 'organisational' gender bias in governance. Men's physical monopoly of public space means that everyday work patterns come to be structured around men's physical needs and capabilities resulting in a gendered structuring of time and space in organisations.

Ideologies and disciplines are also important in creating cognitive and cultural contexts which favour male interests although again this is not 'fixed'.

Bringing a gendered institutional analysis to bear on governance debates suggests a need for reform which will increase accountability to women's gender interests and, thereby, institutionalise more gender-equitable structures and practices. However, confining such efforts to measures to increase female representation in public life will have limited impact unless the broader constraints on women's meaningful participation are also addressed. It is important to recognise the interlocking forms of institutional exclusion faced by women, particularly poor women (Kabeer and Murthy, 1996). This implies a need to rethink and extend the scope of the current governance debate, and of related interventions, in order to increase 'gender accountability'.

5. Gender accountability across institutional contexts: 'Unruly practices and unholy alliances'

In exploring the issue of gender accountability among NGOs, Mayoux (1998) focuses on **participation, effectiveness** and **impact** as aspects of accountability to women's interests, and goes on to explore the limitations in these three areas of current NGO practice. This three fold approach to accountability is helpful and can usefully be extended to look across the range of institutional contexts, or domains, with which governance efforts are typically concerned. Whilst the issues vary across these different domains, there are some common threads.

5.1 Participation

The practical limitations on women's participation in public and political debate are widely discussed in the development literature and elsewhere. The practical measures which may be necessary to include women in discussions and activities are well known - childcare provision, separate meetings where appropriate, consideration of women's workload and use of appropriate times and venues, language considerations - though less often actually implemented and adequately resourced. For poor women, these barriers are likely to be even greater.

Less discussed are the limitations on women's 'voice' which relate to actual or perceived male resistance and silencing, internalised oppression, or the difficulty of articulating women's interests within the existing framework of public debate. For poor women, the sense of powerlessness and exclusion is a product not just of their gender subordination but of interlocking forms of exclusion linked also to class and race.

5.2 Effectiveness

Improvements in women's participation do not necessarily mean that they will be effective in articulating their gender interests in public institutional contexts. Where women are present in only small numbers, they may be isolated and find it difficult to promote group interests. Women's immediate preoccupations may reflect practical concerns which flow from existing divisions of labour and power, rather than more strategic challenges to underlying power structures. For this reason, it may take time and reflection before women articulate in ways which reflect their gender interests.

Once individual women gain access to positions of relative power, the problem of their accountability to the grassroots or poor women whom they 'represent' arises. There is a danger that women in positions of power will be co-opted, or allow their gender interests to be subsumed byclass, caste, or ethnic interests. This may be exacerbated by their 'newness to the club' whereby women may feel beholden to others for their position. There are also very real divisions between women; some women have more to gain from preserving the status quo since their (albeit limited) power rests on their standing in the hierarchy over other women.

Finally, as participation in and openness of public institutions increases, gender interests emerge alongside many other 'issues' or 'interests' (e.g. environment; children's rights; class and ethnically based interests). So, participation may lead to greater competition over resources and also greater scope for men to organise to resist women's efforts to promote their gender interests. On the other hand, it creates opportunities for building strategic alliances between different interest groups.

5.3 Impact

Accountability must also be assessed in terms of impact, i.e. changes in actual outcomes which improve women's, in particular poor women's, lives. This implies changes in institutional rules and practices and also in actual resource allocations. Even where women are effective in articulating their gender interests, it does not always result in change. Certain areas of policy and decision making (especially finance and economics, where decisions on resources are central) have been particularly resistant to incursions with a feminist agenda, in part because of their technical nature. Women, especially when in small numbers, are easily sidelined into 'women's issues' in the social sectors, may themselves feel more comfortable in such positions.

Both 'unruly practices' and 'unholy alliances' are used to resist women's lobbying efforts, as when proposed changes to legislation or to international agreements 'evaporate,' or are vetoed by otherwise uncomfortable bedfellows. And even when decisions are taken at the formal political or legal level to alter 'the rules of the game,' these often face bureaucratic inertia and resistance, or insufficient resources are provided for implementation, so that they remain paper rights.

6. The state

Recent feminist scholarship on the state has highlighted the lack of neutrality of state institutions and political processes with respect to gender. Women globally are under-represented in formal politics at all levels (Karam, 1998). Because of entrenched gender biases, women working in state bureaucracies to promote gender interests find themselves in an ambivalent position working both 'within and against' the state. Most importantly the public- private divide implicit in state institutions, whereby women's needs are construed as a matter of private provision, has proved a barrier to establishing more equitable practices (Goetz, 1998).

6.1 Democratisation

Processes of democratisation have enabled previously disenfranchised populations to have a voice. In this sense, they provide an important route to 'empowerment' for marginalised groups. However, political reform does not necessarily translate into improved well being.

UNDP (1997c: 9) notes that in Latin America, for example, 'Democracy has brought only modest economic and social gains.'. Healey and Tordoff (1997: 245) found limited impact of the introduction of competitive electoral systems on the transparency of the budget process, and that, although public expenditure has been fairly widely distributed under multiparty systems it is 'not normally targeted on the poorer section'. Nevertheless, competitive political systems did offer populations the chance to affect changes to government policies where states performed inadequately.

In most instances, processes of democratisation have led to increases in women's participation in the political system (Razavi and Miller, 1998). In some, however, particularly in Eastern Europe and other transitional economies, it has not. While the issue of representation in formal political structures and arenas of decision making is critical for women there are a number of difficulties in terms of:

a. sustaining gains in these areas;
b. ensuring that formal representation actually translates into meaningful participation; and
c. ensuring that participation translates into substantive change in policies or decisions for resource allocation, which requires that gender interests become institutionalised.

Put simply, while it may create spaces for discussion of gender concerns, liberal political democracy does not automatically ensure better representation of women or their interests.

This does not mean that numbers do not matter, for while women remain in a small minority in political systems, it is difficult for them to form a strategic presence and to act as advocates in women's interests. Much debate has centered on the use of quotas as a means of ensuring women' s representation and the extent to which these devalue or undermine women's effective participation. Current consensus seems to suggest that they may be useful as a transient measure but should be removed once numerical representation is improved. Quota systems used by political parties, rather than reserved seats, are less likely to engender a backlash or result in women being put in place as 'pawns'.

But other, broader changes, are also required. The choice of voting system may have an impact with proportional representation systems showing better performance in terms of women's representation than majoritarian systems (Matland, 1998). Changes to the culture of politics and political parties, which allow for the inclusion of informal groupings and movements in political representation, may also be important. Such moves are apparent in some parts of Latin America, whereby social movements have attained a degree of recognition in political systems and consultation processes.

6.2 Legal frameworks and systems

Internationally and nationally, the establishment and popularisation of human rights instruments and legal provisions which provide for equality as well as protection from abuse, have drawn attention to the extent of gender based disadvantage and discrimination. In particular, the recognition of violence against women as a human rights violation has been a breakthrough and has stimulated efforts to address gender violence in development policy and programmes. An example is the recent UN interagency campaign to combat domestic violence against women, carried out in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

However, the weakness of state interventions in promoting gender equality is widely acknowledged in the governance literature, and is attributed to the persistence of 'customs and traditions [which] often undermine rules and regulations' (UNDP, 1997c: 7). Legal measures on their own are insufficient and need to be accompanied by efforts to change values through education, training and media, as well as affirmative action to promote women's representation in politics and also the legal system (*ibid*.).

But the frequent failure of legislative reform to uphold women's gender interests at local level is not just an issue of outmoded cultural values. Dualistic legal systems prevail in many countries with formal commitments to gender equality, such that the provisions which circumscribe women's lives are governed by customary and religious institutions. Religious and traditional authorities administering personal or customary law can bring considerable influence to bear on political processes locally and nationally such that constitutional or formal legal provisions for gender equality can be undermined. In South Africa, for example, even with a progressive Constitution including extensive

commitments to gender equality, the political need to accommodate traditional authorities as part of the post-Apartheid settlement has militated against strong action to challenge these institutions over gender questions (Walker, 1994).

In a recent assessment of policy formulation processes for poverty reduction in Uganda, Goetz and Jenkins (1998, draft) highlight the issue of land rights and their importance in providing security of tenure to smallholder producers, enabling them to access credit and invest resources with confidence. However, recent changes to legislation missed a crucial opportunity to strengthen women's, as well as men's, property rights in land, which could have proved a crucial plank in addressing women's vulnerability to poverty. A proposed amendment to the land legislation drawn up by women's groups to strengthen women's land rights was accepted during the Parliamentary debate but when the legislation was released, the amendment was mysteriously absent. Attempts to investigate or take the matter further since have been actively discouraged by political leaders.

The failure of legal changes, even when accepted, to translate into meaningful change for poor women is also a result of their lack of capacity in the legal system. This is not just about lack of resources to access legal help and bring court cases, which is nevertheless a constraint, requiring improved and better targeted legal aid provision. It also flows from the social distance between poor women and legal systems, related to education, language and from male dominance in the judicial system. In cases involving domestic violence or sexual assault, unsympathetic or even abusive police responses, and fear of social ostracism, are added deterrents.

6.3 Macroeconomic framework

Discussions of governance emphasise the importance of government in promoting macroeconomic stability and in providing an adequate regulatory framework as well as the physical and institutional infrastructure, to support private economic activity. Political and social stability is also seen as important in determining flows of inward investment and underpinning stability in financial markets. Thus, there is a degree of convergence between support to economic reform and liberalisation and the governance agenda.

Critics of macroeconomic adjustment policies, however, have highlighted a number of highly problematic assumptions underlying economic reforms, as well as the negative impacts of actual policies on some poor women. The lack of consideration in macroeconomic policy of women's unpaid labour in the care economy, which underpins the productive economy, but does not respond to market signals in the same way, is seen as a deeply embedded form of gender bias in macroeconomics (Elson, 1995a).

Greater efforts are now made to assess the likely social and poverty impacts of economic policies, but there is still a tendency to see the solution in terms of improving market access of the poor, with little consideration of the gender-specific barriers that women face in market engagement. Specifically, the case for promoting labour intensive growth

in order to promote opportunities for the poor is gender biased in its failure to understand that poor women, especially in rural areas, are rarely underemployed. It is the productivity of and returns to women's labour, inside as well as outside the household, that need improving, not just their opportunities for further work.

Flowing from the lack of gender analysis in economic policy is a failure to analyse the likely impacts on poor women of changes in public expenditure, a key component of economic reform. Recent emphasis by the World Bank and other agencies on the protection of social expenditures and their reallocation to basic services holds potential benefits for poor women. But it is unclear to what extent these gains have actually been realised in the face of downward pressures on total budgets and the collapse of free public service delivery in many countries. Until the budgetary process is subject to public scrutiny *ex ante* as well as *ex post*, government accountability for actual as opposed to planned expenditures is strengthened, and existing tools for impact analysis of public expenditure are more widely used, such gains may be elusive.

Recent initiatives from women in civil society, often working alongside women in government and with support from multilateral institutions, are beginning to make inroads into the domain of macroeconomic policy. In particular, the Women's Budget Initiative (WBI) in South Africa, learning from similar experiences in Australia (Budlender, 1998) has provided inspiration for the establishment of similar initiatives in a number of other countries, particularly in the Southern African region. South Africa is now also one of three pilot countries for a broader initiative to engender macroeconomic policy, formally under the aegis of government. These initiatives are simultaneously addressing the issue of engaging women in economic policy debates, changing the rules and practices (through efforts to reform the budgetary process) and ensuring that actual resource allocation decisions take account of women's interests. Most importantly, perhaps, they are pushing for policies which give intrinsic value to human life, as well as adequate recognition of women's labour in producing and sustaining human life.

Other initiatives to monitor and influence the impact of macro-economic regulatory frameworks on poor women include the work of the Council for the Economic Empowerment of Women in Africa (CEEWA) in Uganda. CEEWA have lobbied for changes to economic legislation (the recent Financial Institutions Act 1993 and Bank of Uganda Statute 1993) enacted in the context of financial sector reform. These efforts are intended to ensure that such legislation does not institutionalise discrimination or biases against poor women who are the main beneficiaries of non-formal micro-enterprise finance (Kiggundu, 1998). Networks of grassroots women's organisations in the informal sector have also been effective in influencing policy at both national and international levels leading to the adoption of the ILO Convention on Homeworking (Tate, 1996; Prugl and Tinker, 1997).

6.4 Safety nets and public sector reform

Safety nets, public sector restructuring and service provision

Governments, although no longer seen as providers of universally free services, or as having a monopoly on service delivery, are still widely held to have a central role as providers of a safety net for the poor and vulnerable. This includes providing an appropriate policy and institutional framework for poverty reduction efforts, collecting and using public revenues in ways which maximise their poverty impact and, increasingly, designing policies and delivering services in ways which empower the poor, or give them 'voice'.

Reform of the public administration is a key element of governance strategies. It encompasses a wide range of measures including downsizing and restructuring the civil service, introduction of new human resources policies and management systems, efforts to end or reduce corruption. Public sector often involves introducing competition into service delivery and thus the contracting out of service provision to voluntary sector or private providers, or service provision in partnership with non-government actors. While this has the potential to improve the quality of service provision and also to improve outreach to poorer groups, it has disadvantages too from an accountability perspective.

Where a whole range of service providers are operating at a small-scale, localised level, it is hard to have a co-ordinated approach, particularly on strategic issues such as gender policy. A proliferation of service providers may also prove difficult to hold accountable since there is no clear focus for complaint or lobbying and public administrations may find compliance hard to enforce. Where front-line personnel in service provision organisations (often women) have poor conditions of pay and work of, this can have very negative consequences on access to and quality of services available, due to absenteeism, demotivation and *de facto* 'privatisation'.

Social programmes introduced under macroeconomic adjustment have a poor record on women's participation. They have tended to see women as targets for social assistance and men as targets for employment, based on a male breadwinner model. Their populist orientation and appeal to political support, in the context of unpopular adjustment programmes, means that they often tend to reinforce 'family values'. Lack of gender policies, reliance on NGOs and other organisations to carry out projects, with no systematic monitoring, mean that social funds are often ill equipped to address gender aspects of poverty. Moreover, participatory activities or community-based social provisioning in social programmes often rely on the unpaid labour of women. In general, demand driven social funds have been found less likely to reach the poorest than employment schemes for example, since they are likely to be tapped by more articulate groups (Vivien, 1995; Graham, 1994)

Research on the experiences of poor people has highlighted the problem of social distance between poor people (especially women users of social services) and providers or administrators of public services. This reinforces experiences of exclusion and powerlessness faced by many poor people. Cases have been documented involving disrespectful attitudes of service providers towards the culture and views of clients, as

well as verbal and even physical abuse and harassment (e.g. nurses beating patients). Women and girls may be particularly susceptible to abuse and harassment of various kinds, such as sexual harassment of girls by male schoolteachers.

National machineries

The main instrument through which support for women's gender interests has been mobilised within government structures to date is through the establishment of national machineries for women. These have made many positive achievements, most importantly legitmising the place of gender issues in development planning (Goetz, 1998). However, they suffer from a history of marginalisation and insecurity, under-resourcing, lack of technical capacity, over-reliance on donor funding and in some cases lack of accountability to constituencies in civil society. The fact that many national machineries have been established during periods of fiscal restraint and government restructuring has made their claims on resources difficult to advance (Byrne *et al*, 1995).

Some lessons have been learned. National machineries set up following democratic transitions (e.g. Philippines, Chile, South Africa, Uganda) have been, relatively influential and effective, because of the context of broad commitment to greater social equality and justice. Positive experiences also highlight the importance of broad and open processes of consultation, for example, in the development of national gender policies.

Latterly, mainstreaming strategies have become the focus of efforts to institutionalise gender in state bureaucracies. These are reaching beyond traditionally 'female' arenas into 'hard' ministries such as finance, planning, and agriculture. This has highlighted a lack of technical skills among gender advocates; as well as the need for heightened awareness of gender issues among technical staff in line ministries, where implementation responsibility should remain.

It is unclear to what extent national machineries have prioritised the needs and interests of **poor women.** Given limited resources, this is critical. Certainly, there are positive examples: the *Servicio Nacional de la Mujer* (SERNAM) in Chile launched a major programme targeting female headed households in 1994/5; in South Africa, poor, African, rural women are a major stated focus of the Commission on Gender Equality, the statutory body charged with monitoring government and other actions to promote gender equality.

6.5 Decentralisation

Decentralisation is a complex issue both conceptually and practically, with considerable disagreement both about what constitutes genuine decentralisation and whether it has, or is likely to, bring about genuine social and political gains (Manor, 1995; Turner and Hulme, 1997). Participation of the poor in the decentralised management of service delivery has been a main plank of governance efforts, on the basis that this will make

service provision more accountable and response to the poor's interests. Unlike central government, local authorities and agencies are perceived to be closer to the people, and more directly accountable. But this fails to consider the possibility that at local level, power elites may be more entrenched, and more hostile to demands from marginalised groups (Griffin, cited in Goetz and O'Brien, 1995; UNDP, 1998).

Manor (1995) argues that decentralisation (in the form of devolution) has had positive results in many respects, where conditions of accountability and adequate resourcing have been met. These include increased participation, responsiveness and reduced corruption. However, decentralisation has not, he claims, increased the effectiveness of government poverty alleviation efforts which are more effectively organised at higher political levels. He also warns that decentralisation is unlikely to be effective in a climate of fiscal restraint.

Decentralisation of service delivery (e.g. of health services), when combined with an emphasis on increased cost-recovery, can also result in reduced access for the poor, reduced capacity for cross-subsidisation between services and localities and thus increased inequalities in provision (Baden, 1992). Where the management of school provision has been decentralised or farmed out to the private sector, there is evidence of middle class capture and dominance leading to increased fees in good schools and thus the exclusion of children from poorer households (Turner and Hulme, 1997; Goetz and O'Brien, 1995).

Implicit in some of the governance literature is the idea that decentralisation is inherently favourable to women. Decentralisation is thought to create more opportunities for women to participate in political life because logistical and other barriers to their participation are less; and to lead to greater responsiveness of locally provided services to the needs of women, as major users of these services. Recent moves to increase participation in local planning processes - such as the Law of Popular Participation in Bolivia, introduced in conjunction with decentralisation - are also seen as offering opportunities for the direct participation of women, among others, to influence the design of services to meet their needs.

However, it is not the case that women necessarily achieve greater representation at local compared to national level. There are both positive and negative examples here. In India, decentralisation has been used as a vehicle for promoting women's representation with a requirement to reserve one third of seats for women, resulting in a huge increase in the numbers of women active in political life.