1. Introduction

The ‘feminisation of poverty’ has become common currency in the development lexicon in recent years.\(^1\) This is especially so since the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995 when eradicating the ‘persistent and increasing burden of poverty on women’ was adopted as one of the twelve arms of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA).\(^2\) Although there are varied perspectives on the meanings of this ‘pithy and polyvalent phrase’ (Molyneux, 2006a; see also Box 1.1), the most popularised tenets are three-fold. The first is that women are the majority of the world’s poor. The second is that their disproportionate share of poverty is rising relative to men’s. The third is that the ‘feminisation of poverty’ is linked with the ‘feminisation of household headship’, as manifested in the widely cited epithet that women-headed households are the ‘poorest of the poor’ (see Box 1.2).\(^3\)

**BOX 1.1 COMMON CHARACTERISATIONS OF THE ‘FEMINISATION OF POVERTY’**

- Women experience a higher incidence of poverty than men.
- Women experience greater depth/severity of poverty than men (i.e. more women are likely to suffer ‘extreme’ poverty than men).
- Women are prone to suffer more persistent/longer-term poverty than men.
- Women’s disproportionate burden of poverty is rising relative to men.
- Women face more barriers to lifting themselves out of poverty.
- The ‘feminisation of poverty’ is linked with the ‘feminisation’ of household headship.
- Women-headed households are the ‘poorest of the poor’.
- Female household headship transmits poverty to children (‘inter-generational transmission of disadvantage’).

*Sources:* Baden (1999); Cagatay (1998); Chant (1997b; 2003a; 2003b); Davids and van Driel (2001; 2005); Medeiros and Costa (2006); Moghadam (1997; 2005); Wennerholm (2002).
BOX 1.2 ASSERTIONS ABOUT FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS AS THE ‘POOREST OF THE POOR’

‘The global economic downturn has pressed most heavily on women-headed households, which are everywhere in the world, the poorest of the poor’ (Tinker, 1990: 5).

‘Women-headed households are over-represented among the poor in rural and urban, developing and industrial societies’ (Bullock, 1994: 17–18).

‘One continuing concern of both the developing and advanced capitalist economies is the increasing amount of women’s poverty worldwide, associated with the rise of female-headed households’ (Acosta-Belén and Bose, 1995: 25).

‘What is clear is that in many countries women tend to be over-represented in the ranks of the ‘old’ or structural poor, and female-headed households tend to be among the most vulnerable of social groups’ (Graham, 1996: 3).

‘The number of female-headed households among the poor and the poorer sections of society is increasing and . . . they, as a group – whether heterogeneous or not – are more vulnerable and face more discrimination because they are poor and also because they are man-less women on their own’ (Bibars, 2001: 67).

‘Households headed by females with dependent children experience the worst afflictions of poverty . . . Female-headed households are the poorest’ (Finne, 2001: 8).

‘Households headed by women are particularly vulnerable. Disproportionate numbers of women among the poor pose serious constraints to human development because children raised in poor households are more likely to repeat cycles of poverty and disadvantage’ (Asian Development Bank, 2003: 11).

Source: Chant (2006: 5).
While these notions will be explored (and challenged) in the current book, the value of determining trends in the gendered burdens of poverty remains paramount. Although the proportion of the world’s population living in poverty has declined since the early 1990s, absolute numbers in many parts of the South are rising (see Table 1.1), and ‘unless drastic measures are taken’, this may well continue (Middleton et al., 2001: 2). This is important since although headcount ratios (the percentage of the poor...
within the population), satisfy a ‘Likelihood Principle’ (the probability of being poor), they do not, unlike aggregate headcounts (the total absolute number of the poor), uphold a ‘Constituency Principle’ whereby poverty has an intrinsic importance to those it afflicts (see Subramanian, 2005). Moreover, current trends suggest that inequalities in income distribution will undergo further polarisation. Although income inequalities are rarely deemed as ‘politically sensitive’ as poverty per se, they may be particularly important for women since they concern power relations, with women’s lack of power arguably being among the most fundamental reasons why poverty is feminising (see Johnson, 2005: 57).

While defining poverty, let alone which individuals or groups are the ‘poorest’, is both highly complex and contested, one of the main connotations in prevailing constructions of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ is that women suffer a greater incidence of income poverty than men (Chant, 2006). Notwithstanding that collecting data on incomes can be extremely problematic and prone to error, many argue that ‘money-metric’ poverty is the easiest to identify and enumerate. Indeed, the ‘Copenhagen measure’ whereby the (extremely) poor are classified as all those persons living on less than one US dollar a day, is the only indicator which is accepted internationally (Johnsson-Latham, 2004b: 28). Yet while we know more or less how many people this applies to (around 1.5 billion as of 2005, or one-sixth of the world’s population), we are unable to pinpoint its gender dimensions with any precision in the absence of a globally comprehensive database on women’s poverty relative to men’s (see UNIFEM, 2002: 60). On top of this, although ‘feminisation’ implies a trend for gender gaps in poverty to be widening over time, the possibilities for empirical verification are virtually non-existent (Nauckhoff, 2004: 65). As summarised by Johnsson-Latham (2004b: 18):

In spite of the suggestion that the majority of the poor are women, there are neither firm data to confirm this – nor the suggestion that there is a trend of ‘feminisation of poverty’. This is due to the fact that few efforts have been made to estimate the scope and magnitude of female poverty. (See also later)

With the exception of Latin America, where the regional United Nations Economic Commission (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean – ECLAC) has produced headcounts of females and males who fall below national poverty lines (see CEPAL, 2002; also Chapter 3 in this volume), data in developing areas are usually collected at the household level and, as noted by Klasen (2004: 2), which makes it ‘conceptually and practically difficult to “assign” households [sic] incomes or assets to individuals of different gender within households’ (emphasis added). As echoed
by Baden (1999: 10): ‘the lack of systematic data which disaggregates expenditure or consumption by gender means that such broad statements are often based on questionable assumptions’. Yet a continued dearth of comprehensive sex-disaggregated data\(^5\) has done little to dissuade major development organisations from asserting that between 60 and 70 per cent of the world’s poor are female, and that poverty increasingly has a ‘woman’s face’ (UNDP, 1995: 4; see also DFID, 2000: 13; UN, 1996: 6; UNIFEM, 1995: 4, cited in Marcoux, 1997; also ADB, 2000: 16).\(^6\) Indeed, the assumption that poverty afflicts women more than men has become so engrained in international development discourse that this seems to have obviated the need for substantiating the hypothesis. As stated by Davids and van Driel (2005: 5), women’s impoverishment has become a ‘global orthodoxy that is not questioned anymore’.

Yet for all the problems weakly substantiated pronouncements of a ‘feminisation of poverty’ might entail, that they draw attention to women’s privation represents a significant breakthrough given that until recently most discussions have dealt with ‘sexless averages’ (Johnsson-Latham, 2004b: 18), and ‘(P)overty programmes have not ordinarily incorporated gender as an important dimension’ (UNDP, 2000b: 3).

Testifying to the growing prominence of gender in poverty analysis and strategy is ECLAC’s (2004b: 82) claim that one of its main priorities for Latin America and the Caribbean is to ‘identify the characteristics of female poverty and its associated causes’. This is also a major concern for the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (2002: 135), who argue that the ‘overarching goal of poverty reduction is closely linked to improving the status of women, since equity – especially gender equity – is now recognised as an essential factor in transforming growth to development and reducing poverty’. With something of a ‘win–win formula’ having emerged from the conjectured synergies between greater gender equity, economic growth and effective poverty reduction (Rodenberg, 2004: iv), it is no surprise that popularisation of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ seems to have led to a ‘feminisation’ of anti-poverty programmes. The latter is evidenced in initiatives to increase women’s literacy, education and vocational skills, to facilitate their access to micro-credit, to recruit them as volunteers in community solidarity and self-help schemes, and/or to provide targeted support to female heads of household (see Chant, 1999; 2003a; Kabeer, 1997; Mayoux, 2002; 2006; Molyneux, 2006a; 2006b; Pankhurst, 2002; UNDAW, 2000: 3 and 9; Yates, 1997). Growing acknowledgement of the strategic importance of gender in combatting poverty has also propelled it into the macro-level domain of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
THE IMPACTS OF THE ‘FEMINISATION OF POVERTY’ ON MACRO-LEVEL POVERTY REDUCTION INITIATIVES

Gender in PRSPs

Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers aim to alleviate poverty and have been devised by an increasing number of the world’s poorest countries in order to attain debt relief. Gender has become identified in these as a ‘cross-cutting’ issue, requiring, *inter alia*, that women should be a vital constituency in consultation and that proposals should ‘mainstream gender’ (see Bradshaw and Linneker, 2003; Whitehead, 2003). These provisos are driven by what Zuckerman (2003) identifies as three compelling reasons to ‘en-gender’ PRSPs. The first is the ‘poverty reduction case’ which asserts the centrality of gender to reducing poverty. The second is the ‘business–World Bank case’ which focuses on the costs of gender inequality to development. The third is the ‘human rights case’ which regards gender equality as integral to full and equal human rights for all. In turn, Rodenberg (2004: v) claims that two of the most positive outcomes of the purported ‘en-gendering’ of PRSPs are that ‘an array of entry points are identified for alleviating and discriminating against women in the community and the market’, and that strategic concerns such as improving women’s legal position and preventing domestic violence are making an increasing appearance in policy documents.

This said, what happens in practice is often a far cry from rhetoric, and from the BPFA, which, as Johnsson-Latham (2004b: 34) argues, remains the ‘most far-reaching political agreement in defining female poverty and deprivation’, addressing, as it does, core issues in women’s disadvantage such as land and inheritance rights (see also Painter, 2004: 41).

Shortcomings in the ‘en-gendering’ of PRSPs highlighted by Bradshaw and Linneker (2003) include the lack of a minimum gender threshold, no clear guidance from the international financial institutions (IFIs) on how and which groups of women (or men) should be included in the policy development process, that the gender guidelines issued by the World Bank tend to focus on economic growth, productivity and efficiency rather than equity, and that insufficient time or opportunity is given to consultation with women’s organisations. Other qualifications pointed up by Rodenberg (2004) are that women and gender tend to feature in traditionally ‘female’ sectors such as health and education at the expense of ‘gender-neutral’ fields such as trade and development financing, that PRSPs rarely take into account women’s vast amount of unpaid labour in reproduction and subsistence at domestic and community levels, and that under the heading of
gender ‘girls’ and ‘mothers’ are mentioned to a much greater extent than ‘men’ and ‘boys’, with ‘fathers’ seldom mentioned, if ever (ibid.: 25 and 37; also de Vylder, 2004; UNRISD, 2005). It has also been asserted that ‘Because cross-cutting issues are supposed to be everyone’s business, they tend to become the responsibility of no-one’ (UNMP/TFEGE, 2005: 23). Given these wide-ranging contradictions, and that ‘business’ and ‘efficiency’ considerations tend to have overridden those of ‘human rights’, it is no surprise to find allegations that: ‘Only a handful of PRSPs can be said to have taken women’s poverty seriously’ (Whitehead, 2003: 35), or that ‘PRSPs do not at present appear to be a fruitful avenue for women’s empowerment’ (UNRISD, 2005: 56). Indeed, if anything, PRSPs could actually be exacerbating women’s poverty, with women’s organisations in Latin America noting that they constitute:

little more than a rerun of the old structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s which led to a ‘feminisation of poverty’ as a result of the privatisation of basic services and cuts in public social services. They [women] now fear that their governments may use the participation procedure as a means of co-opting them i.e. of using their active participation to legitimise and formulate disguised growth-oriented structural adjustment programmes instead of encouraging them to participate actively in implementing socio-political change. (Rodenberg, 2004: 38)

**Gender and the MDGs**

Criticisms around the gender shortfalls in PRSPs are in many ways similar to those levelled at the MDGs. Issued in the spirit of the Millennium Declaration by 191 United Nations (UN) member states in 2000, the MDGs are described as ‘time-bound and measurable goals and targets for combatting poverty, hunger, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradation and discrimination against women’, with the halving of extreme poverty by 2015 being the first and overriding objective (Barton, 2004: 3; Rodenberg, 2004: i; see also Box 1.3).

The MDGs arguably reflect a human rights agenda, drawing as they do from various world conferences of the 1990s built, in turn, on earlier treaties such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESR) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Abeyesekera, 2004; Painter, 2004: 5). The purported centrality of gender equality and women’s human rights in the MDGs not only implies making connections between the MDGs and global agreements such as CEDAW, the BPFA and so on, but also ‘requires a commitment from donors to finance women’s empowerment’ (Heyzer, 2005: 11). As articulated by UNMP/TFEGE (2005: 1):
BOX 1.3  THE UNITED NATIONS MILLENNIUM DECLARATION AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

UN Millennium Declaration, September 2000
‘We will spare no effort to free our fellow men, women and children from the abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty, to which more than a billion of them are currently subjected.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals and targets</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GOAL 1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Target 1:</strong> Halve the proportion of people on less than US$1 per day between 1990 and 2015</td>
<td>1. Proportion of population below US$1 per day</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Poverty gap ratio (incidence × depth of poverty)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Share of poorest quintile in national consumption</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Target 2:</strong> Halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger between 1990 and 2015</td>
<td>4. Prevalence of underweight children (under 5 years of age)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Proportion of population below minimum level of dietary energy consumption</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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| **GOAL 2: Achieve universal primary education** |  |
| **Target 3:** By 2015, ensure that all children complete full primary education | 6. Net enrolment ratio in primary education  |
| | 7. Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5  |
| | 8. Literacy rate of 15–24-year-olds  |

| **GOAL 3: Promote gender equality and empower women** |  |
| **Target 4:** Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels of education by 2015 | 9. Ratio of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education  |
| | 10. Ratio of literate females to males in 15–24-year age group  |
**GOAL 4: Reduce child mortality**

*Target 5:* Reduce by two-thirds the under-5 mortality rate between 1990 and 2015

11. Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector
12. Proportion of seats in parliament held by women
13. Under-5 mortality rate
14. Infant mortality rate
15. Proportion of 1-year-old children immunised against measles

**GOAL 5: Improve maternal health**

*Target 6:* Reduce maternal mortality ratio by three-quarters between 1990 and 2015

16. Maternal mortality ratio
17. Proportion of births attended by skilled personnel

**GOAL 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**

*Target 7:* Halt and begin to reverse spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015

*Target 8:* Halt and begin to reverse the incidence of malaria and other major diseases by 2015

18. HIV prevalence among 15–24-year-old pregnant women
19. Contraceptive prevalence rate
20. Number of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS
21. Prevalence and death rates associated with malaria
22. Proportion of population in malaria risk areas using effective malaria prevention and treatment measures
23. Prevalence and death rates associated with tuberculosis
24. Proportion of TB cases detected and cured under Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DOTS)
GOAL 7: Ensure environmental sustainability*

*GOAL 7: Ensure environmental sustainability*

**Target 9:** Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse the loss of environmental resources

- 25. Proportion of land area covered by forest
- 26. Land area protected to maintain biological diversity
- 27. Gross domestic product (GDP) per unit of energy (as proxy for energy efficiency)
- 28. Carbon dioxide emissions per capita (plus two figures of global atmospheric pollution: ozone depletion and the accumulation of global warming gases)

**Target 10:** Halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water

- 29. Proportion of population with sustainable access to an improved water source.
- 30. Proportion of people with access to improved sanitation
- 31. Proportion of people with access to secure tenure

**Target 11:** Achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum-dwellers by 2020

GOAL 8: Develop a global partnership for development

**Target 12:** Develop further an open, rule-based predictable, non-discriminatory trading and financial system

Includes a commitment to good governance, development and poverty reduction – both nationally and internationally

**Target 13:** Address the special needs of the Least Developed Countries

- 32. Net ODA as percentage of DAC donors’ GNP (targets of 0.7 per cent in total and 0.15 per cent for LDCs)
Introduction

Includes tariff and quota free access for LDC exports; enhanced programme of debt relief for HIPC and cancellation of official bilateral debt, and more generous ODA

33. Proportion of ODA to basic social services (education, primary healthcare, nutrition, safe water and sanitation)
34. Proportion of ODA which is untied
35. Proportion of ODA for environment in small island developing states
36. Proportion of ODA for transport sector in landlocked countries

37. Proportion of exports by value (excluding arms), admitted free of duties and quotas
38. Average tariffs and quotas on agricultural products, and textiles and clothing
39. Domestic and export agricultural subsidies in OECD countries
40. Proportion of ODA provided to help build trade capacity

Target 14: Address the Special Needs of landlocked countries and small island developing states (through Barbados Programme and 22nd General Assembly provisions)

Market access

41. Proportion of official bilateral heavily indebted poor country (HIPC) debt cancelled
42. Debt service as a percentage of exports of goods and services
43. Proportion of ODA provided as debt relief
44. Number of countries reaching HIPC decision and completion points

Target 15: Deal comprehensively with the debt problems of developing countries through national and international measures in order to make debt sustainable in the long term

Debt sustainability

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The inclusion of gender equality and women’s empowerment in the third Millennium Development Goal is a reminder that many promises have not been met, while simultaneously offering yet another international opportunity to implement them.

That there is a separate goal – MDG 3 – which calls for ‘promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women’, is viewed by some as ‘a powerful symbol of the success of the international feminist movement on international politics and development’ (Sweetman, 2005: 3; also Hayes, 2005: 67). Moreover, that MDG 3 is not only ‘explicitly valued as an end in itself’ (Kabeer, 2005: 13), but is deemed fundamental to realising all the objectives set out in the Millennium Declaration, is also construed as signalling genuine commitment to ‘mainstreaming’ gender (see also Satterthwaite, 2003; World Bank GDG, 2003). The inclusion of MDG 5 – to improve maternal health – is also promising on grounds that this is often regarded as a ‘litmus test’ of women’s status, not only due to fairly consistent links between poverty and maternal mortality levels (Graham, 2004: 6; WHO, 2005a), but because early and dangerously frequent pregnancies often stem from male control over female sexuality (see Fraser, 2005;

That the MDG process requires regular country reports (Millennium Development Goal Reports [MDGRs]) is also seen to constitute ‘a new opportunity for gender advocates to enlarge the space for dialogue and build a broad national commitment to women’s rights and gender equality’ (UNDP, 2003b: 2). Indeed, with the MDGs having become ‘the overarching framework for national development and the reference for pro-people and pro-poor policy-making’, such reporting can potentially ‘catalyse gender-responsive policy-making and programming’, and ‘facilitate more optimal resource allocation’ (UNDP, 2005: 3).

Yet aside from some undoubted potential to advance gender equality, many feminists have criticised the relatively limited grounds on which gender is included in the MDGs (Johnsson-Latham, 2004b; World Bank GDG, 2003). Barton (2005: 25), for example, observes that: ‘When the MDGs emerged from the UN Secretariat, women’s groups were dismayed that gender equality as an issue in its own right was limited to one quite limited Goal, and that the issue of reproductive rights was not explicit.’ The idea that Goal 3 might be achieved without guarantees of sexual and reproductive rights is widely deemed untenable given that these are fundamental to women ‘being able to expand their capabilities, to access economic and political opportunities and have any level of determination over their own lives’ (UNMP/TFEGE, 2005: 6). Another concern is that preoccupation with male–female ratios, as in education, may detract from the fact that:

the empowerment of women does not just depend on the elimination of numerical gender disparities. It is possible to equalise the enrolment of boys and girls in school at a low level for both, a situation that empowers neither. Equality in deprivation does not represent a genuine fulfilment of Goal 3. (UNIFEM, 2002: 6)

Qualms about numbers have also been expressed with respect to poverty, with Johnsson-Latham (2004b: 27) claiming that owing to an overemphasis on measurable data ‘efforts to capture power-related dimensions of poverty appear almost to have come to a halt’ (see also Painter, 2004: 22). Lack of time frames set for women’s political and economic empowerment are also worrying (Rodenberg, 2004: iii). In light of these caveats, and because the MDGs are argued to divert attention not just from the Beijing but from other UN Platforms for Action such as Cairo (Population, 1994), Vienna (Human Rights, 1993), Copenhagen (Social Development, 1997), and Istanbul (Habitat, 1996), Antrobus (2004; 2005) has gone as far to use the acronym ‘MDG’ to refer to ‘Major Distracting Gimmick’.
Inasmuch as the MDGs themselves may be limited in respect of their gender objectives, the monitoring and reporting process to date is also wanting. Despite lofty rhetoric about the significance of MDG 3 to all the other goals, for example, a 2003 UNDP review of the status of gender concerns in 13 MDGRs found that not one identified gender as a ‘cross-cutting’ issue – MDG 3 being the only goal in which gender had been systematically addressed in all countries. Even if gender and/or women often got a mention in relation to MDG 5 and MDG 1 (Box 1.3), the latter asserted by the UNDP (2003b: 6) as being ‘particularly critical for women’, of the nine reports which mentioned gender and/or women in relation to poverty, only five specifically referred to gender inequality as a source of poverty and/or identified gender-related interventions as part of poverty plans (ibid.: 8). This led the UNDP to highlight a notable ‘ghettoisation’ of gender issues within women-specific sectors, along with a persistent portrayal of women ‘in terms of their vulnerabilities, and cast in their traditional roles as mothers or victims rather than actors in development’ (ibid.: 22). Although some progress had been made by 2005, when 78 MDGRs were reviewed by UNDP, only a handful of countries had gone ‘outside the MDG box’, with most concentrating only on the minimum indicators (UNDP, 2005: 53).

In order to rectify these shortcomings the UN Millennium Project Task Force on Education and Gender Equality (UNMP/TFEGE) has been working on improving indicators and strategies. Aside from advocating the inclusion of gender-equality targets in every MDG, the Task Force has recommended that MDG 3 might include strategic priorities aligned with CEDAW and BPFA encompassing guaranteed sexual and reproductive rights, and an end to violence against women and girls (Hayes, 2005: 68–9; also Box 1.4). Even if it has been cautioned that fewer indicators may work better, and that ‘adding to the basket’ may pose impossible demands on national capacities and workloads (see World Bank GDG, 2003), the menu of specific indicators proposed for MDG 3 by the Task Force would undoubtedly help to make more meaningful changes in women’s lives (see Box 1.5).

Moreover, it is important that efforts are made to follow-through the Task Force calls for particular attention to poor women on the grounds that gender inequalities are greatest among the poor, especially in respect of capabilities and opportunities, that increasing numbers of poor households are headed and/or maintained by women, and that the ‘well-being and survival of poor households depend on the productive and reproductive contributions of their female members’ (UNMP/TFEGE, 2005: 3–4). This would also complement the efforts of women’s groups to integrate gender equality as a critical element of poverty eradication in the MDGs since the
launch of the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) at the World Social Forum in Brazil in January 2005 (see Barton, 2005: 31). Yet whether a focus on poor women, let alone MDG targets more generally, are attainable without a major reorientation of current neoliberal macroeconomic growth strategies is doubtful (Mbilinyi, 2004; Williams, 2004). As Painter (2004: 5) argues: ‘The MDGs have not un-seated the predominance of a neoliberal, economic growth-driven model of development that relies on women as instruments as opposed to agents of development.’ This is particularly serious for countries whose burdens of debt service preclude their making the necessary investments in health, education and infrastructure to enable them to attain their goals (ibid.: 19; see also Reddy and Heuty, 2005a; 2005b). As such, many feminists advocate primary allegiance to the BPFA:

Given that the MDGs are weak on the goal of gender equality and that the gender dimensions of the other MDGs are almost invisible, those committed to the advancement of women’s equality and empowerment need to consider putting their efforts into developing strategies for monitoring and measuring progress toward the achievement of the Beijing Platform for Action. After all,
### BOX 1.5 MENU OF INDICATORS FOR MDG 3 PROPOSED BY THE TASK FORCE ON EDUCATION AND GENDER EQUALITY

**Education**
- Ratio of female to male gross enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education.
- Ratio of female to male completion rate in primary, secondary and tertiary education.

**Sexual and reproductive health and rights**
- Proportion of contraceptive demand satisfied.
- Adolescent fertility rate.

**Infrastructure**
- Hours per day (or year) spent by women and men in fetching water and collecting fuel.

**Property rights**
- Land ownership by women, men or jointly held.
- Housing title, disaggregated by women, men or jointly held.

**Employment**
- Share of women in employment (wage and self-employment), by type.
- Gender gaps in earnings in wage and self-employment.

**Participation in national parliaments and local government bodies**
- Percentage of seats held by women in national parliament.
- Percentage of seats held by women in local government bodies.

**Violence against women**
- Prevalence of domestic violence.

*Sources*: UNDP (2005: 53); UNMP/TFEGE (2005: box 1).
the BPFA is theoretically consistent (which the MDGs are not); it includes all of the MDGs; and it already has a constituency of support. Work will have to be done to make links between the MDGs and BPFA in terms of Targets and Indicators, and new Indicators, such as violence and time use, may have to be added. (Antrobus, 2004: 16; see also Pietila, 2004)

Gender Budgets

While the ‘en-gendering’ of PRSPs and the MDGs may leave a lot to be desired, another more promising breakthrough, taking place in national contexts, but inspired by global feminist interchange, is that of ‘gender budgets’, which have undergone experimentation in around 40 countries so far. Gender budgets seek to advance gender equality through changing the ways in which public revenue is raised and expended, and as pointed-up by Kabeer (2003: 220) can ‘potentially promote greater transparency and accountability in policy processes’, as well as help to ‘match policy intent with resource allocation’. As echoed by UNRISD (2005: 60):

Budget audits can be used to review and analyse national budgets and expenditures to determine which groups benefit from fiscal policies, and whether there are inbuilt biases against women, especially from low-income families . . . Gender budget audits can also examine the likely feedback effects of public expenditures on unpaid work. For example, health care expenditures may be found to rebound on women’s unpaid labour time. The implementation of user fees for essential goods such as water and electricity may have similar effects. (See also Borges Sugiyama, 2002; BRIDGE, 2003; Budlender, 2000; Budlender and Hewitt, 2002; Elson, 1998; 1999b; 2004; Mbilinyi, 2004).

With gender budgets in particular, there has undoubtedly been some political expediency to the idea that poverty is feminising. By the same token, it could also be levelled that insufficient analysis, substantiation and nuancing of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ has not led to the most effective policy initiatives. One untoward outcome, for example, is a palpable merger of poverty alleviation and Gender and Development (GAD) interventions despite the fact that gender and poverty are distinct, albeit overlapping, forms of disadvantage (Jackson, 1996; 1998; Jackson and Palmer-Jones, 1999; Kabeer, 2003). In turn, differences in the theoretical and political goals of gender stakeholders on the one hand, and poverty stakeholders on the other, may not make for the most productive alliances. As pointed up by de Vylder (2004: 85), the pursuit of gender equality has usually been regarded within the GAD community as an end in itself and from a human rights perspective, yet pursuing gender equality as a means to achieve poverty reduction is of a more instrumentalist nature and grounded in efficiency considerations (see also Mayoux, 2006).
KEY CONCERNS AND QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ‘FEMINISATION OF POVERTY’

In light of the above, I feel it is important to go back to basics and, in particular, to think about the utility of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ in depicting trends in women’s poverty across developing countries, how appropriately it defines and accounts for poverty, and how effectively it contributes to framing responses to female disadvantage. This needs to take into account a number of concerns already aired in the feminist literature, such as the problems attached to the formulaic nomenclature of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ insofar as it links poverty with women (rather than gender relations), and leads to a focus on the ‘victims’ of unequal development as the catalyst for transformation. Another is the tendency to privilege income privation which may downplay matters such as ‘overwork’, ‘time deficiency’, ‘powerlessness’, and ‘vulnerability’ which can be as, if not more, relevant to women’s perceptions of disadvantage, and to the ‘trade-offs’ they make (or are able to negotiate) between different aspects of poverty (Blanc-Szanton, 1990; Chant, 1997b; Fonseca, 1991; Fukuda-Parr, 1999; Kabeer, 1997; Sen, G., 1999; Whitehead and Lockwood, 1999). In short, grassroots subjective experiences of poverty are often eclipsed by quantitative ‘objective’ measures which portray affected parties as ‘passive victims’ on the basis of narrow externally imposed criteria. In addition to this, given the relative dearth of basic sex-disaggregated headcount panel data, even for income poverty, how do we know whether there is actually any trend at all for women to be bearing more poverty over time? Indeed, it is somewhat strange that while women were supposed to be 70 per cent of the world’s poor in 1995, more than a decade on, the figure seems not to have shifted (Chant, 2006).

How Legitimate is the Term ‘Feminisation of Poverty’?

Leading on from the above, one of my own most abiding concerns is that while ‘feminisation’ implies dynamism, one of the central tenets of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ – namely that women feature disproportionately among the world’s poor – is inherently static. A pattern of poverty which indicates a female bias may not actually be an outcome of a trend for more women to become poor relative to men. Indeed, women in poverty could still outnumber men at a global scale even if poverty was ‘masculinising’ over a given time period (see Chant, 2006). As Medeiros and Costa (2006: 3) summarise:

In spite of its multiple meanings, the feminisation of poverty should not be confused with the existence of higher levels of poverty among women or
female-headed households . . . The term ‘feminisation’ relates to the way poverty changes over time, whereas ‘higher levels’ of poverty (which include the so-called ‘over-representation’), focuses on a view of poverty at a given moment. Feminisation is a process, ‘higher poverty’ is a state.

Even if we accept what tenuous evidence there is that women in general are becoming poorer than men, the terms of this tendency, such as how far and in which ways gender gaps are widening, and which age groups in the population are most affected, remain inadequately specified and elaborated, as do their causal mechanisms (see Johnsson-Latham, 2004b). For example, is it the incidence of poverty among women and men which is the main issue, or the depth or severity of women’s poverty compared with men?9 And is the trend to ‘feminisation’ something which is simply occurring over time, or does it relate to a widening of gendered poverty gaps across generations? To date, generational differences among women have tended to be glossed over, even though they may be highly illuminating in respect of the reasons for growth in women’s poverty relative to men’s. For example, demographic ageing combined with women’s greater life expectancy, may well be leading to clusters of disadvantaged women among senior citizens, especially as older women are more likely to be widowed, to suffer greater social and economic discrimination than their male counterparts, and to lack access to benefits such as work-related pensions (Ofstedal et al., 2004: 166–7; also ECLAC, 2004b: 45–6; UNMP/TFEGE, 2005: 13). Indeed, even in Latin America where investments in human resources have a longer history than some other regions of the South, gender gaps in education and literacy are still greater among older than younger populations (CELADE, 2002: 17). This is arguably significant given that 60 per cent of the population aged 60 and above in Latin America and the Caribbean are female (PAHO/MIAH, 2004: 1).

Alternatively, is it that gender disparities in income and resource exchange are becoming more uneven in younger age groups? If so, how does this square with the wide-ranging interventions that different countries in the South have made to redress gender inequalities following the UN Decade for Women (see Longwe, 1995: 18), or indeed the widely documented efforts undertaken by women at the grassroots to overcome their disadvantage? Even if ‘progress towards gender equality is not necessarily permanent or stable’, and ‘gains can be tenuous’ (UNRISD, 2005: 56), the signs are in many places that gender disparities in earnings, assets and human capital are lessening rather than intensifying, especially among youth (Chant and McIlwaine, 1998; Quisumbing, 2003; UNIFEM, 2002). As noted by Moghadam (1997: 3): ‘The feminisation of poverty would . . . appear to refute the idea that economic development and growth are
generally accompanied by a trend towards the diminution of patriarchal gender relations and an advancement in the status of women through improvements in women's capabilities.'

**Does the ‘Feminisation of Poverty’ Imply a ‘Masculinisation’ of Wealth and Privilege?**

Leading on from this, if we are to accept that poverty is becoming increasingly feminised, does this mean that there is counterpart ‘masculinisation’ of power, privilege and asset accumulation? If so, how is this explained when there is so much talk of a ‘crisis of masculinity’ and mounting evidence that men in some countries are beginning to fall behind women in respect of educational attainment and access to employment (see Chant, 2006; also Chapter 2 in this volume). Indeed, it has also been argued that a progressive narrowing of gender pay gaps may owe more to driving down of male wages than to improvements in women's earnings (Elson, 1999). The latter is noted for some Latin American countries which, in the context of an on-going ‘feminisation of labour’, are ‘witnessing “equality by impoverishment” as a result of the increased precariousness of men's employment’ (ECLAC, 2004b: 7). Yet while some men may be disadvantaged, and this is exerting costs such as higher suicide rates and stress- and alcohol-related health risks, it may well be the case in more general terms, as UNRISD (2005: 12) claims, that ‘Male underachievement has not led to parallel underachievements in wealth and politics’. Indeed, globally, for example, women's earnings are still only an average of 75 per cent of men’s (Rodenberg, 2004: ii). Without any investigation of men in the context of discussions of the ‘feminisation of poverty’, however, real and perceived gender gaps remain hard to determine, let alone to track over time.

**Is the ‘Feminisation of Poverty’ Linked with the ‘Feminisation’ of Household Headship?**

Another issue which needs serious consideration is whether the feminisation of poverty is intrinsically linked with the mounting incidence of households headed by women which presently constitute an estimated 13 per cent of households the Middle East and North Africa, 16 per cent in Asia, 22 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, and 24 per cent in Latin America (Bongaarts, 2001: 14). As noted by Wennherholm (2002: 10), from the 1970s onwards ‘the existence and vulnerability of female-headed households has ... alarmed researchers and advocates’, with the ‘feminisation of poverty’ during and since the 1980s and 1990s, being ‘used and linked to the debate about the vulnerability of female-headed households’. Asgary and Pagán
go as far to say that ‘the feminisation of poverty is the process whereby poverty becomes more concentrated among individuals living in female-headed households’ (see also Box 1.2).

Whether this association has come about because female household heads are commonly a proxy for ‘women’ in poverty statistics, or because synergies are suggested by parallel rises in the ‘feminisation of poverty’ and the ‘feminisation of household headship’, or because no other criterion of differentiation among women has been applied, the two phenomena have become so firmly wedded to one another that, as Davids and van Driel (2001: 162) assert: ‘the feminisation of poverty focuses on female-headed households as an expression of that same feminisation of poverty’. In turn, because lone mothers are often the biggest sub-group of female heads, the ‘culture of single motherhood’ has often been designated as the ‘New Poverty Paradigm’ (Thomas, 1994, cited in Budowski et al., 2002: 301). This carries with it the idea that female headship is not just a problem for women, but for their children, with the contention that female heads cannot ‘properly support their families or ensure their well-being’ (Mehra et al., 2000: 7), having translated into the concept of an ‘inter-generational transmission of disadvantage’ whereby the conjectured privations experienced by ‘fatherless’ children impinge upon their short- and longer-term well-being. Such negative perspectives are perhaps no surprise given Jassey’s (2002: 1) observation that:

women have predominantly been presented as victims, and sometimes as culprits, and themselves responsible for whatever happens to them due, for example, to their ‘backwardness’, illiteracy, isolation or cultural habits. Seldom are they presented as actors and strategists . . . This homogenisation of women does not only turn its back on the diversity of contexts we live in, but it also denies our individual differences and agency, resting instead on perceptions and connotations of all women as weak and dependent. (Emphasis in original; see also Angeles, 2000b)

Yet while not denying that in most societies women lag behind men in respect of access to the resources necessary for survival and self-determination, given that feminist research has highlighted the fact that women’s poverty is often strongly linked with unequal gender relations within as well as beyond the home, the question arises as to why it has been so rarely articulated that assuming household headship may be a medium through which they are actually able to enhance their own and their children’s well-being. Since economic development has provided some opportunities for women which, in principle, expand their choices and allow them to establish their own households (see Safa, 1995; van Vuuren, 2003), it is entirely possible that: ‘this may represent a positive choice, so that the connotations of powerlessness and
victimhood are inappropriate’ (Baden, 1999: 13). Indeed, studies conducted in a range of contexts indicate that children in female-headed households may actually be better off than their counterparts in male-headed units in terms of educational attainment, nutrition and health (Blumberg, 1995; Chant, 1997a; Engle, 1995; Moore and Vaughan, 1994; Oppong, 1997).

Another very basic qualification is that it is extremely difficult to find macro- or micro-level data which show any consistent relationship between female headship and poverty (see CEPAL, 2001; Chant, 1997b; Fuwa, 2000; Moghadam, 1997; Quisumbing et al., 1995; Wartenburg, 1999). Following on from the idea that ‘variations in the correlation between female headship and poverty within and between countries indicate the need for context-specific research’ (Nauckhoff, 2004: 66; see Moghadam, 1997: 43), dismantling the a priori associations between women’s (income) poverty and female household headship in the context of detailed research is essential if we are to take the ‘feminisation of poverty’ beyond a loosely deployed term, to a more clearly defined and robust concept or, indeed, ‘thesis’. Additionally, if we are to continue talking about the ‘feminisation of poverty’ as a trend, then we need to have some handle on how things are changing for women and men across generations, and, given that ‘global’ is so often prefixed to the term, to establish whether the incidence of poverty among women is systematically rising relative to men in the majority of countries.

In interrogating evidence for a ‘feminisation of poverty’ it is also arguably critical to be more precise about which particular dimensions of poverty we are referring to, and to scrutinise more closely what makes some women poorer than some men in different developing contexts. The paramount importance of determining which women are most affected also needs to be determined not only with reference to objective measures (where these exist in an appropriate sex-disaggregated form), but to women’s and men’s own perceptions of their relative privation, and with due regard for differentiation within as well as between the two groups. As articulated by Nauckhoff (2004: 49–50) in relation to PRSPs:

People cannot be described by only using two categories of men and women, even if these are necessary. Obviously men and women are not the same all over the world. Difference and variation in terms such as age, socio-economic and ethnic group and geographical location have to be introduced to make groups and categories fully visible and their situation comprehensible.

More holistic analysis of this nature may help us pin down a concept that can be more readily substantiated and have greater explanatory power, as well make for more gender-responsive poverty reduction strategies. Otherwise, as cautioned by the UNDP (2003b: 22) in relation to its
earlier-mentioned review of 13 MDGRs, when statements about the ‘feminisation of poverty’ ‘are not backed up by data or policy commitments’, these are of ‘little value either as entry-points for refocusing the direction of poverty policy or as benchmarks for tracking change’ (see also Marcoux, 1998a; 1998b).

KEY ENQUIRIES INTO THE ‘FEMINISATION OF POVERTY’ IN THE PRESENT BOOK

With the above in mind, this book interrogates the ‘feminisation of poverty’ on the basis of dedicated case study research in three countries with diverse economic and cultural characteristics – The Gambia, the Philippines, and Costa Rica. Drawing on consultations with a total of 223 low-income women and men from different age cohorts, with representatives from 40 state organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and in-country offices of international agencies, and on statistical and documentary evidence, I aim to establish the extent to which income- (and other types of) poverty are, and are perceived to be, feminised and/or subject to ongoing feminisation. While taking into account quantitative macro-level data on trends in development and poverty, particular attention is paid to subjective views on the intersection of poverty with generational changes in women’s and men’s activities, capabilities and entitlements, and household transitions. The principal objectives are to establish whether poverty differences between women and men are growing over time and/or across generations, the extent to which household circumstances act to offset or exacerbate women’s disadvantage, and the significance of domestic versus broader societal factors in perpetuating gender gaps.

Without wishing to overstate the significance of the research, it is distinctive from most previous analyses of the gender and poverty in three crucial respects. First, it combines original case study material with analysis of secondary bibliographical and statistical sources in three countries drawn from three major regions in the South and with differing levels of poverty and human development. Second, it follows a gender relations approach which includes men as well as women. Third, it is inclusive of different generations of women and men, which I believe helps in illuminating how gendered poverty is changing over time. While I do not pretend to endorse or refute the ‘feminisation of poverty’ on the basis of small-scale localised research in only three countries, I feel that debate on the subject as far as the Global South is concerned can only be furthered by more primary, micro-level, and comparative exploration of this nature.
WHY THE GAMBIA, THE PHILIPPINES AND COSTA RICA?

My choice of The Gambia, the Philippines and Costa Rica as case studies is grounded mainly in pragmatic considerations insofar as I had already worked in all three countries (ranging from the late 1980s in Costa Rica, to the early 1990s in the Philippines, to the early twenty-first century in The Gambia). Earlier fieldwork in these contexts had not only contributed to my knowledge of their differing histories, cultures and economies, but also facilitated access to, and progressive ‘trust-building’ with, institutional personnel and individuals at the grassroots.

Among other important reasons for comparing these three countries is that each is located within a different region of the Global South which yields interesting contrasts for comparative research on gender and poverty. Not only do the three countries sit within three different UNDP categories of ‘human development’ (Costa Rica being classified as having ‘high’ human development, the Philippines, ‘medium’, and The Gambia ‘low’), but they differ substantially in respect of economic structure, orientation and privation (see Tables 1.2–1.4), cultural and social organisation, and gender- and poverty-related variables such as female education, household headship, and labour force participation. While cultural variations in particular clearly make it difficult to isolate the impacts of specific features of national development on changes in gendered dimensions of poverty, they do highlight the importance of diversity in gendered experiences of privation, and how interventions to tackle gendered disadvantage should arguably desist from the ‘one size fits all’ formula often promulgated by international financial and development institutions.

METHODOLOGY

As intimated above, my main methodology for setting the scene for each case study country involved examining statistics on regional and national demographic, economic and social trends, existing indicators of poverty and well-being, and bibliographic and policy documentation on poverty, gender, family, youth and the elderly. Yet unevenness in the availability and quality of longitudinal data on gendered poverty between the three countries – ranging from substantial in Costa Rica to virtually non-existent in The Gambia – meant that my principal comparative information was garnered through first-hand fieldwork with personnel from relevant policy-making and planning bodies (in gender and/or poverty alleviation), and with poor women and men at the grassroots, the latter providing an
**Table 1.2  The Gambia, Philippines and Costa Rica: selected information on population, human development and poverty**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The Gambia</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Costa Rica</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population (millions), 2002</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>78.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual population growth rate (%), 1975–2002</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total fertility rate (TFR) (per woman) 1970–1975</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2000–2005</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life expectancy at birth (years) 2000–2005</td>
<td>54.1</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>78.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population (as % of total population) 1975</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>35.6</td>
<td>42.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>60.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDP per capita (PPP US$), 2002</td>
<td>1690</td>
<td>4170</td>
<td>8840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Index (HDI) value, 2002</td>
<td>0.452</td>
<td>0.753</td>
<td>0.834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDI rank, 2002</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Poverty Index (HPI-1) Value (%)d</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Poverty Index (HPI-1) Rank</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population below income poverty line ($1 a day), (%) 1990–2002f</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**

a. The HDI is an aggregate index comprising information on life expectancy at birth, adult literacy among the population aged 15 years or more, the combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio, and GDP per capita (expressed in US$ Purchasing Power Parity [PPP]). Information pertaining to education and literacy is provided in Table 4.4 in this volume.

b. The highest value of the HDI in 2002 was 0.956 (Norway) and the lowest, 0.273 (Sierra Leone).

c. Rank out of 177 countries.

d. The Human Poverty Index comprises four indicators: probability at birth of not surviving to the age of 40 years; adult illiteracy rate; population without sustainable access to an improved water source, and children under weight for age. The lower the value, the lower the incidence of poverty (for example, Barbados, with the lowest HPI-1 out of 95 developing countries has a value of 2.5 per cent, whereas the highest HPI-1 is for Burkina Faso, with a value of 65.5 per cent – UNDP, 2004: 147–9).

e. Rank out of 95 developing countries.

f. Equivalent to $1.08 a day.

**Source:** UNDP (2004: tables 1, 3, 5 and 8).
essential medium for examining how poverty is experienced, and perceived to arise by different age stakeholders.

The grassroots samples were split broadly between women and men in different age bands as indicated in Table 1.5, with slight variations arising
Table 1.5  Breakdown of grassroots survey populations: The Gambia, Philippines and Costa Rica

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Youth (10–29 years)</th>
<th>Middle adults (30–49 years)</th>
<th>Senior adults (50 years plus)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The Gambia</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philippines</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Costa Rica</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

by default, such as where participants in focus groups (often organised through local NGOs) did not turn up.\(^{13}\) Drawing a line between different generations was clearly difficult given differences in characteristics such as age at first birth, life expectancy and so on between the countries. While I decided to interview three main cohorts, defined as ‘young people’ (13–29 years), ‘middle adults’ (30–49 years) and ‘senior/elderly adults’ (50 years plus), within any one age band there can clearly be individuals with very different experiences and perceptions of their stage in the life course. Technically, for example, although quite seldom in practice, men or women may be grandparents by the age of 30 and no longer see themselves as ‘young’. Similarly, while it might seem premature for people aged 50 years or over to be defined as ‘elderly’, when taking into consideration differences in life expectancy across countries, this decision had to be made to take into account the situation in The Gambia where average life expectancy is only 54.1 (see Table 1.5).\(^{14}\)

In comparing three countries with such different histories and contemporary social and economic characteristics, ‘standardisation’ of samples was clearly difficult. In respect of choosing case study localities, for example, this was primarily influenced by pre-existing contacts in specific communities, which led me to focus on the capital region in The Gambia (Greater Banjul Area), on Metro Cebu, the second largest conurbation in the Philippines, and in Costa Rica, in urban areas in Guanacaste province,
one of the poorest parts of an otherwise relatively wealthy country. However, while there were differences in size of the communities in which I worked, and in respect of position in their national urban hierarchies, one thread in common was that all had been affected by tourism development which had led to some similarities in respect of labour market characteristics, including in-migration and a preponderance of service jobs. Selection of informants was made either on the basis of previous acquaintance or through contacts in local NGOs.

**ORGANISATION OF THE BOOK**

Having set out the key objectives and rationale for the book, and the reasons for my choice of case study countries, the following two chapters establish the general theoretical and empirical anatomy of the ‘feminisation of poverty’. Chapter 2 reviews the ‘en-gendering’ of poverty analysis and measurement over time, while Chapter 3 examines key assumptions underpinning the ‘feminisation of poverty’ and supporting evidence in the Global South, particularly in relation to trends in income poverty and the ‘feminisation’ of household headship. In Chapters 4 to 6 discussion turns to The Gambia, the Philippines and Costa Rica with the principal aim of establishing actual and perceived trends in gendered poverty burdens and their causal mechanisms. In Chapter 7, I summarise and comment on the case study explorations, drawing out comparative dimensions along with major theoretical, methodological and policy implications. This entails revisiting – and some re-casting – of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ such that it better reflects patterns and trends in gendered disadvantage in the Global South.

**NOTES**

1. The term first appears to have been coined by Pearce (1978) in relation to the USA, as discussed further in Chapter 3.
2. All items adopted in UN Global Platforms for Action nominally require the special attention of governments. A total of 189 countries in 1995 declared their intention to ‘advance the goals of equality, development and peace for all women everywhere in the interests of all humanity’ (WEDO, 2005: 10).
3. In most national and international data sources ‘female household headship’ refers to situations where an adult woman (usually with children) resides without a male partner (or, in some cases, another adult male such as a father or brother) (Chant, 1997a: 5 et seq; also Wartenburg, 1999: 77). Despite the difficulties of standardised definitions when headship is not a politically neutral concept, when it is subject to diverse interpretations at the grassroots, and when male-bias leads to the under-reporting of female household headship (see Buvinic and Gupta, 1997: 260; Feijoó, 1999: 162; Folbre, 1991; Harris,
women are estimated to head between 20 and 25 per cent of households worldwide (Delamonica et al., 2004; Varley, 2002).

4. In actuality, ‘one dollar a day’, which converts one US dollar to local currency using PPP (Purchasing Power Parity) exchange rates, is US$1.08 a day. Known as the ‘Copenhagen measure’ because it was established at the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, this did not become widely deployed until the World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty (see World Bank, 2000), and its adoption by the UN Millennium Summit as the benchmark for monitoring reduction in extreme poverty worldwide. The measure has been criticised on a number of grounds including its arbitrariness and the fact that it only records material aspects of poverty (Johnsson-Latham, 2004b: 28), that the line is too low and should instead be based on the local cost of an adequate diet (Kakwani, 2004b), that PPP conversion factors are inappropriate and/or grounded in weak evidence (Reddy and Heuty, 2005b), and that since poverty is multi-dimensional it is difficult to convert into a meaningful uniform measure (Karshenas, 2003; Reddy, 2004; Srinivasan, 2004; Virola, 2002). This said, Lipton (2001: 41) asserts that: ‘The simple “Copenhagen measure” of dollar-poverty is practical, comparable and monitorable’, and ‘overrides the genuine, if contestable, case for more complex measures’ (see also Ravallion, 2004a; and Chapter 2 in this volume).

5. Corner (2003: 2) argues that ‘gender statistics’ are better described as ‘disaggregated by sex’ rather than ‘disaggregated by gender’, since they involve disaggregation by biological sex, rather than ‘gender’ which is a contextually specific and socially constructed entity.

6. ‘Assertion’ is used advisedly here. Aside from lack of robust empirical evidence, Marcoux (1998a; 1998b) points up that the 70 per cent share of poverty assigned to women in 1995 is untenable in light of the age distribution of the global population and its household characteristics. Even assuming a priori that being female places persons at a greater risk of being poor, given that the sex of children under 15 is unlikely to have more than a negligible impact on gender differentials in household poverty, only single-person and lone-parent units could be responsible for the excess of female poverty. Yet there are simply not enough households of this type to give rise to the purported 70/30 ratio of poor women and girls to poor men and boys (see also Klasen, 2004).

7. The PRSP initiative was launched in 1999 by the Bretton Woods Institutions following the establishment of the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC II) at the World Economic Summit in Cologne (Rodenberg, 2004: 31). The core aim of the HIPC initiative was to reduce debt by at least two-thirds in the world’s poorest and most debt-burdened countries and so liberate resources to combat poverty. This required the drawing up by client countries of PRSPs designed to marry structural macroeconomic reforms, such as market-led growth and stabilisation, with policies to reduce poverty, such as the promotion of education and employment. Nominally PRSPs require broad-based stakeholder participation, and are processual in nature, whereby a series of rolling, ‘multi-phase’ plans are shaped by successive poverty analyses, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and reformulation. As of 2004, an overall total of 33 and 48 interim PRSPs had been designed (ibid.). Although the form and recommendations of poverty reduction strategies are widely alleged to display pronounced similarities with their forebear, structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), Nauckhoff (2004: 51–2) points out three major differences. First in PRSPs, poverty reduction is a specific goal; second, participation is signalled as a *sine qua non* in their design and implementation, and third, the PRSP process is expected to result in better coherence among donors.

8. Poor women are not more prone to obstetric complications, but are less likely to receive adequate medical treatment before, during or after childbirth (Graham, 2004: 7).

9. The incidence of poverty measures the proportion of the poor in a given population and is the most commonly used indicator when assessing poverty differentials between women and men, or between female- and male-headed households. The intensity of (income) poverty is measured by the aggregated difference between the observed income of poor populations and the poverty line, while the severity of poverty refers to ‘some combination of the incidence and intensity of poverty and inequality among the poor’ (Medeiros and Costa, 2006: 20n).
10. The term ‘feminisation of labour’ is not only used to describe an increasing female presence in the workforce, but a process whereby more people (male and female alike) have come to be occupied in jobs marked by conditions normally associated with female labour (precarious, underpaid, lacking in social benefits, protection by labour legislation, and so on) (see Standing, 1999).

11. Female-headed households are often equated with ‘lone-mother households’ consisting solely of mothers and children. Although in many contexts these predominate, in a substantial number of cases they may be extended in composition. Other types of female-headed households include grandmother-headed, women-only, and lone-female households (see Chant, 1991b; 1997a: ch. 1; also Folbre, 1991). Moreover, despite common assumptions that the bulk of ‘lone mothers’ are ‘unmarried’, the majority are often separated, divorced and/or widowed (Chant, 1997a: ch. 6; see also Marenco et al., 1998: 8).


13. There were important gender dimensions here. For example, in one focus group convened through a parent–teacher association in Costa Rica, only mothers turned up.

14. Many older individuals in The Gambia, the bulk of whom were illiterate, did not possess knowledge of their exact age, and had no birth certificate (see also van der Sande et al., 2001). This was especially the case among older women (50 plus), some of whom declared that they were 20–30 years older than they actually were. While this was possibly an indication of feeling older than their years, and important in itself, I also wanted to try to establish their numerical ages, and attempted to do so by asking when they had got married and either at what age they had their first child, or how old their first surviving child was now. Even then, some women did not know the exact ages of their children, simply saying that the first had been born immediately prior to or soon after marriage, and thereafter, ‘every 2–3 years’. As such, some ages in the Gambian case study must be taken as approximate.