Exploring the Capability Approach with the Bargaining Model: new methodologies for gender-sensitive poverty measures in Fiji

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Abstract

Poverty measurement has previously been treated as a gender neutral enterprise. Typically, poverty is assessed at the household level, whereby all members of the household are treated as either poor or non-poor, ignoring the differential deprivations that might be experienced by different household members. The discussion in this paper centres on two objectives: to highlight the gaps in the literature, notably the persistent insensitivity to gender, within mainstream approaches to poverty analysis in Fiji; and to introduce the capability approach as a means to conceptualise and assess gender inequality and women’s well-being in Fiji’s context. The paper attempts to map out the ways in which we might conceptualise and operationalise methodologies for gender-sensitive measures of poverty that are capable of reflecting the experiences of both women and men.

Keywords: poverty, gender, capability approach, intra-household relations
Gender and poverty: an introduction

A great deal of discussion in recent years has been about growing poverty, vulnerability to poverty and heightening inequalities between different groups in Fiji (Barr 1993a; 1993b; Bryant 1993; Bureau of Statistics, 2006; Narsey 2006; 2007; Narsey et al. 2010; UNDP 1996). The previous Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) in 2002–03 and 2008–2009 outline a wide variety of conceptual and empirical approaches to measuring poverty and inequality in Fiji using nationwide statistics of income, health, employment, education and the like. My purpose here is not to give a comprehensive critical analysis of the various approaches or concepts used in these earlier surveys but to outline an alternative but complementary approach, which can help to assess the extent of differences in living standards within the household. Apart from the HIES, other earlier studies rely on income (or expenditure) to distinguish ‘the poor’ from the non-poor, using a variety of methods to construct an income poverty line. Reliance on income as a measure of living standards assumes that it is a reliable indicator of the economic resources available to people, and that economic resources largely determine living standards. It remains a standard practice to measure poverty at the level of the household or family, and the resources and needs of individuals within these collective units are not considered separately.

The equal sharing assumption has long been questioned and recently the neglected gender dimension of poverty composition and risk is strongly emphasised, especially by feminist writers elsewhere (see Brannen & Wilson 1987; Buvinic 1983; Graham 1987; Millar & Glendinning 1987, 1989). Gender disadvantage cannot be understood with unmodified poverty concepts and indicators, which can both misleadingly deny the material subordination of women and entirely fail to reflect the ideological and cultural bedrock of gender inequity. The point is not that women are poor but that poverty is gendered. If different individuals within the household are likely to experience different levels of well-being, this could have major implications for our understanding of poverty and gender inequality in Fiji.

Poverty is multi-dimensional; thus, limiting the measures of it to income or consumption shortfalls at household level masks the true extent of poverty, particularly for the vulnerable groups, like women and children, within the household. As noted by Greig et al. (2007:18) ‘poverty lines assume homogeneity of needs when heterogeneity may be the dominant characteristic within a population’. As Chattier (2007) notes, what is less clear in conventional approaches is the relationship between household-level poverty and female well-being, i.e. does gender discrimination intensify or diminish with poverty? The answer to this question is not easy, as gender and poverty have not been adequately addressed in poverty research and literature in Fiji, as much more attention has been paid to factors such as ethnicity and place of residence (Bryant 1993; Naidu et al. 1999; Narsey 2006; UNDP 1996). This neglect becomes a problem for feminist analyses that argue that the household, irrespective of its location, is a key site of gender discrimination and subordination. Razavi (1999:412) points out that despite long-standing feminist concerns about intra-household resource distribution, it remains ‘rare to find standard surveys embarking on a quantitative exploration of intra-household poverty’.

Feminists, on the lookout for androcentric biases, have frequently scrutinised the assumption that resources and incomes are pooled within a household and the entirety equally shared between household members (see England 1993; Evans 1991; Folbre 1988; Jennings & Waller 1990). Households cannot be viewed as monolithic institutions in which all the members agree on
the strategies and means to be used to maximise family and household welfare. The fallacies of aggregation underpinning household analyses of poverty are evident in large part because they are not individualistic enough. They fail to capture the intra-household dynamics of resource allocation and distribution, which may depend on socio-cultural relations of gender, age, kinship, race relations and spatial distribution of resources and opportunities. Therefore, it is necessary to look within the family or household to see how resources are distributed before being able to judge whether or not all the members are in poverty. Previous studies support the view that women are generally poorer than men. For example, Bryant (1993) in her study of urban poverty found that of the 174 household surveyed, 15.5 per cent were headed by women, an increase of 5 per cent since 1989, and the majority of them were living in poverty. UNDP (1996:36) further indicated that ‘poor households have a higher proportion of women as their heads than other income groups’.

Concern about the ‘feminisation of poverty’ over time has been an important theme in Fiji’s poverty research. Narsey (2007) noted that women in Fiji do 52 per cent of the total work in the economy, but receive only 27 per cent of the total income. While poverty lines may not be able to penetrate the household, it is theoretically possible to generalise about the types of households in order to depict the extent of poverty among women. The evidence from published poverty reports in Fiji does show that female-headed households tend to be over-represented among the poor and that lone women are more likely to experience poverty than lone men (UNDP 1996). The 2002–03 HIES also highlighted that around 13 per cent of households were headed by females (Narsey 2006). The estimation of women living below the poverty line is made on the basis of the number of women assumed to live in poor households, including all female-headed households. However, this is problematic because assumptions about female-headed households are an example of neglect of differences among women—a cornerstone of gender analysis—which leads to flawed generalisations about gender and poverty.

While ‘feminisation of poverty’ has been a recurrent theme in discourses of poverty, using ‘household’ as a model for estimating the number of women living below the poverty line is problematic. It is the very measure that masks the extent of poverty among women. Its narrow framework of poverty, focusing on income alone and on the household as a unit, leads inevitably to ignoring intra-household disparities. It would be inaccurate, however, to see this as a problem confined to the workings of household (though this is a major element), because the ways in which women and men relate to material resources are grounded in their different social relations and subject positions in communities and societies at large. The idea of poverty as a condition, and the expectation that all resources have the same meanings to all members of the household, need to be replaced by a more relational concept of poverty that also admits gendered subjects. This paper argues for recognition of the gendered character of all poverty rather than a feminisation of poverty concentrating only on household poverty.

Only when gender relations are factored into the poverty equation can a thorough understanding of women’s impoverishment be gained. The central purpose of this paper is to understand the structure of relationships within the household and explore how women often are poor within marriage, regardless of the level of income received by the male head of the household. As argued by Greig et.al (2007:28):
Rather than looking at the symptoms of inequality (individual opportunities and outcomes) the focus should be the underpinning processes and causes (social structures that foster unequal power relations). Inequalities are not simply carefully constructed measurement scales but complex webs of dynamic social relations that privilege some while constricting the life-chances of others.

Methodologically, the household model is not conducive to asking, let alone answering, the kind of feminist questions about gender, asymmetric power and intra-household relations that this paper seeks to generate. It is important to know whether or not women experience relative poverty risks and vulnerability when issues of gender, hierarchy and power relations are brought into the analysis of the household.

Gender divisions are treated here as lying at the heart of the social structures in society (Anthias 1998) because they constitute particularly salient constructions of difference and identity on one hand, and hierarchisation and unequal resource allocation modes on the other. It is therefore necessary to develop an analysis that is able to understand unequal social outcomes and processes underlying intra-household relations. This paper calls upon gender more than class analysis to understand woman’s poverty, because social-class categories often ignore the multiplicity of women’s positionings within contemporary social life (see Barrett 1991, 1992). I start from women’s concrete experiences, recognising differences in economic and cultural contexts, and then locate the processes through which these experiences come into existence in wider social relations. As Acker (2003:58) writes:

> The conventional approach to class analysis, which emphasises the family or household as the unit of analysis and the feminist perspective which claims the priority of the individual, stand at the opposite poles of the debate.

Here it is argued that women are less likely to gain positions of high economic value because they are women and this relates to the system of gender hierarchies and material inequality. Social norms regarding female exclusion, for example, reinforced through familial and conjugal relations, may impose severe constraints on women’s ability to access resources and opportunities both within and outside the household. For instance, Narsey (2007) notes that it is expected that women and girls will be responsible for most of the housework, whatever their other contributions at work, on the farm, in the shop or elsewhere. By not doing their fair share of housework, men deny the women the same freedoms and stress relief that they expect for themselves: such simple things as to put their feet up after work or school, to have a relaxing alcoholic drink and to visit their friends. Therefore, social class identification for women is tied to the social organisation of gender woven through the social organisation of work and family relations.

Women’s kinship roles serve to define relations of production and women become defined more as wives and relate to production only indirectly—by virtue of their marriages to their husbands (Chattier 2005). Hence, women do not directly assume the class position of their husbands; they are in different situations from their husbands within the system of patriarchal relations that constitutes gendered processes of resource allocation, distribution and ownership. To see more clearly the part that gender plays in structuring relations and promoting compelling systems of belief that justify and perpetuate domination, poverty analysis has to begin at the level of the individual (that is, with the economic situation of women within the household). It is argued that women face more restrictions
on their choices and opportunities than men and this reflects an important dimension of female deprivation that needs to be explored in detail. Amartya Sen’s capability approach provides a useful evaluative framework for an engendered understanding of poverty combined with the bargaining model that shifts the unit of analysis from household to individuals and from a focus on resources themselves to command over commodities.

**Feminist concerns and the capability approach**

A solution to the concerns raised above is found in a version of the capabilities approach, an approach to quality of life assessment pioneered by Amartya Sen (1980; 1992; 1999). This section evaluates Sen’s capability approach through a feminist lens, as an alternative framework for understanding the questions of poverty, intra-household relations and gender inequality. Although different interpretations of the capability approach across academic disciplines have led to several conflicting views,Sen’s formulation of the capability approach in itself offers an important conceptual advancement for considering gendered poverty.

The capability approach stipulates that an evaluation of individual or social status should focus on people’s real or substantive freedom to lead the lives they find valuable (Sen 1993). This real freedom is called a person’s capability. A person’s capability reflects her/his potential well-being, or well-being freedom, in contrast to the actual well-being that s/he has realised, in other words her/his achieved well-being (Sen 1985). This achieved well-being is made up of a number of functionings (ibid.); for example, being mentally healthy, being physically healthy, being sheltered, being well fed, being educated, having a satisfying job, caring for the children and the elderly, enjoying cultural activities, and being part of the community. Therefore, capabilities are people’s potential functionings and functionings are their beings and doings. The difference between a functioning and a capability is similar to the difference between an achievement and the freedom to achieve something, or between an outcome and an opportunity.

All capabilities together correspond to the overall freedom to lead the life that a person has reason to value (Robeyns 2003). Sen (1993:33) stresses the importance of ‘reason to value’ because we need to scrutinise our motivations for valuing specific lifestyles, and not simply value a certain life without reflecting upon it. By advocating normative evaluations, which should look at people’s capabilities, Sen criticises evaluations that focus exclusively on utilities, resources or income. He argues against utility-based evaluations; for example, an income/expenditure approach to poverty that is used at a household level might in fact hide important intra-household dimensions and result in misleading interpersonal or inter-temporal comparisons. According to Sen (1993), resources are only the means to enhance people’s well-being and advantage, whereas the concern should be with what matters intrinsically and people’s abilities to convert these resources into capabilities. This is a helpful move away from private consumption poverty concepts such as income measures, because the capability approach provides a more complete analysis of gender inequality, which not only maps gender equalities in functionings and capabilities but also analyses gender differentials in command over resources.

Ultimately, approaches that focus on outcomes rather than processes are very blunt tools for describing gendered disadvantage, since how capabilities become functionings for women and men depends both on other social identities (e.g. age and ethnicity) and on social processes such as intra-
household relations. Hence, it is argued that for women and men, commodities become capabilities and functionings in ways that are enabled and constrained by their household relations. For example, a woman may have a certain education that equips her for employment, yet the achievement of the functioning of ‘being employed’ may be prevented by a husband or by a mother-in-law who objects to her working. The capability approach is therefore attractive for gender analysis, because it rejects the idea that women’s well-being can be subsumed under wider entities such as the household or the community, while not denying the importance of social relations and interdependence between family and community members in well-being evaluations. These aspects matter particularly in gender related assessments of well-being and disadvantage.

Another important strength of the capability approach is that well-being is measured for the individual across diversities. The neoclassical theory of the family underlying many poverty approaches (such as the income/consumption measure) assumes that all people have the same utility functions or are influenced in the same way and to the same extent by the same personal, social and environmental characteristics. But the capability approach acknowledges human diversity, such as race, age, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and geographical location, in evaluations of poverty, deprivation and well-being. This characteristic of the capability approach is important for gender inequality analysis because issues of diversity will help with understanding intra-household inequalities and beyond. Feminist scholars have argued that many theories of justice claim to address the lives of men and women, but closer scrutiny reveals that men’s lives form the standard (see Bubeck 1995; Folbre 2001). Okin (1989:10–13) calls this ‘false gender neutrality’, where some theories of justice use gender-neutral language but they ignore the biological differences between the sexes, and the impact that gender has on our lives through gendered social institutions, gender roles, power differences and ideologies. By conceptualising gender inequality and intra-household relations in the space of functionings and capabilities, there is more scope to account for human diversity, including the diversity stemming from people’s gender.

Until recently, most economists were content to treat households as if their members had congruent interests. Over the last two decades, though, reservations about this unitary perspective have intensified among economists and other social scientists. The unitary paradigm has been weakened by its failure to explain systematic household disparities in developing countries (see Sen 1990; Kabeer 1991; Agarwal 1990). The growing evidence of persistent intra-family inequalities in the distribution of resources and tasks, and of gender differences in expenditure patterns, as well as descriptions of intra-family interactions and decision-making, indicate the need for a conceptualisation of the household that takes account of multiple actors, with varying (often conflicting) preferences and interests, and differential abilities to pursue and realise those interests. Disparities in the command over essential goods and services have been explored by bargaining theories which interpret intra-household allocation of resources as outcomes of a bargaining process. A brief outline of the bargaining framework is therefore warranted, with particular emphasis on its applicability to concerns raised in this paper.

The bargaining model and intra-household relations

The nature of intra-household interaction between the household members and their command over resources could usefully be derived as simultaneously containing elements of both cooperation and conflict. The members of a household cooperate in so far as cooperative arrangements make
each of them better off than non-cooperation. However, many different cooperative outcomes are possible in relation to who does what, who gets what goods and services, and how each member is treated (Agarwal 1994). These outcomes are beneficial to the negotiating parties relative to non-cooperation. But among the set of cooperative outcomes, some are more favourable to each party than others. The outcome depends on the relative bargaining power of household members. A member’s bargaining power would be defined by a range of factors; in particular, the strength of the person’s fallback position (outside options that determine how well-off s/he would be if cooperation failed) and the degree to which her/his claim is seen as socially and legally legitimate (Agarwal 1994).

The application of a bargaining perspective involving cooperation and conflict and the notion of fallback position to characterise intra-household dynamics is relatively new, but growing. As Folbre (1986:251) has argued:

The suggestion that women and female children ‘voluntarily’ relinquish leisure, education and food would be somewhat more persuasive if they were in a position to demand their fair share. It is the juxtaposition of women’s lack of economic power with the unequal allocation of household resources that lends the bargaining power approach much of its persuasive appeal.

Hence, the bargaining perspective complicates interpretations of market behaviour and intra-household distributions by considering not only individual interests but also the differential abilities to act on those interests, that is, the ‘means to achieve’ in the capability approach (Iversen 2003). The focus on domestic power imbalances makes the bargaining perspective particularly attractive as a backdrop for a discussion of the capability approach and its applicability within the context of poverty and gender relations.

To see whether the capability approach can accommodate such discussions on the role of domestic power imbalances, we need to revisit Sen’s own reasoning on intra-household inequality. Sen (1990:136) argues:

Given other things, if the self-interest perception of one of the persons were to attach less value to his or her own well-being, then the collusive solution, if different, would be less favourable to that person, in terms of well-being.

He notes that this overlap between women’s personal and household interests preserves intra-household inequality. If a woman in a bargaining model perceives the welfare of other household members on par with her own, then intra-household distribution would tally with this interest perception. The advantages of using this model for gender inequality and poverty are clear. It presents the societal context of gender bias as setting the terms of intra-household bargaining, since the reality of vulnerability to poverty for men and women is differentiated in legal, economic and cultural ways. From a poverty perspective, the cooperative conflict model suggests how capabilities are, or are not, converted into functionings since women and men are differently embedded in the dense social relations of marriage, parenting and kinship.

The bargaining perspective or approach is particularly useful in examining gender relations within the context of the capability approach because it allows us to distinguish between command over goods
and services established by social norms and distributions. However, any attempt to identify the
determinants of bargaining outcomes must grapple with several complexities. As Agarwal (1997)
notes, a wide range of factors can define a person’s bargaining power, some quantifiable (such as
individual economic assets) others less so (such as communal/external support systems, or social
norms and institutions, or perceptions about contribution and needs). Other considerations involve
social norms embodying accepted notions about the division of labour, resources and so on, social
perceptions about contributions, needs and abilities (in other words who deserves what) and self-
perceptions and altruism embodying self-interest of household members. Age and kinship relations
may also play a part in the bargaining process through social norms and perceptions. Existing
literature on Fiji suggests that norms and perceptions set limits to women’s processes of bargaining
and/or negotiation within the household and beyond (see also Harrington 2004; Jalal 1997). Social
norms, social perceptions and self-perceptions can affect subsistence distribution directly (in that
intra-household allocations depend on perceptions about deservedness and on prevailing norms of
sharing within families). What this paper argues is that women experience gendered vulnerabilities
that are revealed through considering their gendered roles and relations, and that these insights
should command attention in transforming poverty analysis toward a recognition of gender.

Putting ‘gender’ in the household poverty

This section uses the capability framework to indicate a space within which intra-household
comparisons of well-being are made. A glimpse of how households are socio-culturally situated
in relation to gender and generation gives a more comprehensive picture of how poor households
operate on a daily basis. The evidence on gender inequality against a selected capability listing
presented here is illustrative and not meant to provide a complete assessment of gender inequality
within households. The data presented in this paper have been collected through ethnographic
research with eighteen women (participants) of rural Indian Fijian households, undertaken during
February till May 2003 and follow-up interviews in August and September 2004.3

The study emphasises the allocations within households from the perspective of socio-cultural
entitlements to resource shares expressed in the norms governing ‘who gets what and why’. As
used here, the term ‘entitlement’ refers to the socially and culturally recognised rights of specific
categories of persons to particular resource shares within the household. The concept of socio-
cultural entitlements to resource shares developed here is consistent with Sen’s approach (1990).
I share his conviction that conflict and cooperation coexist in domestic groups and that individual
self-interests are not necessarily submerged by the concern for the domestic group as a whole. My
emphasis on social and cultural elements of entitlement leads directly to consideration of the way
in which connotations of gender, age and kinship generate inequality and mediate opportunities to
achieve well-being among household members. This paper concentrates on two capabilities only,
paid work and autonomy in household spending and time-autonomy and leisure activities.4 The
empirical evidence is specific to the context of this study though the capability framework has been
replicated in my PhD thesis.

Paid work and autonomy in household spending

The functioning of paid work and autonomy in household spending is highly gendered.5 This
section both examines the contribution of women’s wages to the household economy and also
explores the control, disposal and conceptualisation of women’s incomes within the households under study. Family is an arena of intense inter-member mediation and Indian women’s access to work is constrained by historically and culturally specific concepts of familial dependency and gendered norms on physical mobility. Economic hardship is forcing poor women to adapt to new environments and, in turn, these adaptive actions are forcing significant changes in gender roles in households in both subtle and obvious ways.

Ideologies of domesticity expressed within a particular cultural idiom constitute women as dependents to male members of the household, but conflict between economic survival and male honour (linked to men’s ability to provide for the family, as well as to keep women within the home) pushed quite a few women participants into seeking paid employment and other projects. For example, when Sangita6 and Guddi’s husbands became ill, they had to find the means to support the household. However, their husbands made sure they worked within the confines of the house or village community. While Guddi sold home-made savouries to school children from a roadside stall opposite her house, Sangita undertook housemaid duties or provided casual labour on neighbouring farms. If women cannot find house-based work, their husbands prefer employment inside a building in an all-female environment. As Urmila said, ‘My husband allowed me to work in a garment factory . . . in the factory there were all women tailors and also there was no good work with money in the village’. Similarly, Savita’s husband was happy when she decided to operate a tailoring enterprise from home. Where work brings a degree of public visibility and increases exposure to males it reduces the likelihood of women participating. As for Paaru, she could not work for long hours in the evening because her husband started creating tension in the house by saying that ‘Paaru had an affair with someone at the restaurant’. A desire for security and the fear of harming their reputations are also determining factors in husbands’ refusal to allow their wives to work overtime after sunset even if such work is substantially better paid. The men of the households see female employment as pointing to their own failure to provide for family needs, and as a direct affront to male honour.

In terms of the capability approach, women’s paid work may expand the vectors of functioning available to them; for example, it may lead to (a) financial functionings such as being financially independent and (b) psychological functionings (like self-esteem) (Robeyns 2001–23). I argue using my evidence that enhancement in well-being comes mainly through two distinct but related ways. First, participation in paid work may both make women’s economic contribution to the household visible and reduce their economic dependency on other members of the household. Karuna stated that ‘I earn money on a weekly basis and am in charge of my family’s needs in terms of getting groceries and other needs of my children’. Recounting her experience, Urmila said, ‘Because I work in a garment factory . . . there is food and light in my house . . . otherwise both stove and light would have gone off long time ago’. Apart from increasing their ability to provide for the household, women’s earnings had made a definable difference to the household’s well-being. Some suggested that their earnings had increased the household standard of living: allowing the family to eat meat and fish more frequently, offering better hospitality to guests, improving the quality of housing, and purchasing semi-durable items, such as clothes for the children, food items, and even durable goods like sewing machine, rice cooker, electric jug, TV, VCR, kerosene stove and sofa.

Second, women who were either the main providers or who contributed a substantial proportion of the household income were more likely to have gained greater participation in decision-making within the family. Budgeting is a key area of decision-making since it relates to the way in which the
resources of the household are used and controlled (Omari 1995:205). The type of budgeting and allocation system that a household uses is an important indicator of the balance of power between members and it also influences decision-making. Independent earning would give women resources and confidence to use these as means for better well-being. However, the arrangements in regard to the management and control of money varied between the households in this study. Karuna explained the arrangement between herself and her husband as follows:

I get groceries from town because I cannot trust my husband. If I allow him to get groceries, he spends money on cigarettes and yaqona. I work as a housemaid for the past 16 years and the reason I started work outside was because of my husband’s smoking and drinking habits. I never stop him for drinking or anything. If he wants the money he can take it but only when he gets his pay he gives to me to run the family.

The situation in households where there are no employed women is quite different. As Maya stated:

I discuss with my husband what food we need in the house and he normally gets groceries from town, pays water and electricity bills . . . nothing is in my hands. Whatever food he gets, I have to manage with that . . . if I and my daughter-in-law need money to buy our things (undergarments) then I ask for money from my husband. I don’t keep money but my husband is boss of the house so he keeps all the money.

Hence, major decisions over finances and spending were still primarily in the control of their husbands. According to Sadhana, ‘I have to speak to my husband in soft and pleasing voice so that there is no argument about money. If I want to get something for my children, I normally ask my husband in a polite manner’. Similarly, Kala Wati noted:

I stay home and look after the family’s needs. My husband and son get money for our daily needs. My husband buys groceries from town. Suppose my husband tell me something, I cannot reply back because I don’t earn money. So I keep quiet because I have to eat from my husband’s wages.

Women’s wages affected the balance of power within marriage and had significant influence on the decision-making processes within the household.

Styles of management and their implications for decision-making are thus quite varied and for all the participants, how much negotiation over financial decisions there was depended on the circumstances of the household itself. In this context, nearly all the women negotiate with their husband/son to obtain money for expenditure on personal items and children’s school needs. The nature of this negotiation depends on the age, status and earning power of the two individuals. Savita, a home-based tailoring worker, explained how finances were organised in her household:

My husband earns about $70—80 in three weeks and he gives money to me after paying off small amount of credit at local store. From the tailoring I earn about $50—$60 and sometimes $100. My husband gives me his money but takes out some for his kava and suki. He wants me to look after the money . . . how much for food, bills and emergency but he does the food shopping . . . because of the transport problem and he always looks for discount and then shops
at the cheap supermarket. I only do shopping for children’s books and clothes. I have to see everything inside the house . . . that’s my work and his is if there is no more flour or sugar I have to tell him when he goes to town. We only spend on items that we urgently need. I see it’s better for us, if I keep the money, otherwise my husband can spend all the money on kava.

While some of the women managed the household budget and identified the needs of the family, their husbands had control over the money and had more disposable income to spend on themselves.

Unequal power can lead to inequalities in access to money, and one potential inequality is that of personal spending money. Generally speaking, where essential daily expenditure is put into the common fund, women earners are usually in the same position as non-earners, and any inequalities in their rights to call upon the common fund derive from their position as women rather than as inferior wage earners. On the whole, women in this study have less personal expenditure than men. Evidence on this point is, however, more anecdotal than systematic, as amounts fluctuate widely for different individuals, and women’s and men’s assessments of what counts as personal expenditure also differ. For women, home-related expenses, such as ‘clothes for children’, ‘books and stationery for children’, ‘pots and pans for house’, and ‘medicine’ often appear as personal expenditure. However, most men were much more likely than women to engage regularly in forms of expenditure of which they were individual beneficiaries and usually their personal expenditure bias was in favour of their own friends rather than family. For example, visits to the local store or friend’s house, eating outside, money spent on hobbies like drinking and smoking all count as men’s personal expenditure. Men’s greater personal expenditures partly reflected gender-specific values and possibilities: culture rather than economics explains why Indian men in rural Fiji smoke and drink kava more frequently than women do. Men could engage in these individual forms of consumption with greater ease because that is what masculinity entails. Being a man also entails maintaining a public profile with other men and keeping up with the socially mandated role of the breadwinner. Hence, the tie between men’s self-worth, earning capacity and personal spending is quite strong in explaining male identity in this settlement.

Women, on the other hand, rarely reported forms of expenditure from which they were the direct and personal beneficiaries. The interests of these women are subordinated along with those of their dependents. Displays of ‘maternal altruism’ (Whitehead 1981:54) have often been part and parcel of women’s obligations to the family and frequently women in this study have subordinated their own needs and choices in fulfilment of what is expected of them as a mother and wife. Even where personal expenditures were reported, they tended to rationalise these in terms of work requirements. For example, Karuna pointed out that her clothing requirements have increased since she began work as a housemaid because she needed to maintain a decent appearance and could not go to work wearing torn clothes. Women’s greater tendency to subordinate their personal well-being reflected the same patriarchal ideologies that underpinned men’s greater tendency to make personal claims on household resources. Some of the participants have stated that their power vis-à-vis their husbands may decrease when they earn incomes of their own because husbands tend to keep more of their own incomes for personal expenditure while the women’s earnings go into paying for collective family needs. As Karuna stated:
My husband always used to spend his money on kava and tobacco... so I started work as a housemaid. And now he takes out some amount from his money then gives me the rest for food expenses. It is not good because... with that money I can buy more food for everyone.

Women have also been shown to worry more than their husbands about the everyday problems of managing food in the household, and are more prepared to ask for help, and to consider trading their activities that could generate income to buy food for the household. In my study Paaru reported, ‘When my husband stopped my work in town... I did a housemaid job in village. I got paid $7 cash and some groceries. Another time there was no food in the house and I sold a goat for $50... at that time my husband was fishing in the sea’. In such explanations of women’s desire to make life better for their children we can see the complex and inextricable interweaving of love, altruism, tenderness and self-sacrifice. In the words of Siez (1991:26) ‘this is itself in part a result of unequal bargaining power; but it is also a product of social norms concerning rights and duties which may be internalised’.

In the context of rural Indian households, a striking feature of gender subordination is the extent to which women rely on male protection as much as they rely on male provision. Consequently, there is a social as well as an economic dimension to female dependence. It is therefore in most of my participants’ perceived interests to retain intact their familial networks, but most of all, to retain some forms of male guardianship. This gives them a strong stake in cooperation rather than conflict as the basis of intra-household relations. This also demonstrates that the sexual division of labour disadvantages women in ‘bargaining within marriage by leaving them with little (or no) earnings to take with them if they left the relationship’ (England & Kilbourne 1990:163–88).

**Time-autonomy and leisure activities**

The core of gender inequality is the gender division of labour, in other words the gender division of time and responsibilities for paid employment, non-market work and leisure. The allocation of time within the household is usually a collective and not an individual decision and is influenced by individual, household and community characteristics (Agarwal 1997; Robeyns 2001). Feminist scholars such as Folbre (1994) have argued that the gender division of labour is unjust and generally works against women’s advantage. Elsewhere, others have also drawn attention to gender differentials in time-use patterns, especially female concentration in unpaid household work, by arguing that a properly comprehensive measure, one incorporating valuation of household members’ time use, would reveal the gender inequalities starkly (Jenkins 1991:461). Closer to home, Narsey (2007) notes that females appear to be far more under-employed than males in ‘paid’ activities, but they contribute substantially to unpaid household work irrespective of ethnicity and location.

As seen in my previous discussion, the strong sense of appropriate place and the proper activities of women and men in Indian society, together with low formal female labour-participation rates, have resulted in a clear division of labour and separate male and female ‘spaces’, which associate men particularly with activities ‘outside’ the home and women with activities within it. Carswell (1998:241) noted that a differentiating characteristic of the way rural women and men’s work is organised involves the fact that much of men’s work can be clearly located and temporalised as farm work. She further noted that men finished harvesting or working on the farm for the day and then relaxed in the evenings while women continued on into the night processing and cooking food,
as well as caring for children and other household members. This is not to say that men were not involved in other tasks, but generally they had much more time to pursue leisure activities such as sport, or grog-sessions. I also found that men’s spare-time activities are often located outside the home in places such as village store and male grog sessions during social-get-togethers at others’ places. As Savita noted, ‘Men like to relax with village friends by drinking grog . . . and they say because they work hard. It’s not good because they get drunk on house-money’. Jackson (1999:103) noted that alcohol consumption appears in labourers’ words as necessary to numb the exhaustion of extremely hard work rather than an idling away of the housekeeping money (see also Behrman 1997). Yaqona drinking amongst the rural men is a very common problem in this area as discussed below.

Men on the whole have far more leisure time than women because their work hours do not have the same demarcations as women’s. For example, Savita’s husband outlined a man’s routine when he was not harvesting cane; he also stated how hard women work:

Women’s work is very hard, cane-cutting not easy life . . . man has to be up by 5 or 6 o’clock . . . reach farm around 6.30. Cut cane and load the trucks with cane. Have breakfast in the cane-fields. Reach home around midday, have lunch and rest. If no other work elsewhere . . . like weeding or planting on other’s farm then I visit my friend’s house for a grog-session . . . most afternoon and evenings.

Nonetheless, the activities of men should not be oversimplified and are dependent on age, status and responsibilities. Some of the grog sessions in the evenings were also meetings of cane harvesting gang committees, school committees and religious meetings. The younger males, especially those who were unmarried and therefore with fewer responsibilities, tended to have more time and inclination to play a game of soccer after harvesting. Religious activities such as weekly Ramayan recital and other festivals could take up several evenings a week, in addition to the usual prayer gatherings. These are attended by both men and women and were very popular amongst Indian men in the present study. Issues such as mobility and reputation discussed previously are relevant, as it is much easier for males to attend different activities and walk freely at night time.

Moreover, visiting friends in the evening is a common form of relaxation amongst men and often involves a few drinks. It was also a cause of tension as far as husbands’ responsibility within the household was concerned. I found that yaqona has become a daily part of many rural Indian men’s lives and it is worth making a few observations here. On one hand, yaqona provides the sedative effect of relaxation after a day’s work and some men will drink it by themselves for this reason. As with any ‘substance’, over-indulgence has its price and combined with late nights, grog induces people to sleep late and feel lethargic the next day. Paaru expanded on why women do not want a lazy man who drinks grog the whole day:

My husband is a fisherman . . . when he is not fishing he spends the whole day with his friends . . . drinking yaqona, daru and smoking cigarettes. I don’t like this because he does not think about us . . . especially his children. He is always lazy and does not help me in the house . . . even when I built the new house. When he’s not fishing he does not find job somewhere...just drinks yaqona and sleeps.
This means the workload falls on other household members, especially women. Karuna notes the contrast in work routines in her experience:

I mean a woman does a lot of the work . . . like me, my day starts early and ends in the night . . . no rest during weekdays because I work as a housemaid all week . . . I do cooking early morning, and leave for work at 7 o’clock and come back 5 o’clock in afternoon . . . then I do washing, cleaning and cooking. When I have my bath, sometimes I’m too tired to eat at night and I sleep. My husband cuts cane for few hours in the morning and the rest of the time he is free . . . he grogs the whole day and goes here and there. He does not help me around the house.

It may also lead to increasing tension in the household, as grog-drinking habits become a contentious issue, particularly between wife and husband. In this area, it was not customary to eat before a grog session so a man may want his dinner at midnight and many of them expected their wives to get up and serve their food regardless of the hour.

Women in this study tended to work longer hours, from when they got up to the time they went to bed. I often observed that girls and women were constantly doing some form of work when it appeared they were sitting or relaxing, such as sorting through home grown rice for small stones and un-husked rice, sorting bundles of beans for sale, mending, making doilies for sale and so on. The actual number of hours women worked was taken from the time diaries five participants kept, interviews and my own participant observation; and sixteen hours a day was common. There were rest times, usually after lunch in the hottest part of the day, and there were also occasions to visit neighbours and have a pyala (bowl) of tea. There is a clear indication amongst these women that their spare-time activities are an extension of domestic routines, such as cooking, sewing and gardening, embodying a ‘culture of domesticity’ (Pahl 1980, 1984) in which the home is, for most women, both the location and focus of leisure activities such as ‘do-it-yourself’ repairs, decorating and refurbishment. Also indicative of the constant nature of women’s labour is the lack of clear delineation between one task and the next, and consequently the tendency to do simultaneous tasking. This is in contrast to the work that men do, which generally focuses on one thing at a time and the freedom they have in controlling their own use of time. The fact remains that asymmetry in time-autonomy and distribution of leisure activities within the household favours men.

Gender-sensitive measures of poverty: policy implications

Why does it matter that gender disadvantage is so frequently represented as a problem of poor women, and that ‘one-size-fits-all’ poverty concepts are expected to apply to understanding gender and well-being? In this paper I have argued that analysis of Fiji’s poverty should include gender perspectives. This would recognise the analytical strengths of gender analysis, in particular, the separation of women and gender. In doing so, my discussion centres on how the capability approach can be used to study gender inequality and poverty. Literature on household behaviour within a bargaining framework provides a useful basis for examining intra-household relations and distribution of resources within the household. Such accounting is necessary because individual opportunities of household members to achieve well-being are influenced by domestic power relations, which in turn are influenced by each party’s material and non-material endowments. The foregoing analysis of intra-household negotiations and gender inequality explored how householders negotiated resources and opportunities. The households were internally differentiated in access, control and allocation of resources and opportunities.
Hence, gender analysis and interventions need to be mainstreamed into poverty reduction policies and practice. Two possible approaches to mainstreaming gender within poverty reduction work suggest either arguing a case for inclusion on the grounds that gender identity entails poverty, or alternatively arguing that poverty is gendered, in that women and men often experience poverty in distinctive ways. In moving towards gender-sensitive, pro-poor measures of poverty, four ‘next steps’ are worthy of consideration. First, there is a need for measures of poverty to pay greater heed to the lived experiences and priorities of individuals—particularly those for whom poverty is a daily experience. When the household is the unit of analysis, it is impossible to know how poverty is distributed among the genders and it obscures intra-household inequalities. Excluding such an important feature from a poverty measure may expose poverty policy analysts to the risk of failing to understand lived experiences and priorities of poor women and men. Second, taking gender seriously means not just examining intra-household distribution, but also assessing the selection of dimensions and indicators. Many standards of evaluation are gendered and as discussed in this paper, failure to take account of leisure time or quality and kind of work men and women do may disproportionately undercount women’s poverty.

Third, there is a need for greater emphasis on sex disaggregation in the collection, analysis and reporting of national, sub-national and local-level data. This paper highlights the need for more and better data collection to be able to make individual-level assessments of deprivation that can therefore be disaggregated by such factors as sex, gender, age, ethnicity and disability. Without sex-disaggregated data, existing measures of poverty cannot be gender aware. Finally, rather than relying exclusively on large-scale surveys, there is a need to utilise more responsive and participatory forms of data collection, including qualitative techniques. Such methods are capable of producing additional data necessary to understand women and men’s different experiences of poverty, and to reveal the intersection between poverty, gender and other markers of identity, including age, ethnicity and religion. As a result, we may be better placed not only to measure, but also to understand the causes, realities and consequences of poverty, and the ways in which it shapes women’s and men’s lives, choices and chances. There has to be enduring consensus on participatory research and theoretical support from philosophical and psychological accounts of basic needs, universal values and human rights to address key questions surrounding the construction of a multidimensional poverty measure that is gender-sensitive.

Notes

1 Ingrid Robeyns has discussed some of those views, and explained at length different interpretations of Sen’s capability approach (see Robeyns 2000). It is also sufficient to note here that Nussbaum’s version of the capability approach has different aims from Sen’s and relies on different concepts, even if their labelling overlaps. For comparisons of the two approaches, see Nussbaum (2000), Sen (1993) and also Gasper (1997), Qizilbash (1998) and Crocker (1995) among others.

2 The term ‘cooperative conflict’ to describe these intra-household interactions has been popularised by the writings of Amartya Sen (1990), discussed in more detail below.

3 This study has been part of a larger study of the relationship between poverty and gender in Fiji. Fieldwork was conducted in two rural Indian settlements in Labasa and it led to what was primarily a qualitative account that contextualises the experiences of participants with historical, socio-economic and comparative literature on Fiji (Chattier 2008).
In my PhD thesis I have looked at a complete listing of about eleven capabilities including: physical health, shelter and environment, domestic work and non-market care, paid work and autonomy in household spending, time-autonomy and leisure activities, mobility and social relations, education and knowledge, bodily integrity and safety, being respected and treated with dignity and religion. In Chattier (2007) I have used a similar theoretical framework but presented data on three different capabilities taken from the above list but not under discussion in this paper.

If ‘autonomy’, defined in a narrow sense, implies control over money, signified by the capability to determine its use and estimation, it can be seen that the women in this study vary widely in the degree of control that they exercise in this sense, regardless of whether they actually manage household funds. Autonomy could, however, be defined in a wider sense to encompass not just access but self-determination. There is a difference between having the ‘right’ to decide whether to save money for children’s education and having the ‘right’ to decide on the basis of one’s employment status. The extent to which access to a wage does produce autonomy in this sense will be explored here.

In order to protect the anonymity of individuals being studied, participants’ names and place names have been changed. Out of concern for the privacy of participants, identifying personal details have been omitted and altered. The following paragraphs attempt to incorporate the stories of these eighteen women and some data about their poverty and well-being situation. But it must be noted that for reasons of limiting length and repetition of themes, a selection of participant voices is presented as representative of the eighteen.

The usual drinks are yqona, daru (locally brewed rice whisky) or methylated spirit. These drinks are readily available and relatively cheap. When they can afford it, men buy beer or what they refer to as ‘hot stuff’ (spirits) from town.

References
—— 1993b, Poverty and Affirmative Action, University of the South Pacific, Suva.
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