Assessing Development- Designing Better Indices of Poverty and Gender Equity in Fiji

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Abstract

This paper explores gender and feminist aspects of an ongoing multi-year, multi-country, interdisciplinary research project, that seeks to develop a new measure of deprivation, that is genuinely gender-sensitive and responsive to the expressed interests and views of poor women and men. The rationale for engendering the measurement of poverty and deprivation, and the ways in which feminist research approaches inform the research methodology and methods will be discussed. Key findings to date regarding the gendered dimensions of poverty and hardship will be presented in this paper, and what these suggest as potential dimensions of a new gender-sensitive measure of deprivation that can be used to construct poverty indices and gender equity indices. The paper presents findings from two phases of fieldwork from Fiji which was conducted as part of this international research project. Based on these two phases of research, it is hoped, that future academic research into poverty measurement and social valuation, will lead towards the design of an individual level of measure of multidimensional deprivation. This individualised level measure of deprivation can be used for two purposes. The first is to identify those who should be categorised as poor. The second is to construct population level indices that reflect the level of poverty and gender inequity in that population. The paper also aims to contribute more broadly to our knowledge of how people with experience of poverty think it should be defined and measured. It is hoped that the gender perspective will contribute to widening the concept of poverty by identifying the need to measure poverty in a way which accounts for its complexity and multidimensionality.

Keywords: gender, poverty, measurement, feminism