Children In Female-Headed Households: Interrogating The Concept Of An 'Inter-Generational Transmission Of Disadvantage' With Particular Reference To The Gambia, Philippines And Costa Rica

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CHILDREN IN FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS: INTERROGATING THE CONCEPT OF AN 'INTER-GENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF DISADVANTAGE' WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE GAMBIA, PHILIPPINES AND COSTA RICA

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in a popular stereotype that female-headed households are the 'poorest of the poor', it is often assumed that women and children suffer greater poverty than in households which conform with a more common (and idealised) male-headed arrangement. In addition, a conjectured 'inter-generational transmission of disadvantage' in female-headed households is imagined not only to compromise the material well-being of children, but to compound other privations – emotional, psychological, social and otherwise. Beyond affecting young people in the short-term, these are also deemed to sow the seeds of future hardship.   However, a mounting body of evidence suggests that household headship is not necessarily a good predictor of the start that children have in life, nor of their trajectories into adolescence and adulthood. On the basis of such evidence, the present paper seeks to interrogate -- and challenge -- some (mis)conceptions about female household headship and poverty among children. It finds that while risks to children's well-being may arise through discriminatory or hostile attitudes towards female-headed households in society at large, gender dynamics within male-headed units can be just as prejudicial in this regard. With this in mind, suggestions are offered for gender-sensitive policies which might help to ensure that children in all poor households are guaranteed equality in basic needs and rights.

INTRODUCTION [1]

Given frequent typecasting of female-headed households as the 'poorest of the poor', it is often assumed that both women and children suffer greater poverty than in households which conform with a more common (and idealised) male-headed arrangement. In addition, a conjectured 'inter-generational transmission of disadvantage' in female-headed households is imagined not only to compromise the material well-being of children, but to compound other privations – emotional, psychological, social and otherwise. Beyond affecting young people in the short-term, these are also deemed to sow the seeds of future hardship. This is critically important when considering that female-headed households (most of which are headed by lone mothers)[2], are rising in number and proportion in most developing regions, currently constituting an estimated 13% of all households in the Middle East and North Africa, 16% in Asia, 22% in sub-Saharan Africa, and 24% in Latin America (Bongaarts, 2001:14).   This said, a mounting body of evidence from different parts of the Global South suggests that household headship is not a good predictor of the start that children have in life, nor of their trajectories into adolescence and adulthood. While risks to children's well-being may arise through discriminatory or hostile attitudes towards female-headed households in society at large, gender dynamics within male-headed units can be just as prejudicial in this regard. Thus although poverty can be exacerbated by household headship, this is not exclusive to children who 'live only with their mothers' (see also Delamonica et al, 2004).

In order illuminate this argument, I interrogate—and challenge -- some popular notions about female household headship and poverty. The paper draws not only on published literature, but on recently concluded research centred on gender, generation and poverty in The Gambia, the Philippines and Costa Rica (see Note 1). These countries offer an interesting range of contexts for the analysis of gendered poverty, falling as they do within different categories of 'human development' as determined by the UNDP: Costa Rica being classified as having 'high' human development, the Philippines, 'medium', and The Gambia 'low'. Alongside differences in economic structure and orientation, GDP per capita, 'human' and 'income poverty' (Table 1), the countries are also characterised by quite significant variations in cultural, political, legal, religious and social organisation. These impact on the formation and survival of women-headed households and can have an important bearing on the life chances of children, as elaborated later (see also Chant, 2007 for a fuller discussion).

TABLE 1 THE GAMBIA, PHILIPPINES AND COSTA RICA: SELECTED ASPECTS OF POPULATION, HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND POVERTY

	THE GAMBIA	PHILIPPINES	COSTA RICA
Population (millions), 2002	1.4	78.6	4.1
Annual population growth rate (%), 1975-2002	3.4	2.3	2.6
Total fertility rate (per woman) 1970-1975	6.5	6.0	4.3
2000-2005	4.7	3.2	2.3
Life expectancy at birth (years) 2000-2005	54.1	69.8	78.1
Urban population (as % of total population) 1975	17.0	35.6	42.5
2002	31.2	60.2	60.1
GDP per capita (PPP US$),2002	1,690	4,170	8,840
Human Development Index (HDI) Value, 2002[a,b]	0.452	0.753	0.834
HDI rank, 2002[c]	155	83	45
Human Poverty Index (HPI-1) Value (%)[d]	45.8	14.8	4.4
Human Poverty Index (HPI-1) Rank[e]	81	28	4
Population below income poverty line ($1 a day), (%) 1990-2002[f]	59.3	14.6	2

Source: UNDP (2004: Tables 1, 3, 5 & 8)

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]).
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 is comprised of 4 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 (e.g. Barbados, with the lowest HPI-1 out of 95 developing countries has a value of 2.5%, whereas the highest HPI-1 is for Burkina Faso, with a value of 65.5% --UNDP,2004:147-9)
e = Rank out of 95 developing countries
f = Equivalent to $1.08 a day.

The paper is divided into five main sections. The first introduces some of the main (mis)conceptions circulating about the poverty of female household heads, focusing in particular on the notion that they are the 'poorest of the poor', and that their children are disproportionately afflicted by an 'inter-generational transmission of disadvantage'.   Discussion in this section also covers the assumptions which underpin these allegations, and the agendas which drive them.   In section two, I challenge common assumptions and stereotypes about the poverty and privation of female household heads and their 'dependents'. This includes, <u>inter alia</u>, a discussion of data limitations in mapping even income poverty among female-headed households, of the ways in which female household heads are often highly proactive (and successful) in overcoming discrimination as women and as lone parents (through, for example, the manipulation of household membership and earning strategies), of the need to take into account the agency of female heads in household decision-making, and the importance of multidimensional conceptualisations of poverty in understanding the well-being of women and children.   Having also outlined here how male household headship can sometimes expose children to greater hardship than in cases of father absence, section three proceeds to identify some of the more persistent barriers to socio-economic security and mobility among female-headed households. These mainly centre on discriminatory attitudes towards female-headed households which can limit their social status, networks and opportunities, employment, and access to housing. The fourth section presents case studies from The Gambia, Philippines and Costa Rica which illustrate various of the arguments of the paper. The fifth and final section offers a general summary and proposes

policy directions which might shape better futures for poor children regardless of their domestic circumstances.

I THE CHILDREN, FEMALE HOUSEHOLD HEASDHIP AND POVERTY NEXUS: SOME ASSUMPTIONS AND AGENDAS

From the 1970s onwards 'the existence and vulnerability of female-headed households has… alarmed researchers and advocates' (Wennerholm, 2002:10). Links drawn between the mounting incidence of female household headship and a 'feminisation of poverty' (see Box 1), have not only led to the widespread portrayal of female-headed households as the 'poorest of the poor' (Box 2), but given rise to a situation where '...the feminisation of poverty focuses on female-headed households as an expression of that same feminisation of poverty' (Davids and van Driel, 1001:162). As such, even though other patterns are connoted by the term, claims have sometimes been made that: '…the feminisation of poverty is the process whereby poverty becomes more concentrated among individuals living in female-headed households' (Asgary and Pagán, 2004:97).

BOX 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,b); Davids and van Driel (2001,2005); Moghadam (1997,2005); Wennerholm (2002).

BOX 2   FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS ARE 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 overrepresented 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)

Sources: Chant (2003a, 2006: Chapter 1).

Leading on from this, because lone mothers are often the biggest sub-group of female heads (see Note 2), and it is assumed that they are particularly vulnerable to poverty, their personal privations are envisaged to impact upon children in both the short- and long-term. Because, allegedly, female heads cannot 'properly support their families or ensure their well-being' (Mehra et al, 2000:7), an 'inter-generational transmission of disadvantage' is assumed to produce an 'inter-generational poverty trap' whereby children's privations in respect of food, housing, education and so on lead to legacy of deficiency and underachievement which inhibits upward mobility in later life (see Lewis, 1993:35; Momsen, 1991:26). As summarised by IFAD (2006) for rural Asia: 'Female poverty and workload is a factor in the transmission of poverty to the next generation'. The idea that 'poverty begins at home' when households are headed by women has become so entrenched that in some circles the 'culture of single motherhood' has been designated the 'New Poverty Paradigm' (Thomas, 1994, cited in Budowski et al, 2002:31).

Alongside concerns about the material welfare of children arising from the purported economic plight of female-headed households, are anxieties about their social, psychological and emotional well-being. Children growing up without fathers, whether as a result of death, divorce or separation, may experience feelings of trauma, sadness, rejection or insecurity. On top of this, given negative societal attitudes towards lone mother households as 'deviant' or 'inferior' to a two-parent 'norm', children may be pitied, taunted, socially-stigmatised and/or isolated (see Chant, 2007; Lewis, 1993;

Safa, 1998; Shanthi, 1994). Children in lone mother households may also be deprived of much contact with either parent, not only because fathers are physically absent for much (if not all) of the time, but because mothers may have to work long hours in order to sustain their dependents single-handedly. This may lead to a lack of surveillance or discipline, leading to absenteeism or early drop-out from school, delinquency, and/or precocious sexual activity and parenthood (see Safa, 1998).[3]

Another popular stereotype is that in order to cope with income and time pressures on mothers, children in female-headed households may be forced to take on high burdens of labour within and outside the home. While young women may have to undertake housework and care of younger siblings (see Monge and González, 2005: Chapter 4 on Costa Rica; Moser,1992 on Ecuador), along with boys they may also have to contribute to household finances. Despite the discipline that engaging in paid (and other) work may instill among young people (see Chant and Jones, 2005; Jones,2005), this may come at the cost of their education. It is also thought that fatherlessness has a particularly injurious effect on boys, depriving them of a 'male role model' which compromises their own ability to become 'responsible husbands and fathers' (see Chant, 1997a:58-9).

Assumptions Underpinning the Construction of Female-headed Households as Vulnerable and Poor

It is not difficult to see why negative stereotypes about households headed by women have become quasi-orthodoxies when there is not only ample qualitative but quantitative evidence that women are disadvantaged relative to men in all societies, albeit in different degrees and ways (see Tables 2—7).[4]

TABLE 2 GENDER-RELATED DEVELOPMENT INDEX (GDI): LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

	Gender-related Development Index (GDI) 2001-2		Life expectancy at birth (years) 2002		Adult literacy rate (% aged 15 years or more) 2002		Combined primary, secondary & tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%), 2001-2		Estimated earned income (PPP US$)[2] 2002		HDI rank minus GDI rank 2001-2
	Rank[1]	Value	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Argentina	36	0.841	77.6	70.5	97.0	97.0	98	90	5,662	15,431	-3
Bolivia	92	0.674	65.8	61.6	80.7	93.1	82	89	1,559	3,463	0
Brazil	60	0.768	72.5	63.0	86.5	86.2	94	90	4,594	10,897	-1
Chile	40	0.830	78.9	72.9	95.6	95.8	79	80	5,442	14,256	0
Colombia	59	0.770	75.2	69.0	92.2	92.1	70	67	4,429	8,420	1
Costa Rica	44	0.823	80.5	75.7	95.9	95.7	66	67	4,609	12,577	-2
Cuba	--	--	78.6	74.7	96.3	94.6	77	72	--	--	--
Dominican Republic	78	0.728	69.2	64.4	84.4	84.3	81	73	3,491	9,694	0
Ecuador	79	0.721	73.4	68.2	89.7	92.3	71	73	1,656	5,491	1
El Salvador	84	0.709	73.6	67.6	77.1	82.4	65	66	2,602	7,269	-2
Guatemala	98	0.635	68.7	62.8	62.5	77.3	52	59	2,007	6,092	1
Honduras	95	0.662	71.4	66.5	80.2	79.8	61	64	1,402	3,792	-2
Mexico	50	0.792	76.3	70.3	88.7	92.6	74	73	4,915	12,967	-3
Nicaragua	97	0.660	71.8	67.1	76.6	76.8	66	63	1,520	3,436	2
Panama	53	0.785	77.3	72.2	91.7	92.9	75	71	3,958	7,847	-1
Paraguay	75	0.736	73.0	68.5	90.2	93.1	72	72	2,175	6,641	-2
Peru	74	0.736	72.3	67.2	80.3	91.3	88	88	2,105	7,875	-3
Uruguay	41	0.829	78.8	71.5	98.1	97.3	90	81	5,367	10,304	2
Venezuela	58	0.770	76.6	70.8	92.7	93.5	66	64	3,125	7,550	-2

Source: UNDP (2004: Table 24)
Notes:
1. Rank out of 144 countries; top =- Norway (0.955); bottom= Niger (0.278).
2. See Anand and Sen (2000)

-- = no data

TABLE 3   GENDER-RELATED DEVELOPMENT INDEX (GDI): SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

	Gender-related Development Index (GDI) 2002-2		Life expectancy at birth (years) 2002		Adult literacy rate (% aged 15 years or more) 2002		Combined primary, secondary & tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%), 2002		Estimated earned income (PPP US$), 2002		HDI rank minus GDI rank 2001-2
	Rank[1]	Value	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Brunei Darussalam	--	--	78.7	74	88.1	94.6	84	81	--	--	--
Cambodia	105	0.557	59.2	55.2	59.3	80.8	53	64	1,622	2,117	-1
China	71	0.741	73.2	68.8	86.5	95.1	64	69	3,571	5,435	5
Hong Kong, China (SAR)	23	0.898	82.7	77.2	89.6	96.9	70	73	18,805	34,776	0
Indonesia	90	0.685	71.4	66.7	86.9	93.9	61	67	1,888	2,723	3
Korea (Rep)	29	0.882	79.2	71.7	96.6	99.2	85	98	10,747	23,226	-1
Lao PDR	107	0.528	55.6	53.1	55.5	77.4	53	65	1,358	2,082	0
Malaysia	52	0.786	75.6	70.7	85.4	92.0	72	69	5,219	13,157	-1
Mongolia	94	0.664	65.7	61.7	97.5	98.0	76	64	1,316	1,955	1
Myanmar	..	..	60.1	54.5	81.4	89.2	48	47	..	..	..
Papua New Guinea	106	0.536	58.5	56.6	57.7	71.1	40	42	1,566	2,748	0
Philippines	66	0.751	71.9	67.9	92.7	92.5	82	81	3,144	5,326	3
Singapore	28	0.884	80.2	75.8	88.6	96.6	75	76	15,822	31,927	-3
Thailand	61	0.766	73.4	65.2	90.5	94.9	72	74	5,284	8,664	1
Vietnam	87	0.689	71.4	66.7	86.9	93.9	61	67	1,888	2,723	3

Source: UNDP (2004: Table 24)

Notes:

1. Rank out of 144 countries
-- = no data

TABLE 4 GENDER-RELATED DEVELOPMENT INDEX (GDI): SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

	Gender-related Development Index (GDI) 2002-2		Life expectancy at birth (years) 2002		Adult literacy rate (% aged 15 years or more) 2002		Combined primary, secondary & tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%), 2002		Estimated earned income (PPP US$), 2002		HDI rank minus GDI rank 2001-2
	Rank[1]	Value	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	
Angola	..	..	41.5	38.8	..	..	27	32	1,627	2,626	..
Benin	130	0.406	53.1	48.5	25.5	54.8	41	64	876	1,268	0
Botswana	102	0.581	42.3	40.4	81.5	76.1	70	70	5,353	10,550	0
Burkina Faso	143	0.291	46.3	45.1	8.1	18.5	18	26	855	1,215	0
Burundi	140	0.337	41.3	40.2	43.6	57.7	29	38	561	794	0
Cameroon	111	0.491	48.1	45.6	59.8	77.0	51	61	1,235	2,787	2
Cape verde	83	0.709	72.7	66.9	68.0	85.4	72	73	3,229	7,034	1
Central Africa	138	0.345	41.0	38.7	33.5	64.7	24	38	889	1,469	-1
Chad	135	0.368	45.7	43.6	37.5	54.5	25	44	760	1,284	0
Comoros	108	0.510	62.0	59.2	49.1	63.5	41	50	950	1,669	0
Congo, DemRep	136	0.355	42.4	40.4	51.8	74.2	24	30	467	846	0
Congo Rep	112	0.488	49.9	46.6	77.1	88.9.	44	52	707	1,273	4
Côte d'Ivoire	132	0.379	41.5	40.9	38.4	60.3	31	46	818	2,222	0
Equatorial Guinea	86	0.691	50.5	47.7	76.0	92.8	49	68	16,852	42,304	2
Eritrea	127	0.431	54.2	51.1	45.6	68.2	29	38	654	1,266	0
Ethiopia	137	0.346	46.4	44.6	33.8	49.2	27	41	516	1,008	1
Gabon	..	..	57.6	55.7	..	..	81	85	4,937	8,351	..
Gambia, The	125	0.446	55.4	52.5	30.9	45.0	43	51	1,263	2,127	1
Ghana	104	0.564	59.3	56.4	65.9	81.9	42	49	1,802	2,419	0
Guinea	..	..	49.3	48.6	..	..	26	41	1,569	2,317	..
Guinea-Bissau	141	0.329	46.8	43.7.	24.7	55.2	34	52	465	959	-1
Kenya	114	0.486	46.4	44.0	78.5	90.0	52	53	962	1,067	6
Lesotho	117	0.483	39.0	33.3	90.3	73.7	65	61	1,357	3,578	0
Liberia	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Madagascar	121	0.462	54.6	52.3	60.6	74.2	43	45	534	906	1
Malawi	134	0.374	38.2	37.5	48.7	75.5	70	74	427	626	0
Mali	142	0.309	49.0	47.9	11.9	26.7	26	38	635	1,044	0
Mauritius	55	0.775	75.7	68.3	80.5	88.2	68	70	5,827	15,897	-1
Mozambique	139	0.339	40.0	36.9	31.4	62.3	32	42	840	1,265	0
Namibia	101	0.602	46.3	43.8	82.8	83.8	75	72	4,833	9,511	0
Niger	144	0.278	46.3	45.7	9.3	25.1	14	21	575	1,005	0
Nigeria	122	0.458	52.0	51.2	59.4	74.4	41	49	562	1,322	1
Rwanda	129	0.423	39.4	38.4	63.4	75.3	51	52	968	1,570	0
Sao Tome and Principe	..	..	72.7	66.9	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Senegal	128	0.429	54.9	50.6	29.7	49.0	34	41	1,140	2,074	0
Somalia	..	..	..	..	..	..					
South Africa	96	0.661	51.9	46.0	85.3	86.7	77	78	6,371	14,202	1
Sudan	115	0.485	57.0	54.1	49.1	70.8	32	36	867	2,752	-4
Swaziland	109	0.505	36.9	34.4	80.0	82.0	75	78	2,259	7,227	0
Tanzania	131	0.401	44.4	42.7	69.2	85.2	31	31	467	660	0
Togo	119	0.477	51.4	48.3	45.4	74.3	53	80	941	2,004	-4
Uganda	113	0.487	46.4	44.9	59.2	78.8	66	75	1,088	1,651	5
Zambia	133	0.375	32.5	32.9	73.8	86.3	43	47	571	1,041	0
Zimbabwe	118	0.482	33.5	34.3	86.3	93.8	58	62	1,757	3,059	1

Source: UNDP (2004: Table 24)

Notes: 1. Rank out of 144 countries; -- = no data

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TABLE 5   GENDER EMPOWERMENT MEASURE (GEM): LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES

| | Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) 2004 | | Seats in parliament held by women 2004 | Female legislators, senior officials & managers 2004 | Female professional & technical workers 2004 | Ratio of estimated female to male earned income 2004 |
	Rank[1]	Value	(as % of total)	(as % of total)	(as % of total)	
Argentina	21	0.645	31.3	26	53	0.37
Bolivia	41	0.524	17.8	36	40	0.45
Brazil	--	--	9.1	- -	62	0.42
Chile	58	0.460	10.1	21	52	0.38
Colombia	48	0.498	10.8	38	50	0.53
Costa Rica	19	0.664	35.1	53	28	0.39
Cuba	--	--	36	- -	--	--
Dominican Republic	40	0.527	15.4	31	49	0.36
Ecuador	50	0.490	16	25	44	0.30
El Salvador	60	0.448	10.7	26	46	0.36
Guatemala	- -	--	8.2	- -	--	--
Honduras	70	0.355	5.5	22	36	0.37
Mexico	34	0.563	21.2	25	40	0.38
Nicaragua	- -	--	20.7	--	--	--
Panama	52	0.486	9.9	38	49	0.50
Paraguay	63	0.417	8.8	23	54	0.33
Peru	42	0.524	18.3	27	44	0.27
Uruguay	46	0.511	11.5	37	52	0.52
Venezuela	61	0.444	9.7	27	61	0.41

Source: UNDP (2004:Table 25)

Note:
1. Rank out of 78 countries
-- = no data

TABLE 6   GENDER EMPOWERMENT MEASURE (GEM): SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES

| | Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) 2004 | | Seats in parliament held by women 2004 | Female legislators senior officials & managers 2004 | Female professional & technical workers 2004 | Ratio of estimated female to male earned income 2001 |
	Rank[1]	Value	(as % of total)	(as % of total)	(as % of total)	
Brunei Darussalam	..	..	–	..	..	..
Cambodia	69	0.364	10.9	14	33	0.77
China	..	..	20.2	..	..	..
Hong Kong, China (SAR)	..	..	..	26	40	..
Indonesia	..	..	8.0	..	..	..
Korea, Rep. of	68	0.377	5.9	5	34	0.46
Lao PDR	..	..	22.9	..	..	..
Malaysia	44	0.519	16.3	20	45	0.40
Mongolia	62	0.429	10.5	30	66	0.67
Papua New Guinea	..	..	0.9	..	..	..
Philippines	37	0.542	17.2	58	62	0.59
Singapore	20	0.648	16.0	26	43	0.50
Thailand	57	0.461	9.5	27	55	0.61
Vietnam	..	..	27.3	..	..	..

Source: UNDP (2004:Table 25)

Note:
1. Rank out of 78 countries
-- = no data

TABLE 7 GENDER EMPOWERMENT MEASURE (GEM): SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

	Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) 2004		Seats in parliament held by women 2004 (as % total)	Female legislators senior officials & managers 2004 (as % total)	Female professional & technical workers 2004 (as % total)	Ratio of estimated female to male earned income 2004
	Rank	Value				
Angola	..	..	15.5	..	..	..
Benin	..	..	7.2	..	..	..
Botswana	35	0.562	17.0	35	52	0.51
Burkina Faso	..	..	11.7	..	..	..
Burundi	..	..	18.5	..	..	..
Cameroon	..	..	8.9	..	..	..
Cape Verde	..	..	11.1	..	..	..
Central African Republic	..	..	--	..	..	..
Chad	..	..	5.8	..	..	..
Comoros	..	..	–	..	..	..
Congo, Dem. Rep. of the	..	..	7.4	..	..	..
Congo	..	..	10.6	..	..	..
Côte d'Ivoire	..	..	8.5	..	..	..
Equatorial Guinea	..	..	5.0	..	..	..
Eritrea	..	..	22.0	..	..	..
Ethiopia	..	..	7.8	..	..	..
Gabon	..	..	11.0	..	..	..
Gambia	..	..	13.2	..	..	..
Ghana	..	..	9.0	..	..	..
Guinea	..	..	19.3	..	..	..
Guinea-Bissau	..	..	7.8	..	..	..
Kenya	..	..	7.1	..	..	..
Lesotho	..	..	17.0	..	..	..
Liberia			--			
Madagascar	..	..	6.4	..	..	..
Malawi	..	..	9.3	..	..	..
Mali	..	..	10.2	..	..	..
Mauritius	..	..	5.7	..	..	..
Mozambique	..	..	30.0	..	..	..
Namibia	33	0.572	21.4	30	55	0.51
Niger	..	..	1.2	..	..	..
Nigeria	..	..	3.3	..	..	..
Rwanda	..	..	25.7	..	..	..
Sao Tome and Principe	..	..	9.1	..	..	..
Senegal	..	..	19.2	..	..	..
Seychelles	..	..	29.4	..	..	..
Sierra Leone	..	..	14.5	..	..	..
Somalia	..	..	..			
South Africa	..	..	30.0	..	..	..
Sudan	..	..	9.7	..	..	..
Swaziland	..	..	6.3	..	..	..
Tanzania, U. Rep. of	..	..	22.3	..	..	..
Togo	..	..	7.4	..	..	..
Uganda	..	..	24.7	..	..	..
Zambia	..	..	12.0	..	..	..
Zimbabwe	..	..	10.0	..	..	..

As far as poverty is concerned, one of the main reasons why female-headed households, and especially lone mother units, are thought to be the 'poorest of the poor', is because they are deprived of one of the major routes through which access to income is achieved, namely a male 'provider'. As noted by Elson (1992:41):

> 'The growth of female-headed households is no sign of emancipation from male power; in a society in which women as a gender are subordinate the absence of a husband leaves most women worse-off. The core of gender subordination lies in the fact that most women are unable to mobilise adequate resources (both material and in terms of social identity), except through dependence on a man'.

In lacking an adult male 'breadwinner' lone mother units not only have to do without men's earnings, but they may also be disadvantaged by higher dependency ratios than households which comprise two working parents (see Fuwa, 2000:1535; IFAD, 1999; ILO, 1996; Safa and Antrobus, 1992:54; UNDAW,1991:38).   In addition, while legal stipulations pertaining to absent fathers are in place in many Family Codes, there is often scant enforcement of maintenance payments to wives and children, especially among the poor (see Chant, 1997a, 2003a; van Vuuren, 2003:73).

That lone mothers may be forced into single-handed management of a multiplicity of tasks, including income-generation, housework and childcare, further compromises economic efficiency and well-

being (see ECLAC, 2004b:18).   On one hand, female heads are conjectured to have less time and energy to perform the wide range of non-market work so essential to income conservation in poor neighbourhoods, such as shopping around for the cheapest foodstuffs, or cutting costs by self-provisioning rather than purchasing market goods and services (see World Bank, 2003:8). On the other hand, women's 'reproduction tax' (Palmer, 1992) impinges on economic productivity, with lone mothers often confined to part-time, flexible, and/or home-based occupations. This is compounded by women's disadvantage in respect of education and training, their lower average earnings, gender discrimination in the workplace, and the fact that social and labour policies rarely provide more than minimal support to parents (see Dia, 2001; Elson, 1999; Finne, 2001; Kabeer, 2003). Female heads are much more commonly engaged in informal activity than their male counterparts, and usually in the lower tiers of the sector (see Brown, 2000; Chant, 1991; Chen et al, 2004; Sethuraman, 1998). Since informal employment is not only poorer paid, but less regular, not to mention lacking in fringe benefits, social security coverage and pensions, the short- and long-term implications for female heads of household, and ipso facto, their children, are potentially serious.

Another important set of factors in the construction of women-headed households as 'poorest of the poor' is that state support for this group in most of the Global South has been fairly minimal to date.[5]   Moreover, where targetted initiatives to alleviate the poverty of female-headed households do exist, they have rarely made an appreciable difference to household incomes or assets,

partly because the disbursements are so small, and partly because isolated handouts mean little when overall structures of gender inequality remain in-tact (see Bibars,2001; Chant, 2007: Chapters 3 & 6).   Indeed, in Costa Rica, where from the mid-1990s onwards female heads of household have been targetted in anti-poverty programmes, it seems paradoxical that this has not diminished the incidence of poverty and extreme poverty among female heads (see Monge and González, 2005; also Chant,2007:Chapter 6, and later).

Just as it is often believed that women's general disadvantage maps directly onto (if not exacerbates) their situation as female household heads, so too is it automatically assumed that their offspring will be worse off. As noted previously, this not only extends to economic vulnerability. The belief that dual ('natural'/biological) parenthood offers the best prospects of social, moral and psychological well-being for children is deeply engrained in many cultures, and is unlikely to become unseated during an era in which concern and advocacy for children's rights are at an all-time high (see Chant, 2007:Chapter 3; Jones, 2005).

Agendas Underpinning Constructions of Disadvantage in Female-headed Households

While the assumptions and constructions detailed above have often drawn in part on empirical observation, it is worth noting that they have also served – whether by design or default -- a diverse range of political and policy agendas. For example, the notion that women-headed households are the 'poorest of the poor' has conceivably bolstered the objectives not only of neoliberal

economic strategies, but of conservative social movements oriented to the prevention of moral and 'family breakdown', as well as of Gender and Development (GAD) lobbyists, albeit for different reasons. As far as advocates of neoliberalism are concerned, if poor women-headed households appear to be a group in particular need then this can legitimise the 'efficiency'-driven case for favouring targetted poverty reduction measures over universal social programmes. From the perspective of 'social conservatives' concerned to uphold the institution of marriage, couple-based parenting, and 'traditional family values', evidence of privation among women and children associated with lone motherhood can fuel calls to strengthen a patriarchal household model, be this through discouraging cohabitation or divorce, or by scapegoating alternative family arrangements for poverty and other social ills.[6] Yet from a GAD perspective, the self-same 'evidence' about female heads as the 'poorest of the poor' can be presented to development funders in order to justify orienting more expenditure to women (see Baden and Goetz, 1998:23; Chant, 2003a; Jackson, 1998).

II MYTHS UNDERPINNING THE MYTHS? CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES ABOUT FEMALE HOUSEHOLD HEADSHIP AND THE INTER-GENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF DISADVANTAGE

Notwithstanding that stereotypes about privation among female heads of household and their children may have some basis in 'fact', it is equally important to recognise not only that such 'facts' may be manipulated to further different political objectives, but that the basic 'facts' themselves may be grounded in tenuous data.

For example, while the typecasting of women-headed households as the 'poorest of the poor' appears, by force of repetition alone, to have gathered increasing legitimacy, it is interesting that this does not always accord with available data on the most common measure of poverty – income and/or consumption -- whether at macro-, meso- or micro-levels.

Lack of Quantitative Evidence for Poverty Among Female-headed Households

Bias towards the over-reporting of poverty among female heads is often inscribed into poverty assessments for two reasons: first, the prevailing use of the 'household' as the basic unit of measurement, and second, the use of income, consumption and/or expenditure as the key indicator of poverty. Reliance on aggregate household income means that because of their smaller size female-headed households often show-up as a 'visible and readily identifiable group in income poverty statistics' (Kabeer,1996:14), even when in per capita terms they may be better off (see Chant, 1997b; also Bongaarts, 2001; Kabeer, 2003:79-81).   Notwithstanding the additional proviso that household income gives no indication of gendered dimensions of resource allocation within household units, even aggregate data themselves do not yield proof of unilateral disadvantage. For example, despite a rise in the share of households in extreme poverty headed by women in some parts of Latin America during the last decade, and that female-headed households in the region are increasingly over-represented among the poor as a whole (see Arriagada, 2002; ECLAC, 2004b:58; also Table 8), in some countries – notably Mexico, Brazil and

Guatemala -- women-headed households appear to be more prevalent among the <u>non</u>-poor, albeit by a small margin. Moreover, in countries not included in Table 8, such as Colombia, female headship has shown a tendency to concentrate more in upper than lower income deciles over time. In 1995, for example, when 22.5% of Colombia's households were female-headed, only 20.9% of households in extreme poverty (equating to the bottom two income deciles) were headed by women, and 19.3% among the poor (deciles 3--5), whereas female-headed households made up 25.1% and 26.2% respectively of the top two deciles (deciles 9 & 10) (see Wartenburg,1999:80-81). That female headship plays little role in determining poverty has also been found in Peru, where the incidence of monetary poverty is, again, higher in male-headed households (Franco, 2003:7).

TABLE 8   FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS BY POVERTY STATUS OVER TIME IN URBAN LATIN AMERICA

Country & year	Total % of households headed by women	Extremely poor (%)	Poor (%)	Non-poor (%)
Argentina				
(Gran Buenos Aires)				
1990	21.1	26.2	11.6	22.3
1994	24.0	22.0	20.0	24.0
1997	26.1	31.7	24.1	26.5
1999	26.9	36.9	28.0	26.5
Bolivia				
1989	16.7	22.0	24.1	26.1
1994	18.0	20.0	17.0	18.0
1997	20.7	24.0	22.4	18.6
1999	20.9	24.4	18.9	20.7
Brazil				
1990	20.1	24.2	22.6	18.4
1993	21.7	22.9	21.0	21.7
1996	23.7	24.1	22.1	24.0
1999	25.4	24.2	24.2	25.9
Chile				
1990	21.4	24.5	19.8	21.5
1994	22.0	27.0	21.0	22.0
1996	23.0	29.0	22.0	23.0
1998	24.0	28.0	23.0	24.0
Costa Rica				
1991	24.1	27.7	22.3	24.0
1994	24.0	24.0	24.0	24.0
1997	26.8	51.0	35.5	24.0
1999	27.9	55.8	38.5	24.9
Ecuador				
1990	16.9	21.6	15.9	15.3
1994	18.7	22.7	17.5	15.3
1997	18.6	23.8	18.6	16.7
1999	20.1	22.9	20.5	18.0
El Salvador				
1995	30.8	38.2	31.3	29.0
1997	30.2	35.8	33.2	27.8
1999	31.4	35.5	35.5	29.2
Guatemala				
1989	21.9	23.1	21.0	21.7
1998	24.3	24.2	21.9	25.3
Honduras				
1990	26.6	35.4	21.2	21.4
1994	25.0	28.0	25.0	21.0
1997	29.2	31.9	27.7	27.5
1999	30.3	32.2	30.4	28.1
Mexico				
1989	15.7	13.9	14.0	16.7
1994	17.0	11.0	16.0	18.0
1996	17.5	17.1	14.7	18.9
1998	19.0	18.0	16.0	20.0
Nicaragua				
1993	34.9	39.9	33.8	31.7
1998	34.5	39.2	36.4	29.6
Panama				
1991	26.0	33.7	29.0	23.5
1994	25.0	35.0	25.0	24.0
1997	27.5	36.5	28.8	26.2
1999	27.4	44.6	28.0	25.8

Source: CEPAL (2002: Cuadro 6E)

Within a broader geographical remit, comparative inter-regional and/or international assessments based on data compiled by the World Bank and other multilateral organisations such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), confirm that female household headship does not predict an above-average probability of income or expenditure/consumption poverty in any consistent manner (for details see Chant, 1997b; Chen et al, 2004:37; IFAD, 1999; Kennedy,1994:35-6; Lampietti and Stalker, 2000; Moghadam, 1997:8, 1998; Quisumbing et al, 1995). This is echoed in the findings of a number of sub-regional and national studies based on official statistics (see Gafar, 1998 on Guyana; Kusakabe, 2002 on Cambodia; van Vuuren, 2003 on Tanzania), and in two of my case study countries -- The Gambia and the Philippines – poverty is more likely to afflict male- than female-headed households (see later).

Detailed micro-level research also provides limited grounds for generalisation. On one hand, there are countries where female headship and poverty seem to be linked, including Egypt (Bibars, 2001: 68), Botswana (van Driel, 1994:216); Iran (ILO, 2004), Zambia (Nauckhoff, 2004:54), Kenya (Rodenberg, 2004:46), and South Africa (Todes and Walker, 1993:48). Moreover, one of the biggest comparative reviews to date, based on over 60 micro-level studies from Latin America, Africa and Asia, concluded that in two-thirds of cases women-headed households were poorer than male-headed households (see Buvinic and Gupta, 1993,1997).[7] On the other hand, numerous studies of other countries in the Global South indicate that there either is no relationship between the sex of household

heads and income and/or that women-headed households are just as likely to be present among middle- and/or upper-income groups as among the poor (see Appleton, 1996 on Uganda; Kumari, 1989:31 on India; Lewis, 1993:23 on Bangladesh; Weekes-Vagliani,1992:42 on the Côte d'Ivoire).

Also interesting here is that observations from a variety of contexts in the South suggest that children in female-headed households may actually be better off than their counterparts in male-headed units in respect of educational attainment, nutrition and health (Blumberg, 1995; Chant, 1997a; Engle, 1995; Hoddinott and Haddad, 1991; Moore and Vaughan, 1994; Oppong, 1997). In addition, notwithstanding the common assumption that female heads of household send young children out to work, levels of child labour are not discernibly higher in female-headed units (see Chant,1997a:230 et seq; Chant and Jones,2005). As concluded by Delamonica et al (2004:1) on the basis of UNICEF data from 17 countries in which at least 15% of children were living only with their mother: '..despite the many challenges that single mothers face, they still manage to raise their children with outcomes similar to those of two-parent families'. The same study also showed that children living with single fathers (as well as with neither biological parent), actually had the poorest outcomes (ibid.:25). An additional factor to bear in mind is that in poor male-headed households in highly patriarchal societies '..the poverty of women and girls … may very well be more severe than that of men and boys' (Moghadam, 2005:28), when households are headed by women there may be less discrimination against daughters and sometimes even positive discrimination (see Chant,1997a,b).

Since the idea that children's well-being may not be unduly compromised by female household headship goes against the grain of prevailing orthodoxy, not to mention widespread evidence of gender inequality (Tables 2—7), it is important to establish how female heads do not necessarily end-up poorer than male counterparts.

Heterogeneity of Female-headed Households

Over and above the fact that the viability of female-headed households is mediated by social, cultural, demographic, political and economic differences among countries, there are many more 'micro-level' reasons why they are not necessarily the 'poorest of the poor', one being that that they are highly heterogeneous in respect of formation and configuration. Differentiation occurs inter alia, through routes into the status (whether via non-marriage, separation, divorce, widowhood and so on), by rural or urban residence, by 'race', by composition, by stage in the life course (including age and relative dependency of offspring), and by access to resources from beyond the household unit (from absent spouses/fathers, kinship networks, state assistance and the like) (see Baylies, 1996; Chant, 1997a; Feijoó, 1999; Safa, 2002; van Vuuren, 2003; Varley, 2002; Whitehead and Lockwood, 1999). The ways in which such criteria may impact upon poverty among women and children are explored below.

Routes into Female Household Headship

In respect of routes into female household headship, it is fair to say that these are more usually 'involuntary' than 'by choice' i.e. in cases where women get pregnant and do not marry, or fall victim to separation or divorce, men are more often the ones in the position of determining and/or insitigating the process. This is partly because in most societies the pressures on women to contain their sexuality within a stable partnership and/or to keep marriages afloat are greater than for men. An equally significant factor depressing female-instigated household headship is that women have less access to economic resources. Yet it is also important to acknowledge evidence which reveals that although women may refrain from taking the step into female headship themselves, once heading their own households they are often reluctant to enter further co-residential partnerships (see Bradshaw,1996a; Chant,1997a,b; Fonseca, 1991; van Vuuren, 2003:231; Ypeij and Steenbeek, 2001). This affirms Baden's (1999:13) point that : 'The processes which lead women to head households are many and in some cases this may represent a positive choice, so that the connotations of powerlessness and victimhood are inappropriate'. As echoed by Rodenberg (2004:13):

> 'Women are…more often affected, and jeopardised by poverty. Lacking powers of self-control and decision-making powers, women – once having fallen into poverty – have far fewer chances to remedy their situation. This fact, however, should not be understood to imply globally that e.g. a rising number of women-headed households is invariably linked with a rising poverty rate. It is instead advisable to bear in mind that a woman's decision to maintain a household of her own may very well be a voluntary decision – one that may, for instance, serve as an avenue out of a relationship marred by violence. If poverty is understood not only as income poverty but as a massive restriction of choices and options, a step of this kind, not taken in isolation, may also mean an improvement of women's life circumstances'.

Indeed, given that feminist research has highlighted the fact that women's poverty is often strongly linked to unequal gender relations within as well as beyond the home, one might ask why it has been so rarely articulated that women's increased headship of households may be a medium through which they are able to exert more control over their lives and better ensure the well-being of their dependents (see Jassey, 2002).

Household Membership

Leading on from this, female headship does not necessarily mean that these households lack adult males (see Fonseca, 1991). Aside from grown-up sons, adult male relatives may well feature in women's extended household membership. Indeed, it is perhaps noteworthy in poor neighbourhoods in urban Mexico more than one-half of female-headed households are extended
compared with just over one-quarter of male-headed units (Chant 1997a). In Nicaragua, surveys conducted in four rural and urban settlements indicate that 54% of female-headed units are extended, as against 21% of their male-headed counterparts (Bradshaw, 2002:16). In Colombia, 46% of female-headed households are extended versus 30% of male-headed households (Wartenburg, 1999:88), and in the Dominican Republic, the corresponding figures are 53% and 35% (Safa, 1998:209). Although household extension may not always result from a proactive measure to improve security and well-being, there is evidence to suggest that this can often bolster women heads' resource base through adding wage earners to the household unit, or by facilitating engagement in income-generating

activities among other household members (see Chant,1997b). This, in turn, means that younger dependent children may not suffer any appreciable deficit in resources.

Household Livelihood Strategies

Given proclivities to household extension, and the intersecting effects of lifecourse, it is clearly inappropriate to assume that female heads are the sole or even main breadwinners in households (Rosenhouse, 1989; Mookodi, 2000; Varley,1996). While female heads may well be disadvantaged in employment and earnings, this may be compensated by contributions from other members. In Mexico, for example, a rise in multiple earning strategies to cope with neoliberal economic restructuring has seen the share of total income apportioned by heads in all households declining in the last decade (see González de la Rocha, 2002:64 on Mexico). On top of this, much research on Latin America more generally suggests that relative to household size, female-headed households may have more earners (and earnings) than their male-headed counterparts because they make fuller use of household labour supply. Male heads, by contrast, may forbid their wives (and even daughters) to work, especially in jobs outside the home or neighbourhood (see Benería and Roldan,1987:146; Chant,1997b; Fernández-Kelly,1983; Proctor, 2003:303; Townsend et al, 1999:38; Willis,1993:71 on Mexico; see also Bradshaw and Linneker, 2001:199 on Honduras). When this leaves households reliant on a single wage, there are greater risks of destitution. Although female-headed households may clearly need more workers (because women's wages may require supplementation), purposeful mobilisation of female and male labour

supply can add to the effects of household extension and/or multiple earning strategies in reducing dependency ratios and enhancing per capita incomes (see Chant, 1991:204, Table 7.1; Selby et al, 1990:95; Varley,1996:Table 5 on Mexico; also Chant, 1997a:210; Kennedy, 1994; Oliver, 2002:47; Paolisso and Gammage, 1996:21; Quisumbing et al, 1995; Shanthi, 1994:23 on other contexts).   As summed-up by Wartenburg (1999:95) in relation to Colombia, the manner in which female-headed households organise themselves can optimise the positive elements of such arrangements and thereby contribute to neutralising the negative effects of gender bias.   An additional factor is that female-headed households may also be able to draw on remittances from children who have left home, or other relatives (see Bruce and Lloyd, 1992; Chant,2003a).

Aside from the fact that the diverse livelihood strategies entered into by female-headed households can raise earning capacity and reduce vulnerability, earnings seem to have a greater chance of being translated into disposable income for household use on account of women being able to sidestep the vagaries of resource contributions from male 'breadwinners', to exert greater bargaining power with other members, and to better realise their preferences.   As pointed out by Davids and van Driel (2001:162):

> 'What is implied is that female-headed households are poorer than male-headed households. The question that is not asked, however, is whether women are better-off in male-headed households. By making male-headed households the norm, important contradictions vanish within these households, and so too does the possibly unbalanced economical (sic) and social position of women compared to men'.

Intra-household Resource Distribution and Women's Power in Bargaining and Decision-making

Leading on from the above, even where female-headed households struggle on low-incomes, empirical evidence from a variety of contexts indicates that patterns of intra-household distribution may work more in favour of children in female- than male-headed households with positive effects on their nutritional intake, health care and education (see Blumberg, 1995:215 <u>et seq</u>; Chant, 1997a:227-8; Engle, 1995; González de la Rocha,1994b; Kabeer, 1996:13, 2003:165 <u>et seq</u>; Kennedy,1994:36; Moore and Vaughan, 1994). This not only means greater well-being in the short-term, but, given investments in human capital, also encompasses potential for greater socio-economic security (or indeed mobility), over a longer timescale.

That more money may be available for expenditure on children in female-headed households owes to a combination of three main factors, all of which hinge on the need to acknowledge households as internally-differentiated units. The first is the contrast between what women and men do with the income they generate. Whereas women are widely noted as surrendering all or the bulk of their earnings to household use, men often reserve a substantial proportion for personal expenditure. Therefore, even though men's remuneration is usually higher the amount of income available for their wives and children may be less in practice (see below). The second reason why more money tends to be spent on children in female-headed households is that in the absence of male heads women's power to make decisions is vastly enhanced. While decision-making <u>can</u> be cooperative and democratic

in male-headed households, it is often the case that women and men have separate (and unequal) spheres of jurisdiction. As a general rule, men's greater wages are used to legitimise their control or major say over what income is actually allocated to women and children in the first place, or grants them the prerogative of deciding on major items of household expenditure such as housing or costly consumer goods. Women, on the other hand, often have limited bargaining power over the use of male wages, with their decision-making centred on relatively routine matters such as how to allocate the amount they are given for 'housekeeping' to daily consumption needs. This contrasts substantially with women who head their own households who are better able to make strategic decisions because they do not need to defer to male heads. Such observations lend weight to the relevance of abandoning conceptual models of a 'unitary' household' in which inequalities in control and command over resources derive from a 'joint utility' function, in favour of those such as Sen's 'cooperative conflict' model, which recognises that household members may have different preferences whose realisation hinges on their relative bargaining power (see Sen,1987,1990; also Bolt and Bird , 2003:10; Kabeer, 1994: Chapter 5; Quisumbing [ed.], 2003; Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2003).

The third, and related, factor is that women's preferences are more likely to be 'other-'oriented than self-oriented, with considerable evidence to suggest that women prioritise investments in children to a greater extent than men (see Bradshaw and Linneker, 2003:9; Chant, 1997a,b; Dwyer and Bruce [eds],1998; Folbre,1991). In many countries, for instance, the higher the share of resources controlled by women within households, the more tends to be spent on education

(see Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2003:27).   At a more basic level it is also the case that mothers tend to be much more preoccupied with satisfying their children's food needs than fathers (see Johnsson-Latham,2004; May, 2001; Quiusmbing and McClafferty, 2006).

Explanations for child-oriented spending among women have included, inter alia, compliance with socialised expectations of maternal altruism, taking responsibility in the absence of alternatives (i.e. women have little choice other than to spend on children because they have limited or no help from men), or because investments in children help to ensure that women will be cared for in old age, especially where there are few alternative sources of support.

Even if some poor fathers express and/or feel genuine concern about children's well-being, self-sacrifice is much less common, and the aforementioned tendency for men to retain sometimes substantial shares of their earnings for personal use can put women and children at the mercy of 'secondary poverty' (see Dwyer and Bruce [eds], 1988; also Bradshaw, 1996b, 2002; Chant, 1997b; González de la Rocha, 1994b; Moghadam,2005).   On top of this, when women are earning, men may keep more of their wage for themselves such that rather than women's incomes complementing their's, they become a substitute (see Bradshaw,2002). In some instances male household heads also go as far as to extract 'top-up' money from working wives. In Thailand and the Philippines, for example, it appears to be culturally acceptable for husbands to gamble and go drinking with friends after work and to demand money from their spouses to do so (see Blanc-Szanton,1990:93;Chant and McIlwaine,1995).   Gambling and drinking, along with smoking, drug abuse, extra marital sexual liaisons, and

conspicuous consumption on clothes and hi-tech consumer goods, are often referred to as 'non-merit' items (see Haddad, 1991). Expenditure on these can not only lead to the short-term deprivation of spouses and children, but also result in longer-term problems – for example, when a male breadwinner's earnings are lost due to long-term sickness or disability, or premature death, or where other household members become infected by a sexually-transmitted disease, or have to pick up the tab for medical attention or greater unpaid care work (se Chant,2006; Delamonica et al, 2004; UNDP,2005). These findings underline Folbre's (1991:108) argument that due to their privileged bargaining position male heads may command a larger share of resources than they actually bring to the household (see also Baylies, 1996:77). Added to this, financial contributions from men may be so irregular that this makes for excessive vulnerability on the part of women who not only have to generate their own income, but may be forced into additional borrowing and indebtedness in order to get by (Chant, 1997a:210).

Leading on from this, it is not just men's lack of financial responsibility which is perceived to be problematic by and for many women and children, but their limited commitment of time to household life and parenting.

In short, while having to cope single-handedly can be difficult for lone mothers, especially those with young children, we cannot necessary assume that co-resident fathers make life any less problematic.[8] As stated by Baylies (1996:7): 'The presence of two parents in the same residence gives no guarantee of either financial or emotional support', and as summarised by Hewitt and Leach (1993:17), 'father absence'

can be just as prevalent in male- as female-headed households (see also van Driel, 1994:208 et seq). Moreover, rather than improving economic circumstances for households, paternal co-residence can undermine these through secondary poverty or the exploitation of mothers, whether on account of wilful neglect, egoism or lack of effort. Life without men in some instances can thus be better for all concerned: for women, because they may not have a great deal to lose economically, labour-wise or in terms of stress from the absence of a partner, and for children, because when mothers are the main decision-makers, they are better able to act upon their preferences, in which the well-being of their dependents is usually uppermost (Buvinic and Gupta, 1997; Delamonica et al, 2004).

Multi-dimensional Conceptualisations of Poverty and the Notion of 'Trade-offs'

Following on from this, it is vital to recognise not only that bargaining power over resources can be as important as level of resources, but also that poverty is broader than incomes, and women and children may gain in other ways from living without fathers, for example, with less insecurity, less violence, and, in the case of girls, with less discrimination. With respect to the latter, for instance, male pride may lead fathers with little education prevent their daughters having any more than basic schooling because they fear that their own status and.or authority will be undermined. Alternatively in the context of cultures characterised by son preference, men may simply resist expending scarce resources on girls. I have documented male-biased expenditure on education previously for Mexico (see Chant,1997a), and while recognising that in other societies with apparently greater tendencies to son preference, such as India,

Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, it may be that 'under-investment in girls' (Moghadam,2005:14) occurs regardless of the constitution of the natal family unit, father presence may exacerbate such tendencies insofar as adult men are usually responsible for making and delivering such decisions.

Violence towards women and children also seems to be much more of a problem in male-headed households. While physical and sexual violence, and other forms of abuse may be found in many different domestic environments and in different guises[9], there is substantial evidence to suggest that this is mainly perpetrated by adult men against women and girls (see UNFPA,2005; Velzboer-Salcedo and Novick,2000). In the context of my own field research the prevalence of adult male violence (particularly on the part of spouses and fathers) towards women and children in the domestic context was such that no other form of intra-family violence was mentioned.

Despite initiatives such as the UN Declaration against Violence against Women (1993) which has been followed up by national programmes in several countries, violence continues to be a major problem. It not only undermines individual women's and children's psychological and emotional well-being, as detailed above, but economic security, which in turn exacts a heavy toll both on households and on society at large (World Bank, 2003:7; also Moser and McIlwaine, 2004; WEDO, 2005). As highlighted by ECLAC (2004b:26) for Latin America:

'A thorough understanding of poverty must include an analysis of violence as a factor that erodes personal autonomy, the exercise of citizenship and social capital (social autonomy), the latter as a result of the isolation to which women are subjected. This is consistent with the definition of poverty as the lack of minimum survival conditions…On the one hand, poverty is a risk factor that makes the appearance of physical violence in the home more probable. In addition, violence produces more poverty, since it holds back economic development for a number of reasons: (i) dealing with the effects of both social and domestic violence requires spending on the part of the police, judicial and social services systems, and (ii) in the case of women, those who suffer domestic violence are less productive at work, which leads to a direct loss to national production'.

Following on from this, actual levels of income may mean little in respect of women's and children's subjective evaluations of their situations, and makes it easier to understand how 'A lower income may even be preferred over a position of dependence and domination' (Davids and van Driel, 2001:164; see also González de la Rocha, 1994a: 210). The process by which women weigh-up different dimensions of poverty and privation and attempt to negotiate domestic situations in which their own and their children's well-being are best assured has often been summed-up in the concept of 'trade-offs', among which opting for female headship seems to be an important strategy.

Female Household Headship as a 'Trade-off'

On the surface, female household headship may appear to be detrimental to the well-being of women and children, especially given that women often lose out materially from divorce or separation, and particularly when they themselves take the decision to initiate a split. Although women are less likely to leave men as be deserted, for example, empirical evidence suggests that some women's desire to exit negative relationships is such

that are prepared to make substantial financial sacrifices in order to do so. Leaving their spouses not only means doing without male earnings, but, in cases where women move out of the conjugal home, forfeiting property and other assets such as neighbourhood networks in which considerable time, effort and/or resources may have been invested (Chant, 1997a, 2003a). Similarly, separated women may resist men's offers of child support when this threatens to undermine their autonomy (see Chant, 1997b:35). Yet as we have seen poverty has different facets, and while leaving men or eschewing assistance may at one level exacerbate material hardship, and, accordingly, attach a high price to women's independence (see Jackson, 1996; Molyneux, 2001: Chapter 4), the benefits in other dimensions of women's and children's lives may be adjudged to outweigh the costs. While women's lower average wages clearly inflate these costs, as Graham (1987: 59) argues: '..single parenthood can represent not only a different but a preferable kind of poverty for lone mothers' (see also UNDAW,1991:41). While the perceived benefits of being without a male partner often centre on non-economic aspects of well-being (Bradshaw, 2002:31), women's conscious rejection of men's support and/or co-residence can diminish personal and family vulnerability in various ways, including materially (Chant, 2003a). Critical in all this, as mentioned earlier, is that through female headship women usually gain more power to direct resources to the fulfilment of children's needs.

Another positive spin-off of female headship is that in the process of taking on a bigger role as providers, managers and decision-makers in households, women can generate positive role models

for daughters, as well as inculcating more egalitarian views about gender among sons (see Chant,1997a on Mexico and the Philippines).   Boys in female-headed households not only tend to respect their mothers' role as managers, but generally take on more domestic labour than their counterparts in male-headed households. In male-headed households, by contrast, fathers may intervene to prevent sons from engaging in 'women's work', as documented for Costa Rica in the case study section later.

In brief, feminist research has demonstrated that there is often as much going on within households, as outside them, which determines women's and children's poverty, well-being and power. One of its most significant contributions has been to reveal how female household headship is often erroneously construed as a risk factor for women and their offspring (see Chant, 2003a; González de la Rocha and Grinspun, 2001:61).   While poverty-inducing processes are frequently seen to reside in women's social and economic position in society at large, in some instances domestic relationships with men can aggravate this situation.

III   PERSISTENT BARRIERS TO WELL-BEING IN FEMALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

Although the findings discussed above underline the need to avoid sweeping stereotypes about the poverty of women-headed households a counter-stereotypical proposition would be equally ill-advised.   Just as female headship is far from being a 'panacea for poverty' (see Feijoó, 1999:162), so too would it wrong to suggest that male-headed households are necessarily associated with 'secondary poverty' among women and children.   Even

recognising that the well-being of women and children in male-headed households may be compromised by gendered inequalities in bargaining power in the space of the home ('domestic patriarchy'), female-headed households are by no means exempt from bias accruing from 'societal patriarchy' in the wider spaces of community, labour market, and legal institutions. As summarised by Hewitt and Leach (1993: v), lone parent households (especially those with young children), rarely 'compete on an equal playing field' with their two-parent counterparts. In having to cope with multiple responsibilities, for example, some women are inevitably forced into becoming 'time-poor', or in order to overcome gender bias in earnings and other productive assets, must 'self exploit' and take on a variety of income-generating activities as well as reproductive work (see also Delamonica et al, 2004:2; Fuwa, 2000:1517, 2001:18; Panda, 1997). This not only restricts time with children, but opportunities for personal rest and recreation, not to mention the active cultivation of links with kin, friends and neighbours and workmates which might enhance their access to 'positive social capital' such as mutual aid. This compounds the fact that the social networks of female heads are frequently diminished by lack of ties with ex-partners' relatives (see for example Willis,1994), and because female heads may eschew seeking help from others because they feel unable to meet reciprocal demands (Chant, 1997a:206; González de la Rocha, 1994a:211, 2003:23; van Vuuren, 2003:101; see also Chen and Drèze, 1992:23).[10,11] It has also been observed that female heads may be shunned by others in their communities, and/or 'self-censor' their own behaviour by 'keeping themselves to themselves' in the face of anticipated or actual hostility or mistrust

on the part of others (see Chant, 1997a; Lewis, 1993; Willis, 1994; see also later).

Despite some evidence that 'alternative' family patterns are more tolerated than in the past, the heterosexual male-headed household persists as a normative ideal in most parts of the world, and has greater social legitimacy (Gangopadhyay and Wadhwa, 2003; Monge and González, 2005: Roseneil and Mann, 1996; Stacey,1997; Ypeij and Steenbeek, 2001). As noted earlier, the marginalisation of female-headed households, and particularly lone mothers, results from the belief that they symptomise family disorganisation and a breakdown of family values, and contribute to rising rates of divorce, juvenile delinquency and crime (see Chant,1999,2002; Safa, 1998: 203). In turn, negative social attitudes towards female-headed households which can restrict women's ability to exercise preferences to ensure children's welfare, whether because they act as a brake on the formation of female-headed households in the first place, or circumscribe the options open to them once in this situation. For example, just as lone mothers may face discrimination in the labour market, in contexts in which title and inheritance are male-biased they might also encounter barriers to land or property ownership. This can set up a vicious circle of privation. When female heads are unable to buy land and housing, and have no option but to rent or share accommodation, this may restrict the range of informal domestic-based income-generating activities they are commonly forced to engage in due to lack of formal employment opportunities and/or help with childcare (see Chant,1996: Chapter 3; see also ECLAC, 2004b:51; Kabeer, 2003:198; Mboup and Amunyunzu-Nyamongo,

2005; Rakodi, 1999).   Indeed, even rental accommodation might be hard to obtain or hold onto in the face of aspersions about the sexual propriety of women without a male 'guardian' (see Vera-Sanso, 2006 on southern India).

Deficits in 'decent' or well-paid work, coupled with lack of assets, moral prejudice on the part of the wider society, and social isolation can clearly add up to negative impacts on offspring, with some children of lone mothers having limited contact with other adults or peers who might provide additional stimulation, recreational opportunities, emotional support or economic assistance. As far as teenage daughters are concerned, the economic and social marginalisation of lone mothers can dampen their marital prospects as noted by Lewis,1993 for Bangladesh, or attract the 'wrong' kind of attention from the opposite sex. In Mexico, for example, daughters whose mothers are unmarried or separated are often more vulnerable to predatory sexual advances from men seeking to exploit a situation in which girls have no fathers to 'defend' them, or because it is imagined that they will be more precocious due to lack of surveillance or discipline (see Chant, 1999). Even if mothers are often excessively protective of daughters as a result, the sexual reputation of these young women usually comes in for greater speculation than their counterparts in male-headed units. Disquiet about female-headed households among public organisations is also apparent even where countries have launched targetted initiatives to assist them, as illustrated by the case of Costa Rica below.

IV CASE STUDY EVIDENCE ON FEMALE HOUSEHOLD HEADSHIP, CHILDREN AND POVERTY FROM THE GAMBIA, PHILIPPINES AND COSTA RICA

Brief Introduction to Aims and Methodology

The case studies of The Gambia, Philippines and Costa Rica presented in this section draw from wider interrogation into the 'feminisation of poverty' as perceived and/or experienced by low-income women and men at the grassroots (see Note 1). This research involved fieldwork with a total of 223 low-income people in the three countries between 2003 and 2005, either in the context of one-on-one interviews or focus group discussions. The grassroots samples were split broadly between women and men in different age cohorts as indicated in Table 9. However, slight variations arose by default, such as where participants in focus groups (often organised through local NGOs) did not turn up. Revealingly perhaps, a focus group for women and men convened through a Parent-Teachers association in Villareal, Costa Rica ended-up consisting only of women because only the 'madres' (mothers) rather than the 'padres' (fathers) attended.

TABLE 9   BREAKDOWN OF GRASSROOTS SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN THE GAMBIA, PHILIPPINES AND COSTA RICA

	Youth (10-29 years)	Middle adults (30-49 years)	Senior adults (50 years plus)	Total
The Gambia				
Female	16	14	11	41
Male	17	6	9	32
Total	33	20	20	73
Philippines				
Female	9	20	21	50
Male	11	7	9	27
Total	20	27	30	77
Costa Rica				
Female	13	24	10	47
Male	10	6	10	26
Total	23	30	20	73
Grand total	56	77	70	223

Source: Chant (2007: Chapter 1)

While the main age groups were defined as 'young people' (13-29 years), 'middle adults' (30-49 years) and 'senior/elderly adults' (50 years plus), drawing a line between different generational cohorts was difficult given differences in characteristics such as age at first birth, life expectancy and so on between the countries. Within any one age band there could clearly be individuals with very different experiences and perceptions of stage in the life course.   Technically, for example, although quite seldom in practice, a man or woman could be a grandparent by the age of 30 and in this way perhaps no longer see

themselves as 'young'. Similarly, while it might seem premature for people aged 50 years or over to be defined as 'senior' let alone 'elderly', when taking into consideration differences in life expectancy across countries this decision had to be made to account for the situation in The Gambia where average life expectancy is only 54 years It should also be noted that 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 women aged 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 endeavoured to establish people's numerical ages through asking when they had got married and either at what age they had had their first child, or how old their first surviving child was now. Even then, some women did not know the precise ages of their children, simply saying that the first had arrived immediately prior to or soon after marriage, and thereafter, 'every 2-3 years'.

Interviewees were recruited on the basis of existing or newly-established contacts on the part of myself or local field team members (for example, in the case of Costa Rica, through previous research or professional work in social psychology), and the focus groups, through NGOs, schools and government institutions.

Sessions with respondents commenced with the gathering of basic personal socio-economic details pertaining to work, fertility, marital and household characteristics. In the interests of exploring the 'feminisation of poverty' this was followed by group discussions of

varying length on the meanings and evocations of 'poverty' generally and personally and its evolution over time, on gender, the family and poverty alleviation programmes. A core element of the sessions was to elicit people's views on which groups of the population were most vulnerable to poverty, whether they felt that these groups had always been poor, were getting poorer, and/or were being displaced by other groups at risk over time. In the course of these discussions reference was frequently made to gender disparities within male-headed households and to the fact that female-headed units were not as disadvantaged in practice as they were often conceived to be in principle.

Perspectives on Children, Poverty and Household Headship in The Gambia

The Gambia is the poorest of my case study countries, reliant mainly on a groundnut economy and a growing mass-market tourist industry. More than half the population are poor on the basis of the Copenhagen (dollar-a-day) measure (see Table 1) as well as according to national statistics. Interestingly, however, women-headed households are not at a disproportionate risk of income poverty. According to the 1998 Gambian National Household Poverty Survey, for example, of the 16.7% of households nationally which were headed by women only 45.1% were poor compared with 57% of male-headed households (see GOTG,2000:176).

That women-headed households are not especially vulnerable to income poverty in The Gambia may owe partly to the fact that the

majority of households are large and extended, and that boundaries between households are often highly permeable, with significant exchanges and resource flows.   Another reason is that even when women have husbands (who may well have other wives), they often have to 'go it alone' even when men are present.   Indeed, underlying one of the main arguments made earlier in this paper, my interviews with Gambians revealed resounding consensus on the fact that women were mainly responsible for bearing the costs of sending children to school and for feeding them. As Teeda, a 35 year old respondent in a focus group of female fruitsellers and batik-makers at Cape Point stated: 'Men are not doing anything – if they pay for breakfast, it's women who pay for lunch and dinner. Women pay for school lunches. You see the festivals, and it's the women who are selling… some men are not working, and some men refuse to work, or if they work they don't do it for that (the family)' (see also below).

These and other Gambian respondents repeatedly emphasised how men used income for their own gratification, to enlarge their reputation among male friends, and to gain access to other sexual partners. Typical comments from Teeda's companions in the Cape Point focus group included: 'if you are a woman you always have to think about having to spend it (money) on everyone else, whereas men will just use any surplus income to secure a second wife', and 'men follow money, then they start to follow little girls'. Women added that men tend not to have anything to do with the children when they are young, and only attempt to cultivate relationships with them at a stage when they are set to embark on full-time work. As stated by Suntu, a 40 year old fruitseller and female head with

seven children who had been abandoned by her husband when he took a second and younger wife: 'When the kids are very young the husband is not usually interested. Only when their kids are older and they have something to offer do they make their claim on them'. This was echoed by Satou (38), who said, 'When your children become a Minister or a Director, that is when the men start to get interested!'.

Resentment about fathers making little economic (or other) contribution to family well-being was also voiced by young Gambians. In a focus group held with eight adolescent schoolgirls in Bakau, for example, there was virtual unanimity on the idea that men's unwillingness to work was a major reason for persistent poverty in the country and of suffering among their wives and offspring. Men's pursuit of their own pleasures not only undermines economic well-being, but in pushing women to work harder means less mother-child contact. As Sophie (15) declared: 'While women should be sitting and watching after the children, they have to work because some fathers just used (i.e. are accustomed) to sit and chat, drinking *ataya* (green tea)'. Similar views on the injustice of such divisions are echoed in a publication issued by a local skills training centre for female early-school leavers (see Box 3). The interrelationship between men's negligence or 'irresponsibility' with vices was a persistent theme across all three case study countries. While men in a country where 95% of the population are Muslim tend not to drink alcohol, or at least to do so openly, the ritual of green tea consumption with male companions is often accompanied by the smoking of tobacco and/or cannabis.

BOX 3   VIEWS ON GENDER AND WORK FROM YOUNG WOMEN IN A GAMBIAN ADULT SKILLS AND LITERACY PROJECT

<u>'Women's Work' - Harriet Ndow</u>
'Looking at a picture I can see a woman carrying some wood. She is carrying a baby and holding a baby boy too. The other children are coming to her.

There are some men seated at the bantaba drinking green tea and probably talking about the woman with her children.

There are trees around the compound. The houses are mud houses. There are fences around the compound and a door between the fences.

The men are at the bantaba talking about all kinds of things and the woman is walking. She has looked for wood and is coming to cook. She is with her children too.

Men of today never help women. They just sit talking about some things all the time. I see this happening all the time. We must try to change it'.

<u>'Women Have More Work than Men' - Mary Mendy</u>
'Women always do more work than men in many ways. Sometimes they will be working and at the same time, carrying their baby on their backs.

A lot of work at home is being done by women, and you see most of the women doing work that belongs to men, such as paying school fees for children and buying clothes for them.

The women also do work such as washing clothes, cooking, cleaning, bringing water, going for shopping, and taking care of children at home, such as disciplining them, and also going to find wood.

Whilst some men are sitting at the bantaba chatting and drinking ataya, the women are working hard because they have children to take care of. The men are lazy and refuse to go and work'.

<u>Division of Work in the Home - Mariama Conteh</u>
'My observation on the division of work in The Gambia is that women work more than men. You can see a woman, when she wakes up in the morning, she will sweep inside and outside the compound. Whilst doing that she will be cooking breakfast for the family whilst her husband will still be in bed.

She will fetch water for the family to bathe. When her husband wakes up he will take his bath, eat his breakfast and go to his place whilst the woman will go to the market to sell the fruit she has planted in the garden. After selling it, the little money she has she will use to buy food for the family and soap to wash the clothes.

A woman will be doing two things at one time such as cooking the lunch and washing the clothes, and after that she will have to rush to the garden till the evening.

Then she will come home to wash the plates, sweep the floor, take care of her children, fetch water for the family, and prepare the family dinner whilst her husband will be with his jobless friends thinking about how to marry another wife!'

<u>Source</u>: SJAEC (2003)

In addition to the fact that poor children in The Gambia in general may not get very much care, attention or support from fathers, there is considerable evidence that girls suffer more discrimination than their brothers in male-headed households. For example, Yassime, a 27 year old waitress working in Fajara gives 75% of wages to her parents who for years now have completely depended on Yassime and her three sisters who work as a cook, hairdresser, and shop attendant respectively. On top of handing over cash to their parents, the girls are also responsible for cooking, cleaning, and paying an outsider to do the family laundry.   While none of the girls was allowed to progress beyond primary school, their father is using their contributions to pay for the education of his only son (now 14) who is studying at secondary level. Yassime talks with pride about discharging her filial dues and does not regard her self-sacrifice as unusual or problematic, yet the only discernible reward seems to be a 'clear conscience'. Their father's property, for example, has already been signed over exclusively to his son, who may, or may not, in later life take it upon himself to provide for his sisters and their dependents.

Another case of under-investment in girls is presented by Hadi, a 37 year old housemaid from Bakau. The second eldest of six children born into a poor farming family, of whom only one was male, Hadi recalled her father telling her at a young age: 'I've not got the money to educate so many children, so I will just pay for the education of that boy. You girls, you will be married and work for the home'.   Hadi started working on the family farm (a multi-purpose smallholding growing rice, cous [cous-cous], corn and groundnut) when she was about 11 years old, at the same time as helping out with domestic

labour which included pounding rice, 'catching water', sweeping, washing clothes, and cooking food. Despite these inauspicious beginnings, and an out-of-wedlock teenage pregnancy, from the age of 14 Hadi has managed to hold down a succession of domestic jobs, and, fortuitously in respect of remuneration, mainly for European expatriates. Through this she has managed to fund the secondary education of her daughter (now 23) whom she hopes will proceed to study law. While claiming that as a mother 'she has suffered for her daughter', in Hadi's view, it is essential that girls are able to 'defend themselves' because men are so unreliable. As a female head able to exercise control over the household budget she claims that she has invested in her daughter in exactly the way she might have invested in a son.

Hadi's interest in arming her daughter to fend for herself is also found in among other female heads such as Satou (38 years) from Cape Point who has tried to ensure that all her daughters are equipped with the same life skills as her son. Although Satou did not have the opportunity of educating her eldest daughter (who had been kept by her ex-husband and his second wife for several years in Guinea-Conakry where she did not speak the language), Satou's other two daughters by her ex-husband (aged 16 and 19) are in secondary school. Moreover, not only is a further daughter of 12 years by a different father in primary school but Satou is educating two adoptive daughters (aged 10 and 13) because their own mothers are not in a position to do so. Part of Satou's dedication to the cause of skilling young women is because she wants to spare them the type of past she suffered due to lack of power to make choices.

At 15 years of age, and just out of primary school, Satou was married off by her father to his sister's 40 year old son, Ebrima. Despite this close kin connection Satou was customarily exposed to arbitrary and vicious beatings. Twenty years on she still has scars on her forearm and breasts where Ebrima lashed her with the buckle of his belt. One attack was so bad that Satou miscarried their first child as late as seven months into pregnancy. Satou had no recourse to any protection in these early years because her husband took her to live in Sierra Leone where she knew no-one. After five years together, by which time Satou had borne three of Ebrima's children (a son, now 21, and two daughters aged 19 and 20), Ebrima decided to take a second and younger wife. With complete lack of sensitivity to Satou's feelings, he not only packed her bags and told her to get out, but threatened to keep the son even though his new wife might mistret him. So desperate was Satou to ensure her son's well-being, that she forced herself to endure in the marriage as a spurned first wife ('no better than a piece of furniture'), for another couple of years. Only when they moved back to The Gambia, and Satou was pregnant with their fourth and last child, did she manage to get the support of her parents, which is critical in most Gambian women's decisions to leave their husbands.

Satou's experience of violence is not untypical, especially given the conflict that often arises in polygamous marriages. Moreover, despite the fact that 'assault', along with rape, is technically punishable by law in the Gambia, denunciations rarely happen. The police tend to see 'domestic disputes' as outside their domain

of jurisdiction which leaves women and children extremely vulnerable.

Other than the risk of experiencing more violence in a second marriage, Satou has no wish to re-marry because she has also grown accustomed to her independence and would not take kindly to being dictated to by another man. That marriage in The Gambia tends to be far from companionate, egalitarian or democratic was summed-up by one group of female vegetable sellers in Bakau: 'Women are slaves to men; this is our culture, we have to accept'. While most married women can only act upon their preferences and invest in children by finding the means to pay for this themselves, they also run the risk that their capacity to do so will be undermined by the need to fund their husband's expenditure, over which there is usually little scope for negotiation. This is borne out by the case of Hadi, who would only countenance marriage to please her parents, and/or to have a son to assist her daughter in looking after Hadi in old age. If Hadi does concede to marriage, this would only extend to being a third wife in a polygamous arrangement. In order to protect her hard-won resources from an opportunist husband and to minimise change in her circumstances, she would also insist on maintaining the right to live independently with her daughter, sister and nephew in her own compound.

Although some husbands do provide income to the household pool as well as consulting their wives on major decisions, there seem to be major cultural barriers to women doing anything other than to defer to men. This is often groomed by moralising articles in the national press, one typical one being 'Don't Shout at Husbands' by

Musa Saidykhan – published in *The Nation* (22 June 2004, pp.1-2), which reports on a speech given by the Imam of Tabokoto Mosque at a local wedding:

> 'It's a pity to know that housewives in Tabokoto deliberately behave ungodly towards their husbands. I wonder why they keep shouting at their husbands at the peak of their voice. The menace has become rampant and it appears women don't even bother about it. Islam has given rights to women but they have gone extra-mile and as a matter of fact they behave shamelessly on their spouses. They succumb to Satanic tides thus abdicating their marital responsibility ..it has come to my notice that most housewives keep creating endless problems for their husbands,. If men have not been tolerant, a lot of homes would have been shattered by now'.

Appealing to wives to avoid being cursed in this world and the hereafter, the Iman pleaded: 'Please distance yourselves from disrespecting your husbands. A woman is duty-bound by Allah to be obedient to her husband.   Those who shout on their husbands cannot be termed as good housewives'. At the same ceremony, the Imam also advised women to treat the children of their co-wives fairly, and an old woman in attendance added that while women should not be bullied, 'Womanhood goes with a lot of weaknesses that's why men should at all times guide us… Culture and religion teaches us that men are always on top of us which is why they marry us'.   Another article, published in *The Independent* (28 June 2004, p.5,'Women and Domestic Violence' by Fatou Badjie), talks about traditional beliefs of many being that women need to be 'kept in line by their husbands', and should 'not try to wear the pants in the household'.

Against this backdrop it is perhaps surprising that more women do not choose to stay single, to separate or to divorce. However,

over and above the fact that many women lack the power to choose, one of the more persuasive reasons for refraining from action relates to the point made earlier in this paper concerning the tenuous social legitimacy of female heads. In The Gambia this normally centres on questions about the sexual propriety of unmarried women on the part of the extended family and wider community.   In Satou's case for example, the only grounds for re-marriage from her perspective is because people 'talk' when a woman is 'sitting alone' (i.e. without a husband) for a long time. Indeed, the need to avoid scandal is the main reason why Satou has conducted her own sexual relationships in secret for several years..

Another important factor is the law.   Although the Gambian legal system comprises Received English Law, Shari'a (Islamic) law and Customary Law, only the latter two tend to be applied in family matters through the Cadi Courts. One major reason why women feel they should marry is because out-of-wedlock children are considered under Islamic law to be the sole responsibility of the mother. This inter alia, sanctions the denial of their rights to inheritance from their father's estates (see GOTG, 1998:16 & 25).

In cases of separation and divorce, women may fear losing their children because Shari'a law can potentially place male children over 7 years of age and female children over 9 in the custody of fathers (GOTG,1998:78).   Even where this does not happen, the common practice for women to be cast out of their compound with no material possessions may also persuade women to stay in marriages in which they and their children are suffering neglect, abuse or other forms of cruelty. The idea that their possessions

and inheritance rights could pass to another wife and her offspring often constitutes a further brake to women's voluntary dissolution of marriage. Obtaining maintenance for children from ex-husbands is technically possible through the judicial system, with the Family Welfare Unit of the Department of State for Social Welfare providing official assistance to pursue peaceful resolution of disputes, or, in cases where parents refuse maintenance, subjecting them to attachment of earnings orders or commitment to ensure compliance with the law (ibid.:25). None the less many women do not proceed down this route for fear of angering their ex-husbands. The economic difficulties which female heads can face are also compounded by the fact that there is no targetted programme of public assistance to lone mothers in the country.

In summary, female-headed households in The Gambia are not markedly worse-off in income terms than male-headed units, and women and children within them can even benefit from less exploitation and discrimination than they might face in the context of households headed by husbands and fathers. By the same token, greater social, economic and legal support for female household headship could conceivably strengthen women's and children's 'fall-back' position and help to reduce the inequities which place them at risk of subordination and abuse by adult males.

Perspectives on Children, Poverty and Household Headship in the Philippines

The Philippines is an example of a country at a medium level of human development. It has a much more elaborate economy than The Gambia, comprising quite a diversified agricultural base, significant industry, much of it export-oriented, and a sizeable service economy comprising tourism and ICT (see Chant,2007:Chapter 5). According to dollar-a-day poverty calculations only 14.9% of the population is poor (Table 1), even if national assessments indicate that poverty affects nearer one-third of the population. Similar to The Gambia, however, female-headed households are at smaller risk of poverty than their male-headed counterparts, with official data from 2000 showing that out of the 12% of female-headed households nationally, only 17.7% were poor as against 30.7% of male-headed units (Chant, 2007:Chapter 5; see also ADB, 2005).

The Philippines has the lowest and slowest-growing incidence of female household headship among the three case study countries. This is mainly because divorce is still illegal which owes largely to the powerful influence of Roman Catholicism with over 80% of the national population professing to be practising Catholics. Since separation is also frowned-upon, the vast majority (two-thirds) of households become female-headed through widowhood.   Yet although many couples stay married for life in the context of nominally monogamous Christian marriage, this does not negate the fact that many men have extra-marital relationships, and/or fail

to match women's contributions to household livelihoods (see Chant 2007: Chapter 5).

Although it is also true that fathers tend to have more hands-on involvement with children in the Philippines than in The Gambia (albeit in rather cursory ways), and in a number of cases have reasonably equitable relationships with wives, a substantial number of Filipino respondents complain about men's seemingly inveterate involvement in 'ABS' – '*alak*' (alcohol), '*babae*' (women), and '*sugal*' (gambling), and their reluctance to comply with normative obligations of family provisioning.   As declared by Nelia, a 46 year old helper in her husband's coconut selling business in Babag, Mactan Island: 'Men don't take problems as seriously as women. Men don't worry much even when there is nothing to eat or no food to be cooked. They only depend on women'. That women seem to take on the burden of worrying more about satisfying their children's needs than men was as marked here as in the other case study countries. As expressed by Angelina, a 35 year old married mother of five in Cebu City: 'At times my children is asking for milk and I have nothing to give. I feel so miserable and I can hardly sleep during the night thinking about the situation'. The pattern whereby poor women sacrifice their own nutritional intake to ensure that children (and husbands) are fed has even made headline news in the national press.[12]

Conrada, a 24 year old pieceworker for the shellcraft industry in Cebu City, reckons that men's greater power to act in their own interests is down to the fact that men usually generate the biggest income in the household. Yet by choosing to 'fritter away' their

money on 'non-merit' items, Conrada feels that men distance themselves from their families' and set themselves up for personal and collective ruin. By contrast, since women have to struggle more and more in the face of male negligence, the future of children is deemed to lie in women's hands where it is likely to be better guaranteed:

> 'Women have brighter future than men because nowadays more men are indulge in vices like drugs, *shabu* ('poor man's cocaine'), mistresses, drunkenness and so on. Though there are women who are in vices this is not much as men. Maybe because men is the source of income he has his money anytime and what he wants to do he can do … Nowadays men spend little time with the family. They are fond of getting out with their '*barkadas*' (gang/group of male peers), drinking beer just around the neighbourhood. Women and children are just left behind at home'.

Conrada's views were shared by men as well as other women. As Bernie, a 20 year old volunteer for a local NGO in Cebu City, opined, men make fewer attempts than women to get out of poverty: 'By being poor, men will remain the same, poor, while women will find ways and means that they will be better off'.

Aside from the inequities attached to men spending money on themselves and doing little to help their households move out of poverty, men's time inputs into family life often leave much to be desired. Although many Filipino women work days of 15 hours or more, they tend to spend the bulk of their leisure as well as working time with children, certainly in the context of reproductive labour, and also if their income-generating activities are domestic-based.   Men, on the other hand, not only seem to feel entitled to 'down tools' after they have finished 8-9 hours of paid work, but do not seem to prioritise dedicated parenting (beyond a brief chat, game or

peremptory display of physical affection) in their time off.   For instance, Juanito, a 57 year old trisikad driver, who heads a 6-member extended household, allows himself about 5 hours rest in an average day. This includes a long lunchbreak, a nap when he comes home from work, and at least 2 hours 'roaming around' in the evening chatting with neighbours and friends.   This also involves expenditure outside the home which could undoubtedly be put to more constructive use for other household members.

Since husbands can consume alot of time, stress and money, as well as curtailing the freedom of wives, in some cases female household headship seems to offer women and children, if not a route out of poverty, then at least greater prospects of ensuring that resources are spent on children.

Lilia is 57 years old and has been head of her own household since 1984 when her husband apparently died of a nervous breakdown. This may have been associated with a drink problem which also meant that he had contributed little to family life   Although technically speaking widowed people can remarry in the Philippines, Lilia claimed in front of 10 other participants in a focus group meeting in Cebu City that 'with one dead husband, I don't want another one!' Lilia managed to raise her four children single-handedly, put them through school, and see all get work with career potential. For example, her youngest son, aged 22, and the only one who is still single and living at home, is presently working as a volunteer for a local NGO with whom he hopes to get a a regular job. Lilia puts her success down to hard work and a wide-ranging portfolio of income-generating ventures, modestly termed 'sidelines'. These include

running a small home-based shop, training as a reflexologist, and working as a 'fixer'. The latter is a job which is something of a hybrid between a personal assistant, courier and equivalent to Citizen's Advice Bureau representative. It involves arranging payments and/or paperwork for other people, usually at the City Hall, ranging from electricity bills, to permits, to job applications. For the service she charges a small fee and relies for expansion of her business by word of mouth. Her ability to enter this self-styled profession is partly due to the fact that without a husband she had to engage with bureaucracy on her own account, and partly because she made several contacts through freedom to be active in the community as member of the local women's association and the like.

Anther female head, Milagrosa, a 35 year old store owner who lives on Cebu's dockland with her two children (by different fathers), declared that she had found it easier to make a life for herself and her children without a man. She can make her own decisions and there is less conflict. Both her children are in school, and she runs a successful business safe in the knowledge that her profits will not be squandered on drink or drugs.

This is not to say that life is not hard for female heads. Germinia, a 65 year old head of an extended household in Cebu City, for example, emphasised how her responsibilities, at times, had been 'tiresome … I am the *tatay* (father) and the *nanay* (mother) in our household. So all the household work, earning a living, and taking care of the children was done by me – very difficult'. Yet this was still preferable to the situation in which she had lived with her husband: 'My husband was only good during the early years of our marriage.

Later on he was very irritable, always drunk, and when he arrived home he would quarrel with me. He even battered me. He got angry with me when I asked him why his earnings were so small. More money was allotted to alcohol than food'.

Since both Germinia and Milagrosa had separated from their spouses, they were potentially at risk of being regarded with suspicion by others in their communities and subject to some social isolation. Indeed,as recently as the early-to-mid 1990s, when I last did fieldwork in the Philippines, I found that lone mothers themselves tended to keep a distance from families and neighbours as a means of deflecting the 'shame' or 'dishonour' attached to out-of-wedlock birth and/or marriage failure (see Chant and McIlwaine, 1995). In some instances this was exacerbated by the fact that some female heads seemed to have little choice other than to become involved in stigmatised types of employment such as sex work due to discrimination by 'formal sector' employers, and because low wages in other 'feminised' occupations did not pay them enough to support children (ibid.:302). Yet while the low incidence of female headship in general and the fact that the vast majority enter the state through widowhood rather than non-marriage or separation would indicate that pressures remain strong on women to conform with their lot in male-headed households, attitudes gradually appear to be changing. This is possibly because it is increasingly acknowledged by child rights organisations that children are likely to fare better when they are not subject to the economic insecurity attached to extra-domestic spending on the part of men, nor exposed to the undesirable influences attached to risk-taking behaviour such as drug and alcohol abuse. Another important factor is that while only 15% of the population profess to be Evangelical, or practising with

various protestant sects such as the Aglipayan, Iglesia Ni Cristo, Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Born Again Christians, and the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, these sub-faiths, which are gaining ground in the country and emphasise an agenda of hard work, self-discipline and asceticism, tend to provide women with greater moral support to leave husbands who engage in drinking, drug-abuse and other forms of self-gratification.

There is also indication of a sea change in acceptance of lone motherhood on the part of the State given that in 2000, the Philippines passed it's first ever legislation to provide help for lone parents under the auspices of the Solo Parents Welfare Act (RA 8972) of 2000. Theoretically this provides a comprehensive package of social welfare and development services to lone parents and their children. Alongside livelihood, self-employment, skills development, educational scholarships, health services and so on, this nominally includes assistance in psychological, emotional and social matters to one-parent families (around three-quarters of whom are headed by women) when the 'nuclear family is not available or cannot be restored' (CWC,2000:48; DSWD, 2004; see also Box 4). This is a promising start, even if there is room for improvement in the effectiveness of this initiative. For example, athough the lead organisation is the Department of Social Welfare and Development, access to various benefits needs to negotiated with a bewildering array of agencies, and almost always requires considerable paperwork and countless referrals from social workers. Moreover, an eligibility criterion for some programmes, such as Kanlauran (SEA- K), a micro-enterprise scheme designed to 'lift solo parents above the poverty

line' via cooperative small businesses ventures, is a 'good reputation in the community' (DSWD, 2004). Although it is not explicitly stated in the policy literature what a 'good reputation' might entail, that lone parents need endorsement from others is an arguably tall requirement in a society where traditionally they have met with disapproval.

BOX 4   THE PHILIPPINES: HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SOLO PARENTS WELFARE ACT OF 2000

Republic Act No. 8972
 – An Act providing for benefits and privileges to solo parents and their children

Declaration of policy (Section 2).**–** It is the policy of the State to promote the family as the foundation of the nation, strengthen its solidarity and ensure it's total development. Towards this end, it shall develop a comprehensive programme of services for solo parents and their children to be carried out by the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Health (DOH), Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS), Department for Interior and Local Government (DILG), Commission on Higher Education (CHED), Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA), National Housing Authority (NHA), Department of Labour and Employment (DOLE) and other related government and non-government agencies

Definition of terms (Section 3)

a) A **'solo parent'** is an individual who falls under any of the following categories:
  i)   A woman who gives birth as a result of rape or other crime against chastity, and keeps and raises the child
  ii)   Parent left alone with responsibility of parenthood due to death of spouse
  iii)   Parent left alone due to imprisonment of spouse for at least 1 year
  iv)   Parent left alone due to certified physical or mental incapacity of spouse
  v)   Parent left alone due to legal or de facto separation
  vi)   Parent left alone due to annulment of marriage
  vii)   Parent left alone due to abandonment by spouse for at least 1 year
  viii) Unmarried mother or father who has kept and is raising children
  ix)   Any other person who solely provides parental care or support to a child
  x)   Any family member who assumes responsibility of head of family as a result of the death, abandonment, disapparance or prolonged absence of parent(s).

b) '**Children**' refer to those living with and dependent upon the solo parent for support who are unmarried, unemployed and not more than 18 years of age, or over 18 years of age in case of inability to self-support due to mental and/or physical incapacity

c) '**Parental responsibility**' with respect to children shall refer to the rights and duties parents as per the Family Code of The Philippines.

d) '**Parental leave**' shall mean leave benefits enabling solo parents to perform parental duties and responsibilities where physical presence if required

e) '**Flexible work schedule**' is the right granted to a solo parent employee to vary his/her arrival and departure time without affecting the core work hours as defined by an employer.

Criteria for support (Section 4) – Any solo parent whose income falls below the poverty threshold as set by NEDA and subject to assessment by local DSWD worker. NB Non-poor solo parents are also entitled to flexible work schedules, parental leave and freedom from employment discrimination.

Comprehensive package of social development and welfare services (Section 5) - to be developed by an interagency committee comprising a range of relevant agencies headed by the DSWD (see above), initially including: a) livelihood development services, b) counselling, c) parent effectiveness services, d) critical incidence stress debriefing (e.g. Stress management to enable solo parents to better cope with situations of crisis or abuse), e) special projects for individuals in need of protection (e.g. temporary shelter)

Work discrimination (Section 7) – No employer shall discriminate against any solo parent with respect to terms and conditions of work on account of his/her status

Parental leave (Section 8) – In addition to leave privileges under existing laws, solo parents are entitled to no more than 7 days parental leave after a minimum period of service of 1 year.

Educational benefits (Section 9)- The DECS, CHED and TESDA shall provide scholarship programmes for qualified solo parents and their children in institutions of basic, tertiary and technical/skills education, as well as non-formal education as appropriate

Housing benefits (Section 10) – Solo parents shall be given allocation in low-cost housing projects on liberal terms of repayment.

Medical assistance (Section 11) – DOH to develop a comprehensive health care programme for solo parents and their children

Additional powers and functions of the DSWD (Section 12) include:
   a) conduct of research to develop a new body of knowledge on solo parents, to define executive and legislative measures needed to promote and protect the interests of solo parents and their children, and to assess the effectiveness of programmes designed for disadvantaged solo parents and their children
   b) Coordinate government and NGO activities oriented to solo parents and their children
   c) Monitor the implementation of the provisions of the Solo Parents Welfare Act.

Implementing rules and regulations (Section 13)
Interagency committee lead by DSWD to consult on these with LGUs, NGOs and people's organizations

Appropriations (Section 14) – The amount necessary to execute the provisions of the Act shall be included in the budget of concerned government agencies in the General Appropriations Act of the year following enactment into law and thereafter.

Repealing clauses (Section 15) – All laws, decrees, EOs (Executive Orders), administrative orders or parts thereof inconsistent with the provisions of the Act to be repealed or amended accordingly.

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Source: Republic of the Philippines (2000)

In short, women and children in the Philippines tend to fare better than their counterparts in The Gambia in male- and female-headed households alike, mainly on account of the fact the incidence of poverty is less, and because more policy attention has been accorded to promoting gender equality. By the same token, the religious and social pressure on Filipino women to stay married and to weather the disadvantages attached to inequitable marriage can impede their own mobility and that of their children.

Perspectives on Children, Poverty and Household Headship in Costa Rica

Costa Rica presents something of a paradox when it comes to female household headship and poverty. On one hand Costa Rica is the wealthiest of the three case study countries (see Table 1). Over the last two decades it has appreciably enhanced its status within the global economy by reducing its reliance on primary exports and becoming a major centre of international tourism, export manufacturing and ICT. Costa Rica also has the best record in terms of gender indicators (see Tables 2—7). This in part owes to a swathe of impressive range of legal and policy initiatives to promote gender equality and to alleviate poverty, especially from 1990 onwards (see Chant,2007: Chapter 6). Moreover, in order to comply with the directives of CEDAW and the BPFA, Costa Rica has managed to produce a rich sex-disaggregated social indicator database which allows for examination of the poverty status of female-headed households over nearly 20 years, a process which is not

possible either in The Gambia or the Philippines.   Yet, despite all this, one of the most interesting, and worrying, trends is that while only 2% of Costa Rican households are classified as poor in terms of dollar-a-day poverty (Table 1), and one-fifth on the basis of national poverty lines (see Chant,2007: Chapter 6), female-headed households have represented a rising share of poor and extremely poor households since the late 1980s (see Fig 1).

Figure 1 Costa Rica: Female-headed Households as a Proportion of All Households, and According to Poverty Status 1987-2005 [1]
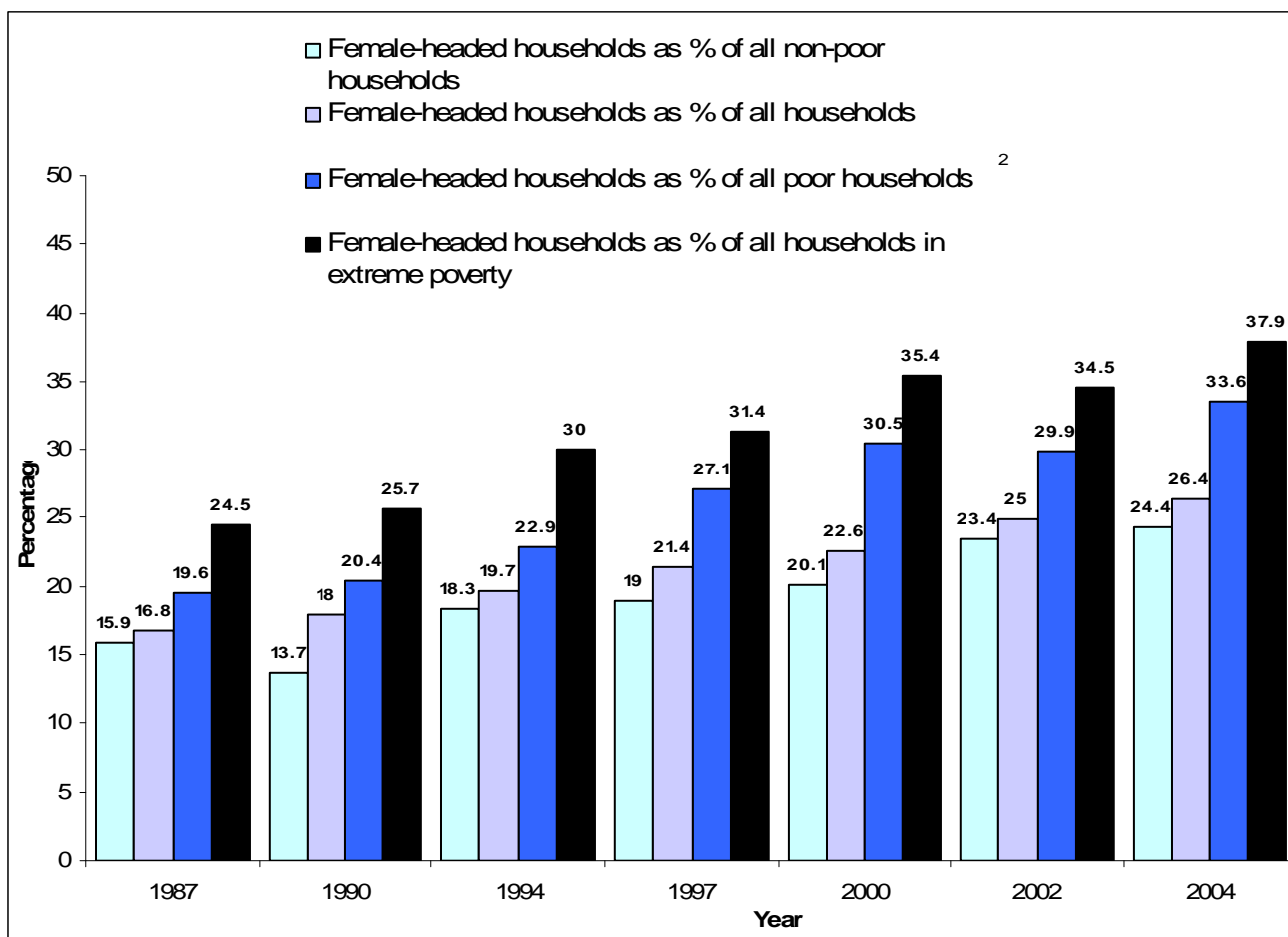
Notes:
1. Data relating to poverty categorisation relate only to those households with known or declared income
2. Percentages for poor households include those in extreme poverty

While this pattern is mainly accounted for by the fact that women-headed households are growing in number, the fact that their probability of being in poverty has been around 1 in 4 since the late 1990s, compared to 1 in 5 among male-headed households, suggests that gender-differentiated income poverty remains stubborn. By the same token, the fact that in a predominantly Catholic country, albeit less devout than the Philippines, women's headship of households is increasing and the majority (just over three-quarters) are divorced, separated or unmarried, would also suggest that even if women are not necessarily choosing female headship, they are managing to survive in and/or conform to this state.   While female headship may not always come about by 'choice', my field evidence suggests that a growing number of women are 'trading-off' the disadvantages of their lower earning power against increased autonomy, the ability to manage household finances more equitably, and to escape exploitation and violence.

As in The Gambia and the Philippines, several women and children in Costa Rica commented on how the excessive amount of money spent by fathers on drink placed the responsibility on mothers to feed, clothe and educate offspring. As stated by William José, an 11 year old from the town of Liberia, women have a hard time because 'they are left alone with their children, and the men with alcoholism'. As echoed by Yiselda (43) from Filadelfia, who was raising her two children single-handedly now that her alcoholic spouse had left home: '*Si ellos ganan*

50 mil, ellos le dan a uno 25 nada más, y ellos se dejan el resto para gastarlo en el güaro' ('If they earn 50,000 [*colones*], they give you no more than 25,000, and they spend the rest on liquor'). Again, sharp contrasts were drawn between men's egoism and women's altruism, with Ixi (40), a recently separated mother of three in Liberia, stating that:

> '*La mujer pobre no solo piensa en ella; piensa en su familia, en sus hijos, y en salir adelante. En cambio el hombre es más egoista. Entonces, el sólo ve sus necesidades. En cambio, la mujer ve las necesidades de ella y las de sus familiares. Generalmente el hombre cuando ve la situación muy negativa tiende a irse y a dejar la mujer sola para que asuma la responsabilidad'*
>
> ('A poor women doesn't only think of herself; she thinks about her family, her children, in getting ahead. In contrast, men are more selfish, only concerned with their own needs, unlike women who are thinking not only about their own necessities but those of her family. When men see a situation getting difficult they tend to go off and leave the women to assume responsibility').

The extent of women's altuism is such that, as in the other case study countries, self-imposed nutritional sacrifice in the interests of others is not uncommon. As articulated by Ester, a 27 year old mother in Filadelfia, Costa Rica: '*uno prefiere que coman los hijos que comer uno'* ('one would rather have the children eat than eat oneself').

In light of the inequities women are prone to face in legal or common-law marriage the need for women to arm themselves with the means to stand alone was espoused by many young Costa Rican women who had not only learned about men's 'bad behaviour' from mothers and other female relatives, but whom had often experienced men's '*vicios*' ('vices') and *'irresponsibilidad'* (irresponsibility) at first hand. Having grown up with a father who

deserted her mother for another woman, for example, Marian (12) who participated in a focus group of 10 schoolgirls in Santa Cruz, declared that men '*sólo sirven para destruir*' ('only serve to destroy'). Andreina, an 11 year old in the same focus group who lived with her mother and two half-brothers felt that women lost power when they got married: '*Si uno se casa ... el hombre no la va dejar hacer lo que uno quiera y salir cuando uno quiera.... Manda más a las mujeres. Las mujeres no pueden hacer lo que ella quiera*' ('if you get married ... men will not let you do what you want to do, or go out when you want to go out... Men dominate women more than women dominate men. Women can't do what they want'). Giuliana (10) in the same group, observed that even before marriage, men often 'mess-up' women's lives, such as abandoning girlfriends when they get pregnant: '*Los hombres se casan con muchachas así cuando las muchachas quedan embarazadas, se separan. Se van. Entonces como van a ser ellas para trabajar si está embarazada?*' ('Men hook up with young girls but when the girls get pregnant they leave them. They just go. So how are the women going to work if they are pregnant?'). In light of such views, it is no surprise that all participants in this group emphasised the personal importance of studying, working and obtaining some material security before marriage and children. As summed-up by Mariela (15) who has never known her father and lived with her mother and two elder brothers in Santa Cruz said: '*A mí no me gustaría que me manden. Es mejor estudiar y trabajar para que nadie lo mande a uno y no haya problemas*' ('I don't like to be ordered around. It's better to study and work so that no-one does this to you and there are no problems'). Despite women's stronger 'fall-back' position, however, it is interesting to note that the prospects of women negotiating any

autonomy <u>within</u> the context of a union is still perceived as limited, which is a conceivable reason for opting for female household headship.

Young men tended to corroborate the opinions of young women about the stereotype of male infidelity, with a focus group of eight adolescent boys in Liberia concurring that the more money men had the more unfaithful they could be – which effectively robbed their wives and children of upward mobilty. One respondent in this group, Abdías (14) also warned that even if women take steps to protect themselves through studies and work, nowadays men often look for women with money so they will not have to take any responsibility at all for wives and children.   Indeed, echoing the findings of earlier research (see Chant,2002:209). another observation was that men were not only lazy, but 'like children', insofar as they tended to look for a '*segunda madre'* ('second mother') or '*madre esposa'* (mother-wife), often in the shape of an older woman, who would cosset them and overlook their faults, not to mention indulge their need to exercise authority.

Given the difficulties women often face in male-headed units in respect of exerting control over men's expenditure or to realise their own preferences, female headship, as in the other case study countries, can offer an appealing alternative.. This is evidenced by the case of Sonia, a 44 year old mother of three from Santa Cruz. Sonia had moved in with the father of her third child only to find three months later that he was no more responsible than the fathers of her first two children, and had burdened Sonia with virtually sole responsibility for providing for the household through her job as a school cleaner. Although fear of reprisals made her

put up with her spouse, not to mention feed him and attend to his other basic needs for nearly 15 years, she used savings she was able to accumulate along the way to buy a small plot of land on which she now lives independently with her children.   Since the split with her husband she has also taken advantage of free enrolment in adult education, is about to finish her high school diploma, and hopes to go on become a teacher.   Although she has been seeing another man since she left her spouse, she is reluctant to live with him, and if she ends up so doing, will insist that he sets her up in a new house so that she can pass her existing one onto her children.   Looking back, Sonia recognises that she has had a hard life, but one on which she can feel pride in having raised her children with minimal male assistance: 'Y*o puedo sola... Soy la madre y el padre. Yo soy capaz. No necesito ayuda de nadie'* ('I can go it alone.. I am the mother and the father. I am capable. I don't need help from anybody').   In turn, Sonia does not think that households headed by women are worse-off. For Sonia, the idea that women are the '*sexo débil'* (weak sex) is a '*mentira'* (lie) -- '*la mujer no necesita un hombre. ella tiene capacidad'* ('a woman doesn't need a man. she has capacity'). Not only does Sonia feel that she has become 'empowered' through her achievements, but that by example she has instilled a greater sense of self-worth and independence in her daughter, and made her two sons value and respect women more than they might have done had she carried on kow-towing to her spouse. This not only means her sons helping out financially – as her eldest does – but also participating in domestic labour. That this is as possible in male-headed households is in more doubt. Bartola, a 60 year old mother of five from Santa Cruz, for example,

reported that her efforts to make her sons more domestically-oriented were repeatedly thwarted by her husband:

> '*Yo les enseñe a mis hijos a tener plato propio en la casa, y si querías comer y el plato estaba sucio, tenían que laverlo para comer. Sabe que pasa....? Taque los papás no los ponen a hacer nada porque después se hacen "gays"'.*

> ('I taught my children to have one plate in the home, and if you wanted to eat and the plate was dirty you had to wash it to eat. And you know what happens?.... Well, the fathers intervene and tell you not to do anything like this because you will make the boys "gay"').

Almost exactly the same scenario was reported by Gloria (50), from Santa Cruz, who had raised four childen: '*Yo me acuerdo que mi hijo me ayudaba a lavar los platos y a limpiar la casa, pero una vez llegó mi marido y lo vió y me dijo que no lo pusiera por que se iba hacer maricón'* ('I remember that when my son helped me wash plates and clean the house, but one time my husband arrived and saw this and told me not to do this because I would turn him into a homosexual'). While in male-headed households it seems that domestic labour is imbued with effeminacy and is discouraged among young men, in female-headed households, because it calls on team spirit in the context of limited labour supply, it seems more 'ennobling'.

Another widely perceived advantage of female headship in Costa Rica is that this comes with the prospect of eliminating the threat of violence from women's and children's lives, with many respondents drawing attention to the horror of men coming home in the early hours of the morning, and beating up their partners, often in front of the children, and sometimes threatening the latter as well.[13]

Although Victorio, a casual agricultural labourer from Santa Cruz is now 55, the scars of violence in his childhood remain deeply etched in his memory. For this reason he is glad that women today have more protection from the law, at least in principle:

> *'Antes muchos hombres le pegaban a las mujeres, no había diálogo. Solo los trataban mal por desconfiados. Yo me acuerdo que mi papá trataba muy mal a mi mamá. Eso era feo, porque hasta a uno que estaba pequeño en ese entonces, le daba miedo. En cambio, ahora si un hombre le pega a la mujer lo demandan. Lo puedan dejar sin casa y sin mujer, porque después la mujer mete a otro hombre en la casa ..yo creo que ahora ellas mandan porque la ley las apoya y a los hombres no'.*

> ('Before many men beat their wives. There was no dialogue. They treated women badly simply because of lack of trust. I remember that my father treated my mother atrociously. This was horrible, because even though i was very young at the time, it made me afraid. In contrast, if a man beats his woman now, they send him to prison. A man can be left without a house, or woman, because afterwards the woman puts another man in the house. I think women rule now because the law supports them rather than men').

Legal reform in the interests of eliminating domestic violence against women in Costa Rica has been on-going since 1990 with the passing of the Law for Social Equality for Women, which, <u>inter alia</u>, granted greater rights to the victims of domestic violence to evict the perpetrators from their homes. This was followed in 1996 by a Law Against Domestic Violence which saw the launch of a National System for Care and Prevention of Domestic Violence (PLANOVI). Complementing the pioneering efforts of the NGO, CEFEMINA, which, from the late 1980s has run a highly successful nationwide self-help programme for 'survivors' of domestic violence called '*Mujer, No Estás Sola'* ('Woman, You are Not Alone!') (see Chant,2007:Chapter 6), this has comprised a telephone helpline for women along with provision for legal, social and psychological assistance in the Office of Women's

Affairs, the setting-up of specialised courts for domestic violence, care facilities in state hospitals and clinics, and government refuges in three different parts of the country (CEDAW, 2003:47). Yet while many men share Victorio's opinion that this spate of legislation has 'turned the tables' on men, some women are more dubious about how it works in practice. For example, a 49 year old part-time domestic worker, Nuvia, from Villareal, who left her violent spouse over a year ago, reported that following a bout of particularly menacing behaviour on his part: '*El hombre que yo tenía, el padre de mis dos hijas, yo lo demandé. Llamé a la policía, en el momento en que llegaba, como no me hallaron azul, como no me hallaron nada -- porque yo no me deje pegar -- llegaron y no hicieron nada. La policía actúa hasta en el momento que lo matan a uno, ya para qué*' ('I denounced the man I was with, the father of my two (youngest) girls. I called the police, but when they arrived and didn't find me black and blue, and couldn't find a mark on me, because I wouldn't let him beat me, they did nothing. The police only act when they actually kill you, and what's the sense in that?'). Notwithstanding Nuvia's experience, however, there is some evidence that the law is having an effect on people's awareness of domestic violence in Costa Rica and women's greater readiness to report it, which is conceivably strengthening women's 'fall-back' position

Also important in strengthening women's position in Costa Rica have been the efforts of the national machinery for women – *Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres* (INAMU) (formerly, *Centro Nacional para la Mujer y Familia* [CMF]) – to promote gender justice in a variety of arenas, including working with more flexible definitions of 'family' than are often found elsewhere, and to make women and female household heads a focal point of anti-poverty initiatives (see Chant 1999, 2002).

That female-headed households have grown at the rate they have is conceivably in part a testimony to the their growing visibility, public acceptance and support (see Chant,2007: Chapter 6), even if there is still some way to go. For instance, many official (and academic) publications in Costa Rica continue to use the term '*familia completa*' ('complete family') to denote units comprising two parents and their children, whereas one-parent households are consigned to the category of '*familia incompleta*' ('incomplete family') (see Sagot 1999:101; also Monge and González, 2005: Chapter 4). In addition the term '*desintegración familiar*' ('family breakdown') is often used to refer to the absence or irresponsibility of one or both parents, normally fathers, thereby reinforcing the idea that 'family' is synonymous with an ideal-type 'male-headed household' (Chant,2002:114). In turn, fear that assistance to female heads of household might lead to an increase in their numbers is such that when the Social Welfare Ministry (IMAS/*Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Social*) established its first programme for female household heads, specific declaration was made in the supporting documentation that there was no intention to promote increases in lone motherhood (Chant,1999).

The first Costa Rican programme for female household heads was coordinated by the Mixed Social Welfare Institute (*Instituto Mixto de Ayuda Socia*/IMAS) and launched in 1995 under the auspices of the *'Promujeres'* (Pro-women) branch of the National Plan to Combat Poverty within a year of President José Mariá Figueres' adminstration (see earlier). Going under the title of the 'Comprehensive Training Programme for Female Household Heads in Conditions of Poverty' (*Programa de Formación Integral para Mujeres Jefas de Hogar en Condiciones de Pobreza*), this offered women a modest stipend

('*asignación familiar temporal*') for up to six months during which time they were expected to take courses in personal development (including the building of self-esteem) and in employment-related training (Chant, 1997a:151; Marenco et al, 1998:52). Although there were problems with the training component and with general coordination, a total of 25,000 women benefited from the 'human training' ('*formación humana*') component between 1995 and 1998 (Marenco et al, 1998). Following a 1998 Act on Services for Women Living in Poverty (Law no. 7769) at the start of Rodríguez's presidency in 1998, it became a state obligation to assist women in poverty. This led to the Comprehensive Training Programme being revised and re-launched under the name of '*Creciendo Juntas'* ('Growing Together') – the new nomenclature being spawned by the fact that grassroots participants in the previous programme felt that 'women in poverty' was too degrading.   The basic format of the original programme, emphasising a combination of personal development (oriented around human and political rights) and vocational and technical skills was retained, but *Creciendo Juntas* became a major inter-agency venture and was extended to all women in poverty, albeit with priority to female household heads (see below), as well as being broadened to include completion of basic education, and housing benefits (see IMAS, 2001). The economic incentive was set at 30% or more of the minimum wage of a general worker, and in January 2002, another article was added to Law no.7769 to provide for micro-enterprise initiatives as part of the objective of improving women's insertion into the labour market. The target population to be reached by the new and more elaborate programme was set at 5000 per annum, with a minimum of 25% to be female heads of household (INAMU,2005:12), notwithstanding that definitions of female headship in the programme are looser than in the

census, referring only to 'a woman who has the responsibility for the family' (which can clearly apply to <u>de facto</u> as well as <u>de jure</u> female heads of households, not to mention female spouses in male-headed units) (see Chant, 2007: Chapter 6). Although the new programme only reached an estimated 17% of female-headed households classified as poor between 1999 and 2001, around half of the 15,290 beneficiaries covered during this period were female heads of household (Jimenez, 2002). In the period 2002-4, a further 13,640 women were catered for by the programme (Pacheco de la Espriella, 2005:2), again with an estimated 43-50% of these latter beneficiaries being female heads. Despite the fact that funding shortfalls have led to a tailing off in numbers of *Creciendo Juntas* beneficiaries over time (CR,2004:12), between 2002 and 2006 nearly 24,000 female heads of household in poverty and extreme poverty were targetted for help with house-building and acquisition (ibid.:7).

Another group identified as particularly vulnerable to poverty in Costa Rica are teenage mothers. Mainly on account of persistently high rates of adolescent pregnancy and lone parenthood (see later), two further programmes were introduced in 1999: 1) '*Amor Jóven*' ('Young Love') and 2) '*Construyendo Oportunidades'* (Building Opportunities). Despite opposition from the Catholic Church, *Amor Jóven's* efforts have been directed to broadening the sexual education of male and female children and teenagers in schools as a means of heightening sexual awareness, fomenting healthier and more responsible attitudes towards sexuality, and preventing premature pregnancy. The second scheme, *Construyendo Oportunidades* (Building Opportunities), seeks to (re)integrate teenage mothers into education, and to equip them with personal and vocational skills to enhance their own lives and those of

their children (see Chant, 1999, 2000; IMAS, 2001; PDR, 2001). The annual target is in the region of 2400 teenage mothers.

Indicating some even-handedness in matter of parental responsibility, Costa Rica's interventions in respect of gender and the family have not just been confined to women. For example, 2001 saw the passing of a radical new 'Law for Responsible Paternity' ('*Ley de Paternidad Responsable*'). Momentum for the law came, <u>inter alia</u>, in response to the high number of children without named fathers, which had serious implications for children's well-being given that only children formally acknowledged by fathers and with the right to use their surname had entitlement to paternal support (Budowski and Rosero Bixby, 2003). In order to uphold the rights of children to paternal recognition and economic assistance, and to reduce the financial, social and emotional burdens of lone parenthood on women, the law requires men who do not voluntarily register themselves as fathers on their children's birth certificates to undergo a compulsory DNA test at the Social Security Institute. In the event of a positive result, they are not only obliged to accept the child's use of their surname and to pay alimony and child support, but to contribute to the costs of the pregnancy and birth, and to cover their children's food expenses for the first twelve months of life (INAMU, 2001; Menjívar Ochoa, 2003). This initiative is heralded as an 'historic landmark in the struggle by women's organisations and the National Mechanism to eradicate offensive discrimination in the field of filiation and family responsibilities' (CEDAW, 2003:181). It looks likely to go some way to improving the economic conditions of lone mother households in future, and may well encourage men to desist from unprotected sex. However, whether it will be sufficient to substantially change long-standing patterns of paternal neglect remains another

issue (Chant, 2003a).   Although Costa Rica has gone further than the other two case study countries in terms of trying to create a more favourable social, economic and legal environment for female-headed households, the need to sensitise men to gender and parental justice needs more dedicated attention, support and action.

V   CONCLUSION AND POLICY PRIORITIES: JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN IN POOR HOUSEHOLDS

In any discussion of children's poverty in developing countries it is vital to acknowledge that although household disadvantage can be transmitted inter-generationally, we should not necessarily make any a priori assumptions about which types of home are worse for children. As this paper has demonstrated, due to patriarchal norms and practices which operate at different levels and in different ways, there can be just as much privation among children in male- as female-headed households. Recognising that any single category of household is marked by its own heterogeneities, children may face equally restricted access to material resources in male- as in female-headed households if their mothers cannot exert control over what husbands' earn or possess (see Bradshaw, 2002:12; Linneker, 2003; Quisumbing and McClafferty,2006). Where mothers have less power, which is clearly more often the case in male-headed households, there may also be less investment in children, and especially girls. While acknowledging that children in female-headed households may suffer from psychological or emotional privation due to the absence of co-resident fathers, in male-headed households they may feel just as wounded or resentful if

their fathers neglect them at close range.   The fact that female-headed households have often been disproportionately scapegoated as a cause of women's and children's poverty to date is not only grounded in questionable evidence, but also in dubious beliefs about a) the power of households to combat poverty in society at large, and b) what constitutes a 'proper family'. As articulated by Moore (1994:61):

> 'The straightforward assumption that poverty is always associated with female-headed households is dangerous, because it leaves the causes and nature of poverty unexamined and because it rests on the prior implication that children will be consistently worse-off in such households because they represent incomplete families'.

While the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as with other UN treaties, does not stipulate that children have a right to be free from poverty (Chinkin,2001 cited in Jones,2005:337), it advocates a series of recommendations which are relevant to issues pertinent to child privation discussed in the present paper. These include that 'children should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding' (Preamble), that children should be 'protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of status' (Article 2), that States Parties should ensure protection and care for children as necessary for their well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of their parents, legal guardians, or other individuals responsible for their upbringing (Article 3), that children have the right to know and be cared for by their parents (Article 7), that children separated from one or both parents have the right to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis (Article 9), and that

States Parties have a duty to render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and to ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children (Article 18).[14]

In terms of how this maps out in respect of the arguments advanced in the present paper, and how the well-being of children might be best guarenteed, we need at one level to go beyond household headship, and to recognise that by focusing primarily on female-headed households we are missing large numbers of deprived children.   A second step is to encourage acceptance of a diversity of household arrangements such that young people do not feel or experience prejudice by growing up without fathers. As noted by by Johnsson-Latham (2004:30):

> 'As stressed by several researchers, the tendency to disregard female poverty in male-headed households and to stigmatise FHHs as poor can be seen as a political choice, and as part of a neo-conservative agenda which seeks to portray male-headed households as superior to FHHs. This approach runs contrary to the politically agreed texts from Beijing in 1995 where, in the end, an agreement was reached to refer to various forms of families, and not (as suggested by the Vatican and many Muslim countries) to indicate the family – supposedly male-headed – to be the norm'.

Dedicated campaigns to promote a socially-inclusive stance to a broad spectrum of family arrangements could make major inroads in respect of equalising the status and opportunities of female- and male-headed households. This is especially relevant given on-going rises in the numbers of households headed by women.   As noted by van Driel (1994:220) in relation to Botswana, female headship has to be recognised legally and socially, since: 'As long as women have a

secondary legal status, both in customary and common law, and in Tswana society at large, women who are female heads of household will be seen as the exception to the rule whereas in practice the rule seems to be the exception'. Knowing that female headship has the full support of the state and society could also mean that women within male-headed households have more options. In turn, these options may lead to more bargaining power among women, and greater compliance with obligations to the children they raise on the part of men.

Leading on from this, it is tempting to surmise that if more active efforts were made on the part of state and society to mobilise greater involvement of fathers in domestic life, this could mitigate many of the poverty-related problems currently facing women and children within and beyond female-headed units.

Among the more pressing needs here is for states to do more to monitor and enforce men's obligations as fathers. With regard to female heads of household, ensuring that they receive maintenance payments and other spousal/paternal assistance as stipulated by family law (for example in relation to separation or divorce) could go a substantial way to reducing the financial pressures they and their children face, as well as possibly relieving them of some of the burden of care.[15]

As for women and children in male-headed households, efforts to ensure men's compliance with economic obligations may be more complex, since beyond general legal provisions that parents should provide for children, courts are less likely to intervene in

domestic life when people are still married or cohabiting rather than divorced or separated. Given the difficulties (and possible undesirability) of public surveillance and/or policing of all inter-personal relations, one of the most tactical strategies might be to mount public information campaigns, as has been done with some success in relation to domestic violence in Nicaragua (see Solórzano et al, 2000), and/or to encourage men (with or without their spouses) to attend workshops in which they are informed of evolving agendas of children's rights, and how these can (and should) be safeguarded by parents. Such interventions may be even more successful where attempts are made to promote male participation in a portfolio of 'family' activities which extends beyond the generation of income for their 'dependents', to emotional support and practical care (Chant, 2002; UNICEF, 1997). One suggestion made by Molyneux (2006a) in the context of anti-poverty programmes is to get men more involved in household care work 'in ways that break down dysfunctional sex typing and power relations', and, as highlighted by England and Folbre (2002:28): 'Less gender specialisation in the form of parental involvement could lead to improved outcomes for children, not only by improving mothers' economic position, but also by improving emotional connections between fathers and children'.[16] While such initiatives could conceivably be pursued at the local level, broader state directives are undoubtedly helpful with regard to enforcement. As noted by Corner (2002:5):

> 'The experience of developed countries suggests that significant change in the sex distribution of unpaid housework and childcare requires it to be seen explicitly as a policy issue and as something that must be addressed in order to implement national and

international commitments on gender equality and women's human rights' (see also UNRISD, 2005:60).

Indeed, alongside mobilisation of men at the domestic level, governments themselves could do substantially more to advance gender equality and support women in their unpaid carework. In most societies it is implicitly expected, and overwhelmingly the case in practice, that the daily care of infants, children, the sick and the elderly, should fall to women, and that the burden of this care should be borne privately. One major implication is that women's 'reproduction tax' (Palmer, 1992) impedes entry into the labour market on the same terms as men. This contributes either to lower incomes for women and their families, or to a weaker bargaining position for women within households (see also UNMP/TFEGE, 2005:11). As further observed by ECLAC (2004b:14): '…one of the most convincing explanations for the persistence of labour market, social, and political inequalities is that changes which have taken place have not reached as far as the family sphere, so that women are paying for autonomy in their private lives with no help from public policy. Women are no longer confined exclusively to the domestic sphere, but they have not been relieved of responsibility for it'. Indeed, with macro-economic change having required more and more women to take on responsibilities for income-generating activity, the only way their multiple obligations can be performed is at considerable cost or exploitation of themselves. This in turn, can exacerbate their own and their children's poverty burdens, is not efficient, and is far from just.

Given the added tendency for many contemporary anti-poverty programmes to rely on the unpaid contributions of women in the spirit of 'co-responsibility' (see Molyneux,2006a,b; see also Bradshaw,2006), it is only fair for co-responsibility to start working in the other direction, and for women to benefit from more flexible working hours, public-sponsored provision of childcare and family benefits, and services to assist with household chores (ECLAC, 2004a:38). Pressure on employers to contribute to such initiatives would also be desirable. Many may also be encouraged by drawing their attention to the advantages which parenthood contributes to the 'work environment'. As Elson (1999: 612) has argued, employers tend to conceive of the unpaid caring of their employees as 'costs' rather than as 'benefits', when the latter can accrue from the fact that workers bring skills to the workplace that derive from their roles as parents and as household managers:

> '... the reproductive economy produces benefits for the
> productive economy which are externalities, not reflected in
> market prices or wages' (ibid.; see also Budlender, 2004; Folbre,
> 1994).

As echoed by UN/UNIFEM (2003:49):

> 'Social care generates positive externalities in that it allows
> individuals to enhance their capabilities, contributing to overall
> growth in the economy… Thus society in general benefits from the
> care an individual receives at home'. The underprovision of care
> is 'solved' by women, but at their expense, when ideally: 'caring
> labour and the costs of care should be borne equitably among
> women and men, as well as considered in national accounts and
> development plans' .

While the encouragement of greater involvement of a broader range of male and female adults in the lives of children could in part be

achieved by encouraging more cooperation within and between households and employers, states also have an role. The provision of more subsidised childcare and after-school centres would allow children who are potentially at risk of paternal or parental neglect to benefit from other environments in which they gain access to the emotional, material and infrastructural support essential to the fulfilment of their human rights.

NOTES

1. This paper was prepared as a background document for UNICEF's *State of the World's Children 2007: Women and Children- The Double Dividend of Gender Equality.* It is based on research conducted under the auspices of a recently-concluded project entitled 'Gender, Generation and Poverty in Africa, Asia and Latin America', funded by a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship, 2003-6 (Award no. F07004R). Aside from my gratitude to Leverhulme, for assistance in the field I would like to thank Baba Njie (The Gambia), Tessie Sato, Josie Chan and Fe Largado (Philippines), and Enid Jaén Hernández, Luis Castellón Zelaya and Roberto Rojas (Costa Rica), and for technical and editorial help, Hazel Johnstone, Ralph Kinnear, John Fyson, Wendy Sigle-Rushton and Chris Mogridge. For comments on an earlier draft of this paper I am indebted to Sarah Bradshaw, Gareth Jones, Silvia Posocco and UNICEF's State of the World's Children Research and Editorial Team, especially Kate Rogers.

2. While it is generally the case that female-headed households comprise lone mothers and children, female household heads and lone mothers are not always one and the same. Morover, in many instances households headed by lone mothers are extended in composition (see Chant, 1991,1997a: Chapter 1; also Folbre,1991). Another crucial factor to bear in mind is the distinction between de facto and de jure headship. The former refers to female-headed households which come about through male migration but who receive remittances from absent spouses. De jure female-headed households, alternatively, refer to women who reside independently of men as a result of non-marriage, separation, divorce or widowhood, and whose receipt of male support, such as child maintenance, is much less likely (see Chant,1997a). While it is sometimes argued that headship should be ascribed to women where they are the chief breadwinners or decision-makers in households, in this paper I use the more common option relied upon in censuses and household surveys, namely that women are heads of household only in the absence of a male partner or another senior adult male. Moreover, in accordance with the fact that most concern about poverty among female-headed households is directed at those with de jure status, this group are the exclusive focus of this paper.

3. Although a link is often drawn between lone parenthood and dysfunctional behaviour in children various authors have pointed out that it is often extremely difficult to establish the extent to which the psychological problems children may suffer in lone parent households are to do with the experience of living only with mothers, the trauma of losing fathers and/or how loss came about (for example, death, divorce and so on), or to events leading up to the moment of loss/separation, which may include long unhappy marriages beset by emotional conflict or physical violence (see Burghes, 1994; Chant,1997a:Chapter 7). Part of the difficulty is that samples are usually unrepresentative – focusing only on children showing extreme reactions – or because they are based on 'snapshots' at different points in time rather than continuous monitoring (Burghes, 1994:13-19). Another problem is that it is hard to disentangle lone parenthood and/or lack of contact with fathers from other phenomena beyond

the domestic domain such as levels of poverty in given societies, unemployment and education (see Bortolaia-Silva,1996:8; Collins,1991:160-1). Furthermore, even where young people themselves are invited to express views on fatherlessness and/or experiences of growing up in female-headed households, their discourses are likely to be mediated, inter alia, by interview dynamics, the relative ease or difficulty of talking about painful events in their lives, and the degree to which they may conceal their feelings in an attempt either to assert the 'normality' of their familial circumstances and/or to play down their plight.

4. The GDI and GEM are among a number of quantitative measures of gender inequality. Although they have been critiqued on a number of grounds (for discussions see Bardhan, and Klasen,1999; Chant,2006; Charmes and Wieringa, 2003; Dijsktra and Hanmer, 2000; Klasen,2004), they have greater geographical coverage than most, and are among the most widely used in international comparisons of gender gaps.

5. Although in the North there has been more support for lone mothers, poverty among this group has often been attributed to the low levels of financial assistance they are given in public programmes (see for example, Edwards and Duncan,1996; Hardey and Glover,1991:94; Hobson,1994:180; Mädge and Neusüss, 1994:1420; Millar,1992:15). By the same token some assert that state support for women of various forms (for example full employment, tax relief, childcare and other welfare benefits) can greatly increase the viability of lone motherhood (see Goldberg, 1998; Moghadam, 1998:243; Ypeij and Steenbeek, 2001:73).

6. In Costa Rica, for example, where about 80% of the population profess to be Catholic, the Church has been a key actor within a social conservative lobby to preserve 'the family', and to arrest the erosion of 'traditional values' which has nominally accompanied increased sexual freedom, falling rates of marriage, increased illegitimacy, prostitution and homosexuality (see Chant,2002; Schifter and Madrigal 1996:62). Such trends, in which lone motherhood is frequently implicated or explicitly identified, are regarded as 'sinful' and highly threatening to the moral and social order (Budowski,2002, 2003). In order to put a brake on further social and moral 'degeneracy', the Catholic establishment, along with Costa Rica's growing Protestant community, have used sermons and the media to air disapproval, to appeal to adults to set good examples to the young by eschewing the 'evils of libertinism and modern consumerism', and to foment the conservation of 'family traditions', through the Christian Family Movement (*Movimiento Familiar Cristiano*) (see Chant,1999).

7. Thirty-two of the studies had been conducted in Latin America, 20 in Africa and 14 in Asia, between the years 1979 and 1989 (see Buvinic and Gupta,1993,1997). The indicators of poverty used included, inter alia, total and/or per capita household income and consumption, mean income per adult equivalence, expenditure, access to services and ownership of land or assets.

8. It should also be recognised that male-headed households may not necessarily comprise biological fathers, but step-fathers, in which favouritism

may be shown to biological as opposed to step-children. Another point, raised by Gareth Jones in his reaction to an earlier draft of this paper, is that little is known about how blood siblings (or half-siblings) interact with one another in conditions of economic and psychological stress. Both these issues merit consideration in future research.

9. I am grateful to Gareth Jones for drawing my attention to the need to acknowledge multiple forms and flows of violence.

10. In the context of research on informal mutual insurance networks in Southern Ghana, Goldstein et al (2001:7) note that these do not always work because people fail to ask others for assistance. This tends to apply more to women than men, the main reason being that: '... not asking largely reflects internalising rejection, or not wanting to incur the transaction costs associated with asking'.   As echoed by González de la Rocha (2003:23), it is is necessary to take into account that the more embedded people are in kinship and social networks, the more obligations they are likely to have.

11. Another factor, pointed up in relation to Afro-Caribbean women in the Netherlands, is that resisting favours from kin can be a means of reducing interference in their lives (Ypeij and Steenbeek, 2001:78).

12.See for example, *The Philippine Star*, 29 November 2004, pp.1 & 4: 'The Face of Hunger in RP is Female', by Vina Datinguinoo.

13. Only one-quarter of 'femicides' (female deaths as a result of assassination) in Costa Rica are committed by non-family members, with 40% being committed by women's present or former partners, and the remaining 26% by women's fathers, uncles or other male relatives.

14. Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of Child (http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2rc.htm).

15. On the basis of research in the USA, McLanahan (nd:23) points out that: 'Fathers who are required to pay child support are likely to demand more time with their children and a greater say in how they are raised.   Such demands should lead to more social capital between the father and child. Similarly, greater father involvement is likely to lead to less residential mobility, retarding the loss of social capital in the community'. Potential benefits to children notwithstanding, there may well be costs for mothers in terms of their freedom to raise the child as they see fit, or to change residence (ibid.).

16. Engaging men in such ventures might not be as difficult as anticipated given that some partners in male-headed units willingly comply with these responsibilities already (see Chant, 2000; Gutmann, 1996,1999), and because in women-headed households men often perform these roles in their capacities as grandfathers, uncles, brothers and sons (see Fonseca, 1991).

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