

# Engendering Poverty Measurement

By Anastasia Prikhodko

“Social justice is part of the DNA at UTS,” said Professor Vicki Sara, Chancellor of University of Technology, Sydney, as she welcomed delegates to the fourth ACFID University Conference.

The first workshop on my itinerary for the conference was *Introducing Individual Deprivation Measure*, conducted by Dr Janet Hunt (Australian National University), Dr Sharon Bessell (The Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU) and Joanne Crawford (International Women’s Development Agency). Social justice was a key theme throughout this session.

It addressed limitations of current measures and introduced new approaches to measuring poverty and gender equity. The research was undertaken across 18 different sites across Asia, Africa and the Pacific (you can read about the project at the project website: [www.genderpovertymeasure.org](http://www.genderpovertymeasure.org)).

The idea of poverty being ‘gender blind’ as Dr. Hunt put it, really stood out; because although news outlets occasionally report about aid agencies working towards decreasing income inequality, the concept of gender inequality is rarely addressed by the media.

“Women and men are differently located, socially and economically. Existing poverty measures fail to take account of these differences,” Dr Hunt added.

It was also noted that majority of current data on poverty is gathered at the household level. However, this type of data ignores the situations of individuals, and neglects gender sensitivity, which creates a greater conceptual rift between the notions of income and gender inequality.

Dr Hunt explained that by focusing only on the household level, we obscure, rather than illuminate, inequality and disadvantage. For example, it is estimated that women and girls reinvest some 90 percent of the income they earn into their families where as only 30-40 percent of men’s income is invested that way. By examining household data, we focus an averaging of these outcomes, rather than understanding the differences between the behaviour of men and women.

Although household data remains useful for understanding various circumstances and trends, , it may risk perpetuating the lack of information of gender poverty by failing to articulate who is poor, in what ways and to what extent.

Dr Sharon Bessell discussed participatory methods used in phase one of the research and identified lack of employment, income opportunities, quality education, adequate health care, and insufficient quality of food as common prevalent dimensions of poverty.

Dr Bessell noted that across all of the sites they investigated, people talked about the non-material dimension of poverty. Non-material poverty consists of components of deprivation not directly cause by lack of income, such as lack of family support, humiliation, shame or being subject to violence.

Deprivation differs according to age, gender, social and individual roles. Some of the findings discovered were that men’s deprivations consisted of bad roads and infrastructure, therefore, creating challenges to market access and productivity outputs. For women it was limits to mobility, and threats to safety posed by unlit roads. Results suggested that women may be more heavily affected by non-material dimensions of poverty than their male counterparts.

Concluding the workshop, Jo Crawford emphasized that the future of poverty measures has to be about ‘how do we reveal who is poor, in what ways, to what extent?’ One of the key guiding principles is to leave no one behind – we need to measure *the one, the individual*.

