

Chapter *9*

**INTEGRATING KEY ISSUES INTO
POVERTY PROGRAMMES**

Weak Links with Gender Policies

Weak Links with Environmental Policies

Weak Links with Health Initiatives

Organized sectorally, most poverty programmes have weak links to other development policies.



A general weakness of poverty programmes is their lack of integration. Part of the problem is the artificial divide between economic and social policies. Another part is the habit of thinking sectorally. A third part is organizational: governments divide departments along sectoral lines. So in what department does poverty, a multisectoral problem, belong?

The problem is particularly severe for such issues as gender and the environment. The assessments for this report underscore the weak links between poverty and these two issues—a special concern to UNDP, for which gender and the environment are major areas of concentration.

The assessments also show that the links between protecting health and reducing poverty need to be strengthened. Ill health and income poverty are mutually reinforcing and thus need to be addressed together.

WEAK LINKS WITH GENDER POLICIES

Gender inequality does not figure prominently as a source of poverty in most poverty programmes assessed for this report. Yet there are stark gender differences in human poverty that urgently need to be addressed (figure 9.1).

Incorporating Gender in Poverty Programmes

Poverty programmes rarely ask what effect they are likely to have on poor women. A recent exception: the national poverty programme of Mali, which incorporates a Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women. The National Poverty Alleviation Programme of Mongolia includes the Women's Development Fund, which provides microcredit to women for income-generating activities (box 9.1).

UNDP has given various forms of support to targeted initiatives for women, which have encompassed training, microcredit, employment and income generation. But a UNDP-supported study of India's poverty programmes by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) demonstrates that some interventions are better than others at addressing women's poverty and that some interventions can be redesigned to have a better impact. Unfortunately, small-scale interventions tend to be the preferred option for tackling women's poverty—downgrading it, in effect, to a minor problem.

The gender-blindness of most poverty programmes reveals the weak links, theoretical and practical, between gender and poverty—due to problems on both sides. Poverty programmes have not ordinarily incorporated gender as an important dimension. And gender programmes have not done well in focusing on poverty. Combating gender inequality is not the same thing as combating poverty. In attempting to “mainstream” their issues, poverty programmes and gender programmes have often neglected the intersection between them—poor women.

Increasing the Focus on Poor Women in India

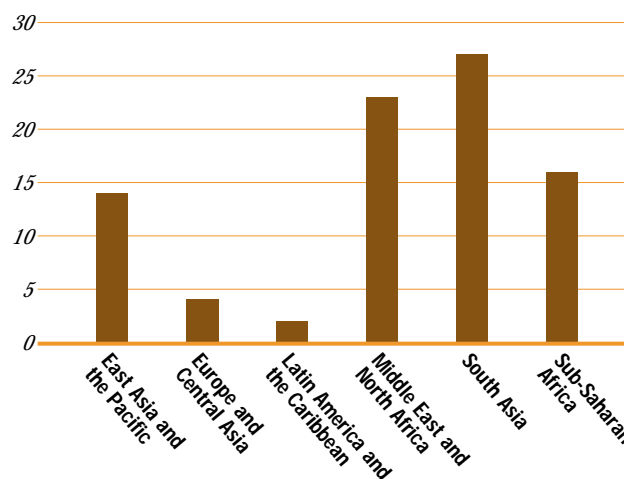
Since the 1970s the Indian government has made poverty reduction a priority in its development planning. Policies have focused on improving the poor's standard of living by ensuring food security, promoting self-employment through greater access to assets, increasing wage employment and improving access to basic social services. A recent UNRISD discussion paper, supported by UNDP and the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA), shows, however, that the policies' effects on poor women could differ from those on poor men. This finding highlights the need for greater attention to designing poverty programmes with poor women in mind.

Food Security Launched in 1965, India's Public Distribution System has helped meet people's basic food needs by providing rations at subsidized prices. Although

Figure 9.1 The Gap between Male and Female Literacy Rates, 1997

There are stark gender differences in human poverty that urgently need to be addressed.

Male adult literacy rate minus female rate (percentage points)



Note: The regional classification in the figure is that used by the World Bank. For the country composition of the regions see World Bank 1999b.

Source: World Bank 1999b.

Box 9.1 The Women's Development Fund Targets Poor Women in Mongolia

The Women's Development Fund is a major part of Mongolia's national poverty programme, unusual because national anti-poverty plans rarely accord gender dimensions such importance.

The fund is similar in most respects to Mongolia's larger Income Generation Fund except that it targets its microloans to women, particularly female heads of household, and has civil society organizations play a major role in training and empowering its beneficiaries. Women use the loans for small-scale activities, such as growing vegetables, raising chickens, opening cafes or making traditional boots. Together the

two funds have created more than 23,000 permanent jobs, 61% for women. This in a country of about 2.5 million people.

The strength of the two funds is their ability to decentralize resources to the local level and to encourage communities to participate in programme activities. In the countryside, where the economy has been depressed for years, the microloans have made a difference in people's lives.

In the Women's Development Fund projects 96% of the participants have been women, about a third of them heads of household. To allow the women to engage

in income-generating activities, the projects cover food costs for children who attend preschool.

The repayment rates for the Women's Development Fund have generally been higher than those for the general Income Generation Fund. But both funds have suffered from recent recession in the countryside. And because of low interest rates, the revolving funds are unlikely to be sustainable. But whatever money is repaid will continue to be used at the local level to finance new income-generating activities.

it has affected less than 20% of the poor's food purchases, the system has been important in sustaining people's consumption of cereals, especially in periods of drought. It has provided women and girls with better access to food and helped overcome the widespread discrimination against female consumption within households. It has also reduced the burden of women, who are responsible for providing food for the household.

The system has been criticized because its subsidies have created incentives for people to sell the subsidized food on the open market and because its coverage has been limited. But proposals to target the programme more effectively to the poor are likely to encounter difficulties. Unreliable income data would make it difficult to identify the truly vulnerable, and social hierarchies would tend to disadvantage those who have the least influence in decision-making, such as women and children. The effort could be both costly and counter-productive.

Self-Employment Schemes The largest credit-based government poverty reduction programme in the world, the Integrated Rural Development Programme provides rural households below the poverty line with credit to purchase income-generating assets.

Launched in 1979, the programme has supplied subsidized credit to such groups as small and marginalized farmers, agricultural labourers, rural artisans, the physically handicapped, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Within this target population, 40% of the beneficiaries are supposed to be women. Although the programme has reached 51 million families, only 27% of the borrowers have been women.

The programme has significantly increased the income of 57% of assisted families. But for 29% of assisted families its credit has led to no real increase in income. And in many cases the income generated has not been enough to keep families out of poverty. One reason: investments have been too small or inadequately linked to the development of strong rural banking institutions and market facilities.

The programme's impact on women has also been mixed. Credit has not reached the target share of female beneficiaries because of the stipulation that loans should go to the head of the household—usually a man. In areas where civil society organizations have helped administer the programme, the loans given to women have been put to more effective use. Social mobilization has been a particularly effective way to involve women in the credit scheme.

Another of the programme's stipulations—that credit be in kind rather than in cash—has hampered efforts to

diversify the income-generating activities that women can initiate. Services need to be promoted that complement the loans, and activities need to be designed that are compatible with women's other responsibilities, such as household management and child-rearing. Although they have not yet done so, the government loans could support women in purchasing land—a critical step in enhancing gender equality and promoting the participation of women in decision-making.

Wage Employment Schemes Rural poverty is largely a result of low productivity and unemployment. The Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, a national public works scheme launched in 1989 with financing from the central and state governments, provides more than 700 million person-days of work a year—about 1% of total employment—for people with few opportunities for employment. The scheme

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has two components: a programme to provide low-cost housing and one to supply free irrigation wells to poor and marginalized farmers.

The public works scheme is self-targeting. Since it offers employment at the statutory minimum wage for unskilled manual labour, only those willing to accept very low wages—the poor—are likely to enrol in the scheme.

By providing regular employment—and thereby increasing the bargaining power of all rural workers—the public works scheme has had a significant effect in reducing poverty. It has also contributed to the construction of rural infrastructure (irrigation works, a soil conservation project, drinking water supply). Evaluations show that 82% of available funds have been channelled to community development projects. Targeting was improved in 1996 when the housing and irrigation well components were delinked and focused exclusively on people below the poverty line.

The evaluations also reveal a lack of funds for training local authorities responsible for managing the programme, and even for completing many of the public works. In addition, only 15% of the beneficiaries have been women, despite intentions to target them. A chief reason: the scheme does not provide additional services, such as child care, that would enable women to participate.

In contrast, the Maharashtra Employment Guarantee Scheme estimates that women make up 45–65% of its workers. This high participation has been achieved with the help of child care services provided near the workplace and the contributions of labour and political organizations in mobilizing communities, building awareness and ensuring accountability.

Micro-interventions The participation of civil society organizations in poverty reduction efforts, especially those directed to women, has increased social awareness and encouraged governments to provide better services. Cooperatives such as the Self-Employed Women's Association provide credit to women at market rates of interest but do not require collateral; they also allow flexibility in the use of loans and the timing of repayments. These civil society organizations have not only contributed to women's material well-being; they have also helped empower them socially and politically.

Such credit initiatives, by bringing women out of the confines of the household, are changing their status within the family and within village hierarchies. The demands of civil society organizations for better social services have spurred the government to launch campaigns to increase literacy and improve public infrastructure. And their calls for greater accountability and real devolution of power are increasing the likelihood that expenditures for poverty reduction will reach the neediest, especially women.

But the growing trend towards directing public funds—including foreign aid—to civil society organizations rather than through regular government channels could weaken democratically elected bodies. Civil society organizations should seek to strengthen the links between government and the poor, not replace government.

WEAK LINKS WITH ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

National poverty programmes seldom have a strong environmental and natural resources component, as most of the assessments for this report show.

Although Mozambique has suffered recurrent natural disasters that have substantially worsened poverty, its new anti-poverty plan does not have a significant environmental component. Instead, its environmental policies contain major pro-poor components. The poverty programme of Kyrgyzstan makes no specific mention of the need for environmental protection and regeneration. Moreover, although the country's Ministry of Environment deals with many issues vitally important to poverty reduction, it is not represented on the National Poverty Alleviation Commission.

The Social Reform Agenda, the Philippines' poverty programme, contains strong language on environmental protection, but its coordinating body does not implement the programme's environmental aspects. These are the province of the departments in charge of agriculture, agrarian reform and natural resources. The rigid functional divisions within government work against cross-cutting concerns.

Breaking Down the Divide between Poverty and the Environment

While countries generally recognize the impact of the environment and natural resources on the poor, most have not yet reflected this recognition in their anti-poverty plans, through programmes or organizational structure. Some countries are notable exceptions.

Mali's national poverty programme includes activities to "promote the sustainable management of natural resources by the poor". Many relate to restoring degraded lands and forests and promoting income-generating activities for the poor that do not lead to deforestation. Firewood remains the main source of energy for the poor, so finding alternative sources is critical (box 9.2).

Nepal's Ninth Development Plan puts special emphasis on land use plans, land reform and forest development, recognizing their close links with poverty. The country faces significant problems with landslides, erosion, floods and deforestation—as well as fragmented landholdings. A major concern is harnessing the country's abundant water resources to produce energy—as an alternative to

Box 9.2 Multipurpose Platform Targets Women's Poverty in Mali

The multipurpose platform project in Mali, supported by UNDP, seeks to reduce rural women's poverty while also providing a cheap source of energy. The platform supports a simple diesel engine that can power different tools, such as a cereal mill, husker, and battery charger. The engine can also generate electricity for lighting and refrigeration and to pump water.

The advantages of the engine are its simplicity, sturdiness and multiple uses—a perfect example of appropriate technology. With its many functions, it can be used year-round, and its simplicity allows rural technicians to master its installation and maintenance.

Made in India, the motor and its spare parts are readily available in West Africa. The engine can be powered by low-quality diesel that is available in rural Africa or by cheap substitutes such as pourgher oil. This oil is produced by crushing the seeds of the pourgher plant, which grows widely in the populated regions of the country.

The multipurpose platform project is demand driven. A condition for receiving help is a formal request from a duly registered women's association that will mobilize counterpart funds from its village and operate and manage the platform. These new roles motivate the women to acquire basic literacy and

numeracy. The project teaches the women how to operate the platform, market its multiple services and keep accounts.

The availability of water and electricity is already transforming conditions in many of the project villages. Health and education facilities now have electricity, and the availability of drinking water has lowered the incidence of disease. With a lighter work burden and a new source of income, women have acquired new status and influence. Recognizing the project's success, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Senegal are pilot-testing the multipurpose platform.

Box 9.3 Sustainable Energy Development in Rural Nepal

Nepal is a perfect candidate for hydropower: it has one of the world's most plentiful supplies of water but can offer only 15% of its population access to electricity. Recognizing this opportunity, UNDP initiated the Rural Energy for Development Programme in the country to develop small-scale hydropower plants to provide a sustainable source of energy and improve people's livelihoods.

People's intensive search for food, fuel and fodder has put pressure on environmental resources. The hydropower project attempts to deal with this problem by harnessing water resources to provide energy for cooking and lighting and power small-scale irrigation and micro-enterprises to generate income.

The project involves local communities in installing and operating the hydropower facilities and tries to institutionalize policies for rural energy development

at the village, district and central levels. The project builds on the decentralization work of a sister project, the Participatory District Development Programme, by helping elected district bodies develop the capacity to manage rural energy systems as an integral part of local development plans.

Many remote mountain villages that have never had access to electrical power now have small hydropower plants. The use of electricity and such energy-efficient technologies as improved cooking stoves has reduced household firewood consumption by a quarter and lightened the burden for women and children of gathering fuelwood. For even greater environmental benefits, the hydropower activities have been coupled with watershed management, land terracing and community reforestation projects.

deforestation (box 9.3). One of the country's most successful programmes has been its Community Forestry Programme, which involves communities in preserving forests. But this programme, like others, incorporates poverty-reducing activities more incidentally—because of the need to address environmental damage—than as an integral component.

So far, environmental plans and poverty plans have been kept separate. Moreover, substantially more countries have prepared environmental plans—44%—than explicit poverty plans—29% (table 9.1). Environmental strategies and action plans have had a head start: countries began to develop them after the 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development. Poverty plans were called for by the 1995 Social Summit.

The divide between national anti-poverty plans and national environmental plans needs to be broken down. A start would be to make sure that poverty-reducing environmental policies are a major component of poverty programmes, and that environment ministries are represented on the coordinating bodies for the programmes.

Linking Poverty and the Environment in One Initiative

In collaboration with the European Commission, UNDP has launched the Poverty and Environment Initiative to foster poverty reduction and environmental regeneration through concrete policy measures. A key objective is to promote political leadership to advocate such integrated policies. To this end, the initiative sponsored the first full and successful meeting of the Forum of Ministers, attended by 20 ministers in late September 1999 in New York. The forum's conclusions were the culmination of a consultative process that included expert workshops, electronic conferences, a Web site and a series of publications.

The initiative has tried to debunk several myths about the links between poverty and the environment. A central myth is that population growth and lack of resources compel the poor to damage the environment. This myth claims that the environmental damage then leads to a downward spiral of increased impoverishment and further environmental damage. But there is no such straightforward causal link between the two. Much depends on the specific situation and on public policies.

The danger of such a simplistic view is that it tends to support policies that reduce poverty at the expense of the environment or protect the environment at the expense of the poor. This false dichotomy is part of the reason why national anti-poverty plans and national environmental plans are implemented separately.

The initiative is seeking to identify and promote policies and public actions that can break this cycle. Surveying a range of experience, it has concluded that "win-win" options can be found—options that both reduce poverty and protect the environment. Many centre on participatory and accountable governance institutions, such as effective community-based institutions for the collective management of resources.

Improving poor people's control over the environment usually gives them a strong motivation to protect it. The

Table 9.1 Countries with Environmental and Poverty Plans by Region, 1990s

More countries have prepared environmental plans than explicit poverty plans.

	COUNTRIES WITH EXPLICIT POVERTY PLANS (%)	COUNTRIES WITH ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGIES OR PLANS (%)
Arab States	24	24
Asia and the Pacific	29	54
Europe and the CIS	14	14
Latin America and the Caribbean	27	38
Sub-Saharan Africa	42	67
Total	29	44

Source: UNDP country offices; World Bank 1999b.

state needs to create a general structure of incentives that motivates the poor as well as the private sector to conserve and regenerate the environment.

Win-win solutions start with the assumption that the poor are part of the solution, not the source of the problem. In many areas it is private companies or state agencies that cause the most environmental damage—by felling forests, diverting water, polluting the air or saturating the land with chemicals.

WEAK LINKS WITH HEALTH INITIATIVES

Initiatives to promote basic education and health care—perhaps surprisingly—also need to be more integrated with national poverty programmes. Based on the artificial divide between economic and social policies, such programmes generally split one way or the other—or try to straddle the divide. Some keep social concerns on the sidelines because they regard poverty as lack of income—and poverty reduction as simply faster growth of income. Others end up doing the same by treating poverty as a residual social issue.

From a human poverty perspective, ill health and lack of income are closely intertwined: it is difficult to deal with one without tackling the other. Preventable disease and a shortened life are signs of a critical shortfall in human development. Particularly important is combating major health epidemics, such as malaria and HIV/AIDS, which continue to ravage many developing countries.

Malaria

Malaria is a disease of poverty. Each year it causes about 300 million acute illnesses and more than 1 million deaths, with 90% of cases occurring in poor African countries. In tropical regions of Sub-Saharan Africa it accounts for a fourth of all child deaths. Malaria attacks have caused about a third of primary school children in the region to miss school, some several times. Contrary to popular belief, the prevalence of malaria is on the rise, reaching high levels in several countries (table 9.2).

With the aim of halving the incidence of malaria by 2010, several development agencies—UNDP, UNICEF, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank—have formed a partnership to collaborate with national governments, civil society organizations and the private sector. The partnership's initiative, Roll Back Malaria, seeks to strengthen the capacity of national health systems to manage disease and emphasizes unifying efforts across a range of sectors, such as education, agriculture, transportation and water and sanitation.

UNDP has also joined with the WHO and the World Bank in the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, which focuses especially on developing drugs and tools for malaria control. At the country

Table 9.2 Incidence of Malaria, 1995

The incidence of malaria has reached high levels in several countries.

	CASES PER 100 PEOPLE
Benin	11
Burundi	15
Comoros	30
Guyana	7
Kenya	16
Papua New Guinea	21
Solomon Islands	30
Zambia	33

Source: UNDP 1999a.

Table 9.3 Prevalence of HIV-1 among Women Attending Urban Prenatal Clinics, 1992–97

Currently countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have the highest prevalence of HIV among women.

	PERCENTAGE INFECTED
Botswana	34.0
Brazil	2.5
Burkina Faso	9.7
Cambodia	2.9
Central African Republic	13.8
Dominican Republic	2.4
Ethiopia	16.4
Haiti	6.0
India	0.7
Myanmar	1.5
Rwanda	17.9
South Africa	16.0
Thailand	1.9
Zambia	33.8
Zimbabwe	47.4

Note: The table shows the most recent and highest level of infection in a subpopulation with a low risk of infection and among a non-random sample of clinics.

Source: World Bank 1999b.

level UNDP has been working to integrate malaria-related initiatives into national poverty programmes and into the United Nations Development Assistance Framework.

HIV/AIDS

More than 34 million people worldwide are living with HIV/AIDS, most of them in developing countries. In Sub-Saharan Africa—with two-thirds of all those living with HIV/AIDS—the epidemic has reached crisis proportions (table 9.3). Within the next decade 40 million children in that region will lose their parents to AIDS. The epidemic is creating new poverty and intensifying existing poverty—drastically cutting short people's lives, for example. In nine countries in Sub-Saharan Africa—Botswana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe—people are expected to lose an average of 17 years of life to AIDS in the early part of the 21st century.

The cornerstone of UNDP's approach to HIV/AIDS and development is its work with the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) to forge partnerships across sectors and among institutions at local, national and international levels. One such partnership is the Alliance of Mayors and Municipal Leaders on HIV/AIDS in Africa. It now includes 60 municipalities in 16 African countries. With UNDP support, the alliance launches broad, multisectoral responses to the epidemic that are integrated with national policy frameworks and emphasize institutionalizing community-based approaches and intersectoral actions at the local level. Pilot activities have been implemented in Côte d'Ivoire and Tanzania and recently launched in Honduras and Ukraine.

Another partnership is the UNDP-supported multi-sectoral initiative of 11 government ministries under the Uganda Programme on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Poverty Reduction. The Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs has developed a comprehensive programme to change laws and customs to help prevent transmission of HIV and minimize its impact. The Ministry of Agriculture has developed nutritional and feeding guidelines to help field extension workers educate farmers and people living with HIV/AIDS about ways to foster better health. Now that the UNDP project is completed, the government has made its own explicit budget allocations to the AIDS control programmes. Noteworthy is the programme's ability to mobilize a broad cross-section of governmental and non-governmental organizations—ensuring, for example, that community-based and civil society organizations have the institutional and technical capacity to implement activities.

In country-level HIV/AIDS initiatives UNDP has been working with UNAIDS to move away from isolated, targeted activities to those more integrated with national development plans. In Malawi, for example, it has helped develop a national interim plan to support ongoing institutional and community capacity building and a five-year national strategic plan for HIV/AIDS. In Kenya it has focused on strengthening United Nations support for the national strategic plan and for policy guidelines for a multisectoral response. In Botswana it helped the government develop a multisectoral national policy on HIV/AIDS in 1993 and establish a medium-term plan in 1996 to prevent the spread of HIV and mitigate its impact.

