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**United Nations**  
**Division for th**

## **ELABORATION**

The UN “aide memoire” emphasizes three elements in its approach to poverty (a) going beyond income poverty to examine human poverty and deprivation; (b) adopting a life cycle approach; and (c) formulating an empowerment and rights-based strategy to poverty alleviation. While the first is now well recognized (although as discussed further below by no means unambiguous), the latter two need some elaboration.

Thinking through poverty in a life cycle format is, I believe, helpful for at least four reasons: (a) The nature and risk of poverty can vary across the life cycle. Both childhood and old age, for instance, make for greater vulnerability; (b) Disabilities created during childhood (e.g. lack of education, poor health, etc.) can set the conditions for poverty during adulthood and old age; (c) Age and time horizon are both relevant in outlining the focus of poverty alleviation strategies: for instance, education builds capabilities in the long term and could bear fruit in terms of future income-earning prospects, but women who are already middle-aged and without education need more immediate access to assets, employment, etc. and (d) Alleviating poverty for women across age groups would require a focus on different elements of capabilities: for instan

## **MEASUREMENT**

At this juncture of the debate, when much has already been written, we need a focused discussion on measurement issues. One, there are large knowledge gaps in the measurement of income poverty by gender. Two, although the need to go beyond income poverty is now widely accepted, there is less consensus on the appropriate measures of gender d



## **NEED TO RETHINK SOME POLICY PRIORI**

econometrically robust studies show that property and asset ownership by mothers has significant better outcomes for the survival, education and health of children, than assets owned only by fathers (see discussions in Agarwal, 1994, 1998). Hence even for promoting female education in the next generation, it might be strategic to create immovable assets in adult women's hands in this generation.

*In other words, within the life cycle context a focus on the mother's assets might help daughters emerge out of income poverty.* And independent land access could also enhance women's agency and so help set in place a process for social an213217.19412447.800511s g

## **Social security and public facilities provisioning**

To cover old age and life cycle crises such as widowhood, effective social security systems need to be seen as an important element of poverty alleviation. These could also improve the bargaining power that the elderly and widows have with relatives. At the moment, many developing countries have quite inadequate social security systems. In India, for example, the idea of women's dependence and male benevolence is deeply embedded in the eligibility criteria of social security schemes, such as in widow's pensions. In several states, widows are eligible only if they have no adult son and in some only if they have no adult relative. In many cases only destitute widows are eligible. In practice, women who have a son or grandson of any age can have their applications rejected. Although similar assump. I

women's organizations, they could move an additional step toward empowerment. Again this needs to be taken into account by both governments and NGOs.

More generally, it appears essential that any strategy that seeks women's empowerment have, as a central component, *the enhancement of women's ability to function collectively in their own interest.*

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