Gender, Generation and Poverty
Exploring the ‘Feminisation of Poverty’ in Africa, Asia and Latin America

The late Sylvia Chant FRSA, FAcSS, formerly Professor of Development Geography, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

In Gender, Generation and Poverty Sylvia Chant challenges the ‘feminisation of poverty’ on the basis of recent fieldwork in The Gambia, Philippines and Costa Rica. Interviews with over 220 women and men of different ages at the grassroots, as well as with 40 professionals in international agencies, government departments and NGOs, highlight the difficulties of establishing any general tendency towards a widening of gender disparities in income poverty, or for female household heads to be the ‘poorest of the poor’. While not denying a ‘female bias’ in material privation, a more important and consistent pattern is that women are bearing an ever-greater burden of responsibility for household survival, and under especially exploitative conditions in male-headed units. These findings lead Chant to propose a more elaborate and nuanced construction of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ which incorporates inputs as well as incomes and takes greater account of gender relations within the home. This not only stands to enrich gendered poverty analysis, but to provide a more appropriate basis for policy interventions.

‘For practitioners and students of development, and library collections on women in development or comparative development. Highly recommended.’
— J.A. Fiola, Choice

‘Sylvia Chant provides the most lucid treatment to date of the debate over the relationship between gender and poverty, and, based on new research from Africa, Latin America and Southeast Asia, critically engages and moves the discussion beyond the taken-for-granted assumptions that tend to govern this issue. Essential reading for scholars and policymakers alike.’
— Maxine Molyneux, University of London, UK

‘Sylvia Chant’s important new book, Gender, Generation and Poverty, challenges the widespread, uncritical belief in the feminisation of poverty – a central trope in development discourse, which explains both the nature of (and potential solutions for) global poverty. Drawing on rich, carefully documented case studies from The Gambia, Philippines and Costa Rica, Chant amply demonstrates the weaknesses of the feminisation of poverty perspective, particularly its tendency to link poverty to women, rather than gender relations, to emphasise women as victims, rather than agents, and to measure poverty by income privation, rather than grassroots subjective experiences. Chant calls for a more nuanced approach, one that pays attention to context, to the impact of gender relations between men and women and to the way generational change affects the gendered experience of poverty. Gender, Generation and Poverty thus has profound implications for both development praxis and theory. It should be required reading for anyone concerned with avoiding “cookie-cutter” approaches to understanding and alleviating poverty in an increasingly complex, unequal and insecure world. I think it is a landmark study, bringing a crucial, critical eye to a long-held “truism” of development thinking and practice.’
— Jane L. Parpart, Dalhousie University, Canada and Visiting Professor, LSE, UK

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