CHAPTER 5

CHANGING GENDER RELATIONS
IN THE HOUSEHOLD

In our village the women cannot do much. They do agricultural labor, bring fuel wood from the jungle, and look after children. —A man living near Bhopal, India 1997d

Having 10 daughters but no boy is the same as having no children.
—Vietnam 1999a

Sister, if you don’t beat them they’ll stop being good. And if they’re good and you beat them, they’ll stay that way. —Bangladesh 1996

One of the most important institutions in the lives of poor people is the household.22 Poverty interventions directly or indirectly affect and are affected by the household and gender relations, and hence the importance of exploring intra-household gender dynamics.23 The household is a basic unit of society where individuals both cooperate and compete for resources. It is also a primary place where in which individuals confront and reproduce societal norms, values, power, and privilege. Gender norms expressed within the household are reinforced and reflected in larger institutions of society. “Gender relations are not confined to the domestic arena — although households constitute an important institutional site on which gender relations are played out — but are made, remade and contested in a range of institutional arenas” (Kabeer 1997). In other words, this is not simply a story of the household and its members, but about the shaping of gender identities by larger institutions, and the ongoing participation of family members in creating new gender norms.

This chapter is about gender anxiety. The household is an institution that is strained and in flux. Vast economic, social, and political restructuring has not —with few exceptions— translated into increased economic opportunities for the poor. Under increasing economic pressure, men in many parts of the world have lost their traditional occupations and jobs, and women have been forced to take on additional income earning tasks while continuing their domestic tasks. These changes have touched core values about gender identity, gender power, and gender relations within poor households, and anxiety about what is a “good woman” or a “good man” seems pervasive. Values and relations are being broken, tested, contested, and renegotiated in silence, pain, and violence. What is striking is that despite widespread changes in gender roles, traditional gender norms have shown remarkable tenacity, leaving families struggling to meet the often contradictory demands.

This tension impacts all household members. It is unclear whether the changes will in fact lead to more equitable gender relations within the household in the absence of outside support, without

22 The terms “household” and “family” will be used interchangeably in this chapter.
23 Gender intersects in complex ways with race, class, caste, religion, education, life cycle, geography and marital status.
going through the trauma of abuse, alcohol, separation, divorce and dissolution of the household. The PPA reports capture the silent trauma going on within poor households which has yet to be factored in poverty reduction strategies.

Over and over again, across countries, women were identified and identified themselves as "homemakers," the keepers of the family, responsible for the well-being of their children and husbands. The PPAs relate that women often feel powerless and yet are willing to undertake considerable risk in order to provide for their children. The reports also relate the entrenched nature of men’s identities as ‘breadwinners and decision-makers’ even as these roles are undermined and eroded by changing social and economic environments. These socially defined roles of men and women are not only unattainable, they sometimes stand in stark contradiction with reality. This is what creates the stress and helplessness that this chapter argues is endemic in poor households today.

The PPAs show that households are adapting to acute and long term stress in gender-specific ways: men often seem to react with defeat while women react by “swallowing their pride” and taking desperate action. When men are unemployed or underemployed, women enter low-income, low-status jobs in order to feed their families. As a consequence of their inability to contribute adequately to the family income, men may start feeling “redundant” and burdensome to households; they experience disorienting challenges to their perceptions of themselves as providers and heads of families, often resulting in anger and frustration. Women, on the other hand, continue to care for their families and gain a shaky new confidence, though their connections to employment remain tenuous.

The Swaziland PPA notes, “the pressures of poverty are experienced very differently by men and women. Men have experienced a threat to their social status, self respect, and confidence in their economic role as providers for their family, through the loss of their cattle and through increased dependence on the informal earnings of their wife to meet basic household needs. Many instances were cited of men who had left the community and deserted their families because of debt they could not repay, or simply because they were unable to provide for their wives and children” (Swaziland 1997). These broad patterns are summarized in Figure 6.

**Figure 6. Economic Disruption and Gender Anxiety**

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<tr>
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<th>MALE</th>
<th>FEMALE</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional Identity</strong></td>
<td>Breadwinner</td>
<td>Caregiver</td>
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<td><strong>Roles</strong></td>
<td>Income Earner</td>
<td>Mother, Wife</td>
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<td><strong>Reaction</strong></td>
<td>Stress, humiliation, alcohol, drugs,</td>
<td>Stress, conflict, anger, hopelessness</td>
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<td>(to male job loss)</td>
<td>violence</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Adaptation</strong></td>
<td>Collapse, defeat</td>
<td>Take action, risky low income, low status jobs, and family care, depression</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Consequences</strong></td>
<td>“Redundant males” in households, collapse, family break-up</td>
<td>Shaky new confidence, vulnerability, family break-up</td>
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<td><strong>Interventions</strong></td>
<td>Employment creation</td>
<td>Protection, organization, employment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dialogues</strong></td>
<td>Male-Female Identity</td>
<td>Male-Female Identity</td>
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136
What is the outcome for households of shifting gender identities? Some households cope by cooperating and dealing with these gender shifts. For other families, it ends in violence, breakup, or divorce.

This chapter is structured upon the information found in the PPAs and the patterns, linkages, and relationships that emerged from listening to the voices of the poor. We first discuss some key concepts that are useful for understanding the findings emerging from the PPA analyses. We then focus on traditional gender norms, gender identity, and traditional divisions of labor. The impact of large scale economic and political change on gender relations and the changing roles for men and women are then discussed. Last, two sectoral case studies on education and property rights are presented to demonstrate how gender roles and rights in the household affect and are affected by these larger institutions in society. There is one striking imbalance. We find remarkably little information on men’s lives compared to women’s lives. Hence the section on men, while revealing, is brief. It appears that despite a switch in terminology, development thinking is very much still caught in the framework of “women in development.”

**Roots of Gender Inequality**

*Very few men work hand in hand with women as far as getting essential commodities for the family.* —Kalangala focus group, Uganda 1994

From multiple perspectives, women find themselves in subordinate positions to men. In most societies, women are socially, culturally, and economically dependent on men. Violence against women is “an extreme expression of male dominance” and “one of the most intractable violations of women’s human rights” (Bradley qtd. in Davies 1994:18).

The persistence of domestic violence across many societies suggests that it is not merely a characteristic of particular individuals but is, at a deeper level, related to social structures that maintain unequal socioeconomic relations between men and women.\(^\text{24}\) At the core of gender-based violence are the unequal power relations that limit women’s choices and reinforce dependency on men. In Cameroon, for example, control and dependency is perpetuated in different ways. Women in some regions require a husband’s, father’s, or brother’s permission to go out. In addition, a “woman’s husband or brother has access to her bank accounts, but not vice versa, providing him with information on her assets. When women in one farmers’ group were asked how their husbands used their money, they laughed and said, ‘We don’t know’” (Cameroon 1995). Davies argues, “The social, political, and economic dependence of women on men provides a structure wherein men can perpetuate violence against women” (Davies 1994:4). Despite the widespread nature of domestic violence, it appears to be a socially and politically “untouchable” subject even by state agencies and international institutions.\(^\text{25}\) One PPA report

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\(^{24}\) According to a WHO (World Health Organization) compilation of 17 primary survey studies undertaken around the world between 1990 and 1997, between 20-50% of women sampled report physical abuse by their intimate partners (WHO 1997). Although there are mixed data about whether violence in the home is decreasing, increasing or staying level, a few studies identify an increase in abusive behavior with the length of marriage. In India, in rural Gujrat for example, 53% of newlyweds report verbal abuse as compared to 85% of women married for more than 15 years (Visaria 1999).

\(^{25}\) The UN Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) for example, makes
stated, “Wife beating is a family problem not to be discussed publicly. Sometimes the cause is that women are rude and arrogant with their husbands who beat them to discipline them. But some men are just oppressive and like to mistreat their wives” (Tanzania 1997). Unfortunately, men’s reactions to their own violence against women is not often recorded in the PPAs.

When authority is challenged, men experience stress and exert their right to control the women in their lives through threats and violence. Moreover, this violence, depending upon prevailing social norms and structures, may even be “naturalized” by the victim and perceived as acceptable or normal. Rupesinghe and Rubio (1994) argue, “An outstanding feature of structural violence is that the victim is also a part of it, in a position of acquiescence or confrontation. We cannot predetermine which of these positions will be taken, because this depends, among other factors, upon the degree to which the victim has internalized the predominant culture or the degree of criticism towards it that he or she has developed” (1994:50). A PPA from Jamaica reports that “On occasion, when women felt able to speak openly about their experiences, stories of everyday domestic brutality, fear, and a sense of being trapped emerged” (Jamaica 1997).

**Traditional Gender Norms**

*Like hens, women wait for cocks to crow announcing the arrival of daylight.*  
—Ghanaian proverb 1995a

*The cock does not know how to look after chicks, but only knows how to feed itself.*  —Jamaican proverb 1997

A norm is a shared expectation of behavior that expresses what is considered culturally desirable and appropriate, while a role is a set of norms attached to a social position (Marshall 1994). Social norms are reinforced through popular culture, radio, television, traditional art forms, proverbs and stories, customs, laws, and everyday practice. Common proverbs such as, “When a girl is born, the karma must be bad” (Nepal), and in India “A good girl suffers in silence” indicate that cultural norms are deeply embedded and understood as “facts.” In general, as a Ugandan man succinctly stated, “Women are taken to be the inferior gender” (Uganda 1996).

Women’s “inferiority” is used to justify discrimination and abuse in the household and in society at large and power inequity is reflected and reinforced by traditional and modern laws and institutional practices. A woman’s extra-household bargaining power with legal authorities, society, and the market impacts her intra-household bargaining power (Agarwal 1997). In country after country, women explained that their right to inheritance was either non-existent or limited. When women did have inheritance rights and asserted them, they risked social ostracism from the very same kin networks in which they base their daily survival.

*Even if a woman is given a chicken or a goat by her parents, she cannot own it. It belongs to her husband. A wife may work hard and get a chicken. If it lays eggs, they belong to the husband.*  (Uganda 1998)

reference to violence against women in three articles, but does not explicitly state it as a problem.

26 Durga Pokhrel, personal communication.
The ability of men and their families to throw women out of their married homes with or without a final divorce, without even their own jewelry, reflects a social inequality of power. The threat of divorce is perhaps an even more potent deterrent to women’s self-assertion. In North India, the idea that “A woman leaves her father’s home in a wedding palanquin and only returns in a coffin” is staple fare for many a Mumbai film.

Researchers in Bangladesh report that men see wife-beating as their right and use religious and sociological arguments to legitimize this right. Some men claim that it is condoned in Islamic religious texts. Others described hitting their wives as a normal way to keep women’s unruly natures in check (Schuler et al 1998). The Bangladesh PPA tells of a 17-year-old woman, married for five years. Her parents had paid about TK 40,000 in ornaments and household goods in dowry. About 18 months ago, she was thrown out of her house by her husband after he found that she had not cooked dinner because she was sick: “He scolded her and physically assaulted her for not preparing his meal. Her mother-in-law joined in the abuse, and that evening [she] was sent back to her parents without the baby” (Bangladesh 1996). In order to file for divorce, her husband is trying to get a certificate from a doctor to declare her insane. However, the woman’s parents’ most cherished desire is that her husband will take her back again.

Other researchers in Bangladesh report women’s silence as a self-protecting strategy in the face of few social or economic options. “If I ever argue with him, he hits me,” one woman in Bangladesh said. “I don’t argue much because he might abandon me, and I would have no place to go. Usually he doesn’t beat me unless my shortcoming is serious” (Schuler et al., 1998). A widow from the genocide in Rwanda reported being treated like a “horse” on the property of her former husband. She added, “My husband’s parents are like strangers, yet one day they may leave their land there and claim my fields” (Rwanda 1998).

Similarly, in Kenya, women reported being chased out of their homes by their husbands without even their utensils. In Ukraine, Latvia, and Macedonia, women said that they did not bother to report rape because of lack of action by authorities. Around the world, women reported having little recourse when faced with abuse and threats to property and their lives.

While many women organize, take action, and protest,27 in the studies analyzed, poor women reported using individual exit strategies, becoming silent, or using indirect ways of asserting themselves. Women also try to improve their lives by using indirect or discreet, traditionally and culturally appropriate means to negotiate more authority in the household. In South Africa, poor women felt that they could gain more by manipulating men than by rejecting them. They spoke of the "art" of selecting the "right man" and of asserting oneself in a relationship. Being able to get your man to hand over his wages at the end of the week was viewed as a major achievement. “This way”, one woman stated, “you are in charge and you can decide how to spend the money” (South Africa 1998).

Social norms are remarkably tenacious. Even in the face of changing gender roles, rigid social norms ground men and women in particular identities and expectations. These norms constitute a formidable barrier to survival of individuals, households, and communities. PPAs confirm that traditional gender norms and roles continue to play a role in the perpetuation of poverty.

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27 For a review of women’s movements in the Third World, see Ray and Kortweg, 1999.
Gender Identity

*Women can do all the work, except to propose marriage. Nature does not allow women to marry men, just like nature does not allow men to wash dishes, cook and sweep. People will lose confidence in a man and his wife if they find him in the kitchen.* —Older woman, Uganda 1994

*In our culture women tend to feel small. Men have always been the leaders; their voice is final.* —South Africa 1998

*Domestic work is usually divided into male and female and is thus performed. Women cook, clean, wash, bring water (where there is no water supply); while men take care of the heating, repairing of the house, and if necessary, help their wives with the children.* —Macedonia 1998

Identity is a person’s sense of self. Based on social difference, it is a fundamentally relational concept. Some aspects of identity are given, such as age and race, while others are changeable, such as career, place of residence, and degree of participation in social networks. It follows then that identities can be created or changed and used in strategic and pragmatic ways for one’s own benefit.

Akerlof and Kranton (1999) connect the psychology and sociology of identity to economic behavior. “Stereotypical characteristics of men are competitive, acquisitive, autonomous, independent, confrontational, concerned about private goods. Parallel stereotypes of women are cooperative, nurturing, caring, connecting, group oriented, concerned about public goods.” Thus, gender identity even plays a role in shaping economic outcomes. In Swaziland for instance, “most women in the rural communities reported needing the permission of their husband, or his nearest male relative proxy, to seek employment. Often, selling vegetables or crafts were the only culturally approved income-generating activities and, as a result, the competition for these activities was very strong. Many rural women said they believed they were poor precisely because their husbands refused to let them work” (Swaziland 1997).

With marked consistency around the world, data from the PPAs show that men’s primary role is that of breadwinner and decision-maker, and women’s primary role is that of family caretaker. Moreover, urban-rural differences do not particularly interfere with fundamental norms around female and male roles. In Panama, for instance, “In urban communities, girls ‘stay at home, do homework, watch TV, and do house work, the wash, and sweep floors while boys are allowed to go to the sports fields. The situation is not very different in rural communities, where girls help their mothers sweeping floors and working in the vegetable garden. Later in life, in rural communities men do ‘work,’ going to the fields and clearing with machete and the like. Women’s cooking is not considered work. Women participate in the harvest but not in sowing the seeds” (Panama 1998).

Rather, women are identified and identify themselves as the keepers of the family responsible for the health, education, and well-being of their children and husbands. In this way, concepts of identity influence how power and work are organized in households through gender divisions of
labor. A report from Vietnam defines gender roles simply: “The husband makes the big
decisions in investments and housing while his wife is responsible for the children and for the
household, including marketing” (Vietnam 1996). In Uganda, women said that men controlled
the profits of women’s labor and restricted their access to household income, which prompted
the saying “Women plan the income and men plan the expenditure” (Uganda 1998). In many
societies, women feel that that “homework” is their natural duty. In India, “women’s perception
regarding the household work reflects their firm belief in traditional gender division of labor. It
can be seen that all cleaning work within the household is done by women and that they think it
is their duty to do household work once they are married into another family. Women from
Dudkasira and Saltarpalli have expressed that the very purpose of marriage is to bring in extra
hands into the house to take care of household work” (India 1998a).

Though traditional identities, norms, roles, and behaviors exist and continue to “be a determinant
in the cultural and social perpetuation of poverty” (Cameroon 1995), the PPAs show clearly and
vividly that tradition is not static. Economic hardship is forcing poor people to adapt to new
environments and, in turn, these adaptive actions are wrenching change in gender roles in
households in both subtle and obvious ways.

**From Breadwinner to Burden: The Changing Roles of Poor Men**

*Your hands and feet are whole and all right, but you are unable to earn a living.*
—Unemployed man in Latvia 1998

*A happy man is an employed man.* —Niger 1996

When men’s roles are directly linked to income earning potential, any threat to earning potential
becomes a threat to gender identity and spills into gender relations. A South African PPA notes
a worrisome “absence of useful social and economic roles for men in the face of the current
division of labor within households, high unemployment, and the marginalization of men”
(South Africa 1998). Similarly, a Moldova report notes that, “Men used to enjoy higher incomes
and be considered the family breadwinner and household head. This is no longer always the
case, and men feel displaced when their wives earn more than they. These tensions contribute to
family stress and disintegration. Women often blame their husbands for the family’s financial
situation and criticize them for their lack of success in finding work. Unemployed or
underemployed husbands feel emasculated and angry; some confess to losing their tempers and
hitting wives and children” (Moldova 1997).

Male identity may intersect with ethnic identity and restrict men’s occupational options and
therefore put their gender identity at risk. In Mali it is found that “for men who do not migrate,
there are relatively few alternative strategies to pursue . . . as cultural taboos often prevent them
from engaging in activities reserved for other ethnic groups (e.g., a farmer could not fish,
because fishing is reserved to the Bozo group) or for a particular caste (e.g., blacksmiths or
potters)” (Mali 1993).

When jobs are difficult to come by, men may give up and neglect their families. “Men expressed
a sense of "social impotence," the inability to fulfill socially important roles as breadwinners for
their family. . . . Many female respondents felt that men had collapsed under the current stresses,
while they, because of their sense of responsibility towards their children and their greater psychological adaptability, had taken on greater burdens and become more proactive in their search for solutions” (Latvia 1997).

So strong is the tie between men’s self-worth and earning capacity that it may be difficult for men to even acknowledge their dependence on women’s incomes. In Pakistan for example, with men in rural areas, researchers experienced great difficulty in uncovering the extent of women’s economic activities. There is both social stigma about women having to leave the house to work and a sense of shame among men that women have to work to earn incomes. Researchers found that the subject could be broached only after talking about health issues. Discussions revealed that in addition to walking long distances for fodder and fuel wood, women worked as laborers on nearby landholdings and on rice farms in the neighboring province (Pakistan 1993).

Household members often unknowingly redefine gender roles as they take action to adapt to changing environments These actions and opportunities are influenced by the broader institutional environment in which households exist and interact such as the state, the market, and the community. It may be easier for women to step outside their traditional roles for the sake of their children than for men. For example, in Latvia men may be ashamed to do traditionally women’s work, but “society pardons a woman for doing men’s work when she does so to feed her children. . . . The ‘breadwinner’ of the family is now anyone—even children—who procure work and income, and this role gives a commensurate authority in the family” (Georgia 1997). When men become “redundant,” the stage is set for family conflict. Similarly, it may be more culturally acceptable for women compared to men to ask for help. “When the situation is desperate, women will ask as discreetly as possible for gifts from relatives or their women’s group. Men will not do this, but for women it is more acceptable because ‘they do it for their children and the children belong to the community’” (Mali 1993).

Due to the traditional expectation that men will provide for a family’s livelihood, the adverse affects of unemployment on men and the coping strategies used by them, can resonate throughout a family. A young man in Gabon explained, “As time passes . . . unemployment begins to undermine the young man’s self-esteem. He starts to see himself . . . as having failed in his supreme duty as father and head of household, and this may drive him to drink and violence. When I don’t know how my children are going to eat tomorrow, I tend to get drunk whenever I can. It helps me forget my problems” (Gabon 1997).

Of course, not all men break down. In some societies, despite rigid prescriptions of appropriate gender roles, some men cope with economic stress by adopting new roles in the household as women becomes the new breadwinners. In one urban area in Pakistan, poor men were observed to spend much time carrying their young children with them. However, women still retained primarily responsibility for domestic chores (Pakistan 1993).
Women: The New Breadwinners

Whether a woman wants it or not, the man must control the money, and if she refuses she is in danger of being ‘retrenched’ (sent away from home).
—Woman in Kabarole, Uganda 1998

Where there are jobs, they tend to go to men, not to women. —Mexico 1995

Rather than suffering from poverty, we should better go sweep up the garbage in other people’s houses. —Moldova 1997

In their desperation to keep the family together and provide food for their children, poor women have emerged in large numbers in the informal sector, despite the risk and discrimination they face. They make up only one percent of the formal labor force (Beneria 1989). The Indian study 1997a documents a typical pattern: “women receive consistently lower wages than their male counterparts for the same work due to extremely prevalent wage discrimination, especially true in the interior parts of the tehsils (districts). While men are likely to spend a significant portion of their income for personal use (e.g. smoking, drinking, gambling), the women in the survey villages tended to devote virtually all of their income to the family (for food, medical treatment, school fees and clothing for the children).” Over and over again, what emerges is that women are prepared to do jobs considered too demeaning by men to ensure that their children survive. In Swaziland for example, while women considered work-for-food programs crucial to survival, men did not work on them, as they considered it “degrading, a form of slavery, and inadequate” (Swaziland 1997). As mentioned above, some men instead took the option of leaving the family.

As men become unemployed and under-employed, households increasingly depend on women’s incomes in jobs, which are often considered marginal or degrading. Women’s participation in the informal labor force ranges from 20 percent to 80 percent from country to country. (Charmes 1998). Globally women are not the majority employed in the informal sector, but they produce the majority of informal sector GDP. This is due to their taking on multiple income-generating roles within the sector. With the exception of Latin America, the majority of employed women are in the informal sector (Charmes 1998).

The informal economic sector is that which is legally unregulated and untaxed, and it tends to expand in times of overall economic stress. While the informal sector offers some opportunities for women to earn income, it is also laden with risk as informal workers are frequently exploited, abused, asked to engage in physically demanding or dangerous occupations, and deprived of legal recourse. Castellas (1997) and Portes (1998) characterize the informal sector as evolving “along the borders of social struggles, incorporating those too weak

28 Recent surveys show that the informal sector comprises 50 percent of GDP in Latin America, 40–60 percent of GDP in Asia, and 75 percent of GDP in Africa. From the perspective of a household, informal sector activities contribute a significant source of income. For example, in Africa informal sector income accounts for nearly 25 percent of rural non-agricultural income, nearly 30 percent of total income, and over 40 percent of total urban income. Moreover, it is likely that the size of the informal sector is larger than official statistics suggest since much of women’s paid work is not counted in official statistics.
to defend themselves, rejecting those who become too conflictive, and propelling those with stamina and resources in entrepreneurship.” Its characteristics include small scale economic activity, self-employment (usually including a high proportion of family workers and apprentices) little capital and equipment, labor intensive technology, low skills, low level of organization, limited access to organized markets, formal credit, training, and services (Charmes 1998; Gómez-Buenidía 1995).

Women are still disadvantaged in labor markets, for example, because children are seen as burdens on workers and women are primarily responsible for their care. Sometimes employers are also reluctant to hire younger women in their early 20’s “because they fear that she will soon have a child and go on maternity leave. If she already has a child it is assumed that the child will frequently fall ill and she, as the primary if not the only caregiver, will often be absent from work” (Ukraine 1996).

Women’s vulnerability in the market place takes different forms in different countries. In many of the countries in Eastern Europe expectation of sexual favors of young women seem to be widespread. This also makes it very difficult for women over 25 years to get jobs. “Women in their early 20’s who do get hired often complain of sexual harassment. Employers feel licensed to make such demands on their female employees knowing that the alternative to refusing is simply unemployment. The knowledge that young women face a tremendous uphill battle to find a steady job paying a living wage encourages employers to make outrageous demands of female employees who frequently complain only to one another.” (Ukraine, 1996.)

In Macedonia, the unemployed poor also said that the cut-off age for women to be hired was 25 years, and being attractive helped. Older (above 25 years) women said “it happens that we apply to an advertisement requesting cleaning ladies, dishwashers, sales persons and secretaries. When they learn how old we are they say we are too old too be employed . . .” An unemployed woman from Skopje said, “I applied several times to an advertisement requiring a cleaning lady and agreed with the owner to meet at a certain place. Sometimes I would wait for an hour and nobody would come. I suppose they would see me from a distance and since I am not young—I am 41 years old and not attractive—they would leave.” (Macedonia 1998).

In many parts of Bangladesh (1996), poor women said that lack of employment was their major problem. But women wanted opportunities for self-employment based in their own homes as they feel they cannot leave their homes and children.

In Rwanda women adapted to changing economies by using diverse survival strategies including increasing the rate of domestic work in the form of childcare, gardening, and housekeeping in the homes of the average and rich. Strategies also include adopting traditionally male jobs such as construction work, vending from small booths and kiosks on the roads, selling from door-to-door, and participating in formal and informal rotating credit schemes. Often, this category of work is unregulated, and women are exposed to theft and police harassment, among other dangers. The Rwanda report introduces the phrase “Running the marathon”: “Women run around because they haven’t the means to rent space in the market and to pay municipal taxes. “Marathon” comes from the coming and going across town to avoid the police, who patrol unauthorized areas” (Rwanda 1998).
The Niger PPA confirms women’s adaptability and determination to support their families. “Commercial activity is risky. Bankruptcies occur and capital is hard to come by to start up again. Many men abandon commercial activity, while women often recycle themselves back into the market even if this entails a smaller scale activity and less income. Among the poor urban households interviewed, business was limited to petty trade, which brings in little money and so is primarily a female activity. The most common business women undertake is the sale of cooked food, especially la beale, a mixture of millet flour and curdled milk. A few women had moved to the Benin border or into villages along the river to sell cloth or fresh fish. The women not able to engage in small business activities grind millet for those who are selling it or work as maids” (Niger 1996).

Not only are women contributing economically to the household in nontraditional ways, they are maintaining their traditional roles as homemakers as well. A PPA from India notes, “[Women] make a significant contribution to the household chores such as fetching water, collecting firewood, procuring groceries, preparing meals and taking them to the fields for male members, cleaning, washing clothes, looking after the children. In addition to all the household responsibilities, they also do agricultural labor and road construction, spin thread, and make bidi, (hand-rolled leaf cigarettes) which increases their workload considerably” (India 1997b).

As a result, women’s overall work burden of has increased relative to that of men. A report from Nigeria says, “For both urban and rural women, the time chart shows that within a single hour, a woman is involved with multiple roles. In Akeju Rabin, within a one-hour period a woman undertook cooking, breastfeeding, picking food items, washing utensils, drying cocoa and preparing yam/cassava flour” (Nigeria 1996). The demands of paid and unpaid labor consume most of women’s days (see Box 18). Women report feeling isolated because “the workload left them no space for relaxation with friends” (Swaziland 1997) In Ecuador, studies indicate that “women in the communities studied had work days of 15-18 hours; culturally leisure is considered unacceptable for women, and they may work at spinning wool even as they walk and talk” (Ecuador 1996a).

Women’s workloads also have consequences for their children. In Uganda, women’s 15 to 18 hours of work per day results in a neglect of children due to time constraints and fatigue. In addition, the younger generation and urban women are increasingly working outside of the home with no reduction in domestic chores. However, when women’s work outside the home begins to be profitable, it is no longer identified as women’s work, and men take over. In Arua district “it was revealed that as the cash crop production moved from farming practices to marketing and sale, the involvement of men increased and that of women decreased, such that the women performed the majority of the manual labor while men received the financial returns from the sale” (Uganda 1998).
Box 18. Women’s Domestic Work in South Africa

Unpaid domestic work is a full time job for women. They must balance the many tasks including childcare, farming, shopping, cooking, and water collection.

*I would like to spend more time with my baby, feeding and washing her, but I have to spend two hours at a time fetching the water. Fieldwork takes up most of the time as we have to get up as early as 4 a.m. to go to the field and leave the baby behind not knowing whether he will be fed in time or not.*

*At times domestic work makes me feel tired and I cannot look after the baby properly.*

*In the winter we spend more time in our gardens where we spend a lot of time watering the vegetables, as we have to collect the water from the river.*

Source: South Africa 1998

Women who enter the labor force may find work in nontraditional and traditional occupations. Women are engaged in trade, migrant labor, and to some extent in sex trade, and in traditional occupations such as domestic worker and maids.

**Trade: A Growth Opportunity for Women**

*I was not brought up to be a smuggler, and in the former system such activity was punishable and rightfully ridiculed.* —Macedonia 1998

Charmes (1998) establishes that in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, for example, women’s make up 65 percent of the trading force. The Georgia PPA confirms that “Interestingly, women have come to play an important role in trade, even when it involves behavior once considered unseemly for women, such as traveling abroad by themselves and absenting themselves from their families. It may be their very lack of integration into the male world of doing things through long established ties and procedures that has allowed them to move so readily into this new niche. Also, women’s responsibility for the daily welfare of children and family has been a strong incentive to swallow their pride and move into such “unprestigious” activities as street trade” (Georgia 1997).

Women have become active in trade, “shuttling” goods in the region. In many countries, women are less harassed than men are by police and border guards. In Armenia, because many younger men are in hiding to avoid the military draft, people felt it was easier for women to step into this role as trader. In Georgia women travel in small groups between countries such as Russia, Turkey, Hungary and Poland, trading and selling goods. They have to contend with various “Mafia” and corrupt police (Georgia 1997). The most predominant groups among female traders are those who are unmarried, widowed, divorced, or whose husbands are unemployed (Armenia 1995). Because of women’s greater ease of movement, increasingly women are hired to run drugs across borders because they are less likely to be suspected by authorities.

Poor households in Macedonia use their own savings and loans from friends and relatives to smuggle goods from Bulgaria, Turkey and resell them on the local streets and in the markets. In Macedonia, “women frequently deal with smuggling. The reason for this is that they raise less suspicion at the border crossings, so they more easily pass the border. But some of the women
who earn money in this way consider it insulting. “I was not brought up to be a smuggler, and in the former system such activity was punishable and rightfully ridiculed” (Macedonia 1998).

According to the PPA from Cameroon, the outcomes of women’s participation in the informal sector has both positive and negative outcomes: “Increased participation of women in the informal sector has opened up avenues for female empowerment and innovation, and, in the Far North, has given them increased mobility. Such changes are tempered by increasing dropout rates, early marriage, and prostitution of young girls, an increasingly prevalent mechanism for coping with falling incomes” (Cameroon 1995).

**Domestic Workers and Maids**

> *We are not living. We are just surviving.* —Group of women in Tanzania 1997

Domestic work is typically done by girls and young women, who in effect have been socialized to be domestic workers through gender divisions of labor within the household. A PPA from India explains, “Girls need to help their mothers in carrying out household chores, and the minimum knowledge to run the household can be acquired at home” (India 1998a). These skills can then be carried into labor markets.

In Senegal, for example, young women and girls from rural areas migrate into cities as farm labor needs decline. “When demand for their work in the rice fields wanes, many young girls from the Casamance migrate to urban areas in search of (low-paid) work as maids or laundresses (41 percent of all domestics are under age 18)” (Senegal 1995). And in Niger, “Our daughters work as maids in homes from where they bring their midday and evening meals. Their salary rarely exceeds CFAF 3,000 a month. With this, we scramble to make a little business of cooked dishes; we save a bit for the family, but most is sold. The earnings buy water, soap, and a few condiments. By the end of the month, the salary has barely made ends meet” (Niger 1996). The low salary of domestic work is sometimes compensated for by in-kind payments. In Pakistan, employers will pay school fees for some domestic workers: “However, private charity or patronage often comes with strings attached in the way of obligations to repay the donor in labor, loyalty, or even commitment to supporting a particular political party” (Pakistan 1993).

In some cases, however, domestic work provides a substantial income, and pays better wages than professional work or casual work done by males. For example, in Nicaragua, the basic teacher’s salary reported is 506 cordobas per month, less than that of a domestic worker. One teacher observed, “A domestic maid is asking 700 cordobas, and she gets extra salary for Christmas and holidays.”(Nicaragua, 1998). In Pakistan, “women domestic workers in Dhok Naddi, Rawalpindi make Rs 600 to 1,000 per month, while unskilled male casual workers make Rs 700 to 1,000. But men are only guaranteed regular work at this rate during the peak summer season” (Pakistan 1993).

Even with relatively high wages and in-kind compensation, domestic workers often do not make an adequate income to survive, and the PPAs show that they must find additional sources of income. Domestic workers are vulnerable to cutbacks by employers in hours and benefits, or unemployment in the domestic work sector. Some studies found that non-poor households are cutting down on non-essential expenditures, often seeking savings by reducing the hours
requested or benefits for low-paid workers such as maids or laundresses” (Senegal 1995). In Ethiopia, “In desperation, some [domestic workers] turn to hidden prostitution to make ends meet . . .” (Ethiopia 1998).

Workplace harassment and abuse of domestic workers is described in many PPAs. When possible, parents prevent young girls from working as maids to protect them from possible sexual harassment. A PPA from Pakistan describes how older women sought to protect daughters from workplace sexual harassment: “In Dhok Naddi in Rawalpindi District for example, older women continued in domestic service for as long as their physical strength would allow in order to protect their daughters from the rigors of the work and the sexual harassment that often accompanies it” (Pakistan 1993). In short, despite relatively good wages, domestic work is generally thought of as a bad job with low status, and is often seen as a last resort for female employment.

**Female Migrant Labor**

*We came to Niamy with our children to find food and our husbands. Those who stayed behind in the village, who did not migrate, because they didn’t have the money for the trip—our cousins, our brothers—what has happened to them? —Niger 1996*

While certain jobs are still traditionally “women’s work,” gender norms are shifting in the formerly male work enclave of migrant labor, and female labor migration is increasing. Often female labor migration takes place precisely to take advantage of more lucrative domestic positions in other regions and countries. International domestic work is seen as a solution to poverty for young women as described in this example from Moldova: “Women have increasingly broken into the formerly male domain of seasonal labor migration. . . . Greece has become a significant destination for young women, who work as maids and nannies for $400-600 a month. ‘Rather than suffering from poverty, we should better go sweep up the garbage in other peoples’ houses,’ explained one respondent. Elena also wishes to go, but still lacks the $600 to pay for a passport, visa and transportation” (Moldova 1997).

Migration can bring several risks to the household. Migrant work can be dangerous for both the migrant worker and thus the family, which is dependent on remittance income. Remittance payments themselves can be irregular. In Nkundusi, many women confirmed that remittances were small and often irregular (South Africa 1998). In one household, business failure left a Mareueli family with a $2,000 debt incurred by the absent member who disappeared (Georgia 1997). Migration itself is risky, as work may not exist on the other side. In one PPA, women migrants noted that “Niamey has changed over the last two years. Today there is no work, no dry food (to send back to the village), no old clothes. People here don’t even have enough for themselves” (Niger 1996).

In Mali, women’s migration in search of income is a recent phenomenon which is hardly admitted by men who claim they would never allow their women to leave—“if the women leave, then everybody leaves.” (Mali 1993). Women go to the rice fields to barter their crafts, work in the rice fields or prepare food for the harvesters. They are often paid in kind, mainly in rice. The two or three bags of rice they bring home are sold in the village, while the men’s rice is stocked
for home consumption. Young women also migrate to towns as maids, washer women; their salary goes partly for their dowry and partly to their husbands or fathers.

In addition, for families who migrate together, some members may be excluded from receiving social services in their host countries. A man in Vietnam, for example, was the only household member with official permanent registration. The mother and children are classified as long-term temporary residents, without access to free state healthcare and education:

Ms. D has lived with her husband and their four children in Ward 5 since 1986 . . . She goes every day to a different place in the city to buy recyclables and sell them for a small profit. Her husband has official permanent registration, but she does not. Because they were late with their marriage registration, she and her children are only classified as long-term temporary residents. Her three older children go to evening classes because they cannot go to a regular day school. The youngest daughter is four years old but she does not attend kindergarten. “How can I afford that?” D asks. For a week now she has had a pain in her belly near the scar of her last operation. She dare not go to the hospital for a check-up because she is afraid that she will not have the money to pay for it. She does not have a free health check book like some other poor people in the neighborhood. She buys some pain-killing pills at a local pharmacy to take. (Vietnam 1999b)

When families do not migrate together, the family that remains may be forced to contend with new divisions of labor. A Moldova PPA illustrates shifts in gender roles related to migration:

The prolonged absence of husbands, and in some cases wives, has further challenged the division of labor and power in the family. When husbands leave for a season or even longer . . . women take over traditionally male responsibilities and decision-making. Sometimes prolonged absence turns into abandonment, as men establish new families where they work, and women are left to support their children and themselves as best they can. A few women have, likewise, used trips abroad to search for new husbands. Sometimes, husbands object to their wives’ working abroad, fearing her prolonged absence may result in divorce. (Moldova 1997)

Finally, migrant work may lead to family dissolution, as men and women establish new families at their current work location (Moldova 1997). Similarly in Armenia, young wives whose husbands migrate to Russia sometimes find themselves in vulnerable positions. Young wives left behind have been seduced by brothers-in-law and fathers-in-law; some men have abandoned their families in Armenia, while others have brought them to live with the "first family." “The Armenian wives tend to swallow their pain and humiliation, knowing that they and their children are dependant on the earnings from Russia. Sometimes the two families establish positive relationships, and the ‘Russian wife’ has taken the Armenian children to Russia for an education” (Armenia 1995). While migrant work has stressed household relations, many women may benefit from related independent incomes (Moldova 1997; Georgia 1997). Likewise, family dissolution is not necessarily a disempowering experience for women, and it is certainly empowering for some women.
Migration and Sex Work

I would not survive were it not for my lovers. —Georgia 1997

Increased worker mobility is often related to sex work for both men and women. In Armenia, for example, “Some female traders also engage in prostitution while abroad. Family members, even husbands, sometimes turn a blind eye to their wives’ prostitution because the income is essential to the family. Although discouraged by the trading firms working in the Persian Gulf, prostitution in Dubai is very profitable” (Armenia 1995). A group in Teklehaiananot also noted an increase in prostitution since 1993, driven by the arrival of more female migrants from rural areas and by a larger number of women from the kebele, previously employed as maids, becoming prostitutes for economic reasons (Ethiopia 1998).

Migration for sex work can preserve honor in a profession often considered shameful. A self-sustaining mother from the eastern region in Macedonia explains, “I am 45 years old and I feel incapable of such thing, but I am forced to do it and bear shame before the children. I do it in neighboring cities to avoid unpleasant situations in the city I live in” (Macedonia 1998). This is also true in Georgia where “some women find it less shameful to engage in prostitution outside Georgia, particularly to Greece and Turkey, sometimes in connection with the shuttle trade, sometimes sending money home to their families.” Sometimes “lovers” is used as a euphemism in the PPA reports. A divorced Roma woman explains, “I would not survive were it not for my lovers” (who help her with money and gifts) (Georgia 1997). In Swaziland, some women report exchanging sex for food (Swaziland 1997). In Moldova, many newspapers now carry job offers for “nice girls who are not self-conscious”; invitations for weekends or longer vacations and attach a list of young women and their photographs (Moldova 1997).

Sex work comes in many forms, including the trade in children and women. This can mean an underground traffic in children, or the sale of women as brides. “In Marneuli, some families are said to sell women and girls as brides to buyers in Uzbekistan; in 1989-92, the going price was 3,000 to 5,000 rubles” (Georgia 1997).

Consequences and Coping

He gets up in the morning, he looks at me, and he asks, “Is there any dinner?” If I say there isn’t any; he starts drinking. —A female respondent in Tbilisi, Georgia 1997

Economic changes and the changes they effect on gender roles can produce significant household stress, humiliation, and conflict in both men and women. Unable to contribute adequately to the family, men may feel powerless, redundant, burdensome, and may react violently. Women, on the other hand, continue to care for their families and sometimes walk out of abusive relations. Women may gain confidence as they start earning and retaining cash incomes, yet due to their tenuous connections to employment they may also remain vulnerable.
The Georgia PPA reports that in many men unable to keep up with the socially mandated role of breadwinner, “their sense of emasculation and failure often leads to a host of physical ailments and sharply increasing mortality, alcoholism, physical abuse of wives and children, divorce and abandonment of families” (Georgia 1997).

**Alcohol Abuse**

*Eat and sleep then wake up and go drinking again—women’s response to the question, “What kind of work do men in your area do?” —Uganda 1998*

*We divorced because my husband was an alcoholic. He started selling property . . . to get money for alcohol. We had no shamba. When I stopped him from selling things, he beat me. He chased me, and I came to Korogocho [slums]” —Kenya 1996*

Alcohol is frequently used to manage and alleviate stress and has a strongly negative impact on household members. Men are reported to be drinking more in recent years in Macedonia: “They usually drink when they find somebody prepared to pay [for] their drinks. Their drinking is painful for those at his home, but they have already become used to such scenes like extensive talk, crying, loud music, and so on” (Macedonia 1998).

Reports from Latvia claim that “the most common causes of poverty are the death of the male provider, divorce, and most often male alcoholism” (Latvia 1997). High alcohol costs and the spending of male wages on leisure activities brings additional financial burdens to households (India 1998a; South Africa 1998). According to one report, alcohol abuse contributes to conflict within the household and beyond: “Alcoholic habits among the males put a tremendous strain on the financial and emotional well-being of the family, and also caused a great deal of conflict within individual households and the community as a whole. . . . There have been changes in their drinking habits due to the unavailability of traditional mahua liquor. . . . Whereas mahua liquor consumption did not create excessive financial burdens on the family, it is not uncommon for a man to spend an entire day’s income in a few hours of drinking the more costly ‘country’ liquor” (India 1997a). In Macedonia, a number of female respondents reported having lost spouses to alcohol-related car accidents (Macedonia 1998).

In Vietnam, drinking, drug abuse, gambling, domestic violence and crime are all reported as negative mechanisms used by some men to cope with poverty (Vietnam 1999b). In contrast to the negative coping strategies ascribed to male stress, several PPAs describe women as being particularly skilled in dealing with anxiety. Thus, while both men and some women abuse alcohol, “many respondents of both sexes felt that women had proved psychologically more resilient during periods of economic stress, perhaps because their identity depends more on performance of domestic and child-related tasks. Men, whose identity is more dependent on their ability to earn money, had crumbled more easily, and responded to economic difficulties by retreating into alcoholism and suicidal depression” (Latvia 1998).
**Violence**

*Men rape within the marriage. Men believe that paying dowry means buying the wife, so they use her anyhow at all times. But no one talks about it.* — Uganda 1998

*In all communities, wife-beating was perceived as a common experience in daily life.* — Jamaica 1997

Violence against women is a basic abuse of human rights. In addition to the physical injuries, abused women suffer from health and psychological problems. Abused women experience a range of feelings related to the violence, from confusion about what brings on the violence, to feelings of hopelessness about the possibility of stopping the violence, to feelings of isolation and depression from being under the violent control of their husbands. Sometimes, women consider suicide as an option to escape violence. In Georgia, “women confessed that frequent household arguments resulted in being beaten” (Georgia, 1997).

Women also suffer the loss of economic opportunities when violence leads to the loss of work hours and increased health care costs. Violence or the threat of violence in the home also negatively affects the nature of women’s participation in the development process. It affects their capacity to assume positions of authority, and it influences whether they benefit directly from development programs and actually increase their access to resources, or simply act as conduits that direct resources to male members of the household. In many countries, women acknowledged widespread domestic violence and sometimes as the issue became acknowledged more openly, as in Uganda, women diagrammed perceived linkages to violence. (See Figure 5.)

In all communities in the Jamaica PPA, woman beating is perceived as a common occurrence in daily life. On occasions when women felt able to speak openly about their experiences, stories of everyday domestic brutality, fear, and a sense of being trapped emerged. One woman in Greenland, Jamaica, talked about how her man for 18 years, whom she loved dearly, continually treated her as a "beating stick." In some areas, young women said that most women are beaten, but most women hide it. In many areas, domestic violence is linked to attitudes of both men and women, women’s dependency on men for employment, and frustration and hopelessness arising out of unemployment, causing a cycle of violence followed by making up. On rare occasions, “this cycle was broken by the woman’s hitting the man or leaving him, or getting him jailed through police involvement” (Jamaica 1997).

Domination and violence may invade poor households even if women relinquish their jobs to take on more traditional roles. “My husband and I are no longer as close as we used to be when I was working — I think because he knows that I am solely dependent on him especially because the children are still young. I am scared of him because he has even started to abuse me, but I know that I have to do my best and listen to what he tells me to do, for the sake of the children” (South Africa 1998).
Figure 7. Observations of Women in Nankulabwe Parish, Uganda

Focus Group: Sewakiryi, Buyenka, Bankus and Gitta, (Uganda, 1999)
**Children: Vulnerable Inside and Outside the Home**

I also have two grandchildren, Miemie (15) and Sharon (17). Sharon’s father is in prison serving a 20 year sentence. The mother of these children lives on the farms around Patensie and doesn’t look after them. Sharon was raped when she was 14 by a man who has a clerical post at the citrus factory. We only discovered that she had been raped when she told us that she was pregnant. She was in Standard 3 at the time. She came out of school and has been working on the farms with her sister ever since. Her child, Hendrika, is not two years old and has been left with me. She doesn’t give me any money to support the child and she only comes back at the weekends to see her. I agreed to look after the child as long as it is a Swarts (the family name). —South Africa 1998

Violence in the home affects children directly and indirectly. The PPAs documented physical and sexual abuse of children, including rape and prostitution. Some evidence suggests that among the most vulnerable to sexual abuse are girls with step-fathers in the home (South Africa 1998). In addition to facing violence in the home — which is not an experience limited to poor children — children of poor families are often forced to work in order to contribute to household income, which puts them at risk of facing abuse on the streets. The South Africa report notes that “gender-based differences . . . persist even amongst street children.” Boys undertake activities such as petty theft and begging and girls take on sex work. “Girls are at great risk of HIV infection and sexually transmitted diseases, whereas boys may face greater risks of assault and abuse” (South Africa 1998).

**Family Breakup**

A woman is allowed to move out of the house only with baskets, cooking utensils, bracelets, and her clothes. In rare instances, the man may decide she is worthy of assistance and give her half the crop of that year’s harvest. —Tanzania 1997

Family break-up affects men and women differently. In general, men are the financial winners from divorce, and women are the financial losers. Economic concerns are often significant in the decision to divorce. Women’s assets upon divorce tend to be less valuable than those of men. In addition, laws regarding division of marital property, where they might benefit women, are frequently not implemented. Women then have to rely upon social and family networks to start life over again.

In Tanzania, a woman in Kagera said, “A woman can’t own anything valuable. On divorce or separation a woman can take a young child with her until he reaches the age of seven. Then she must return him. The children belong to the father. If she has no children, she gets nothing except what she brought when she got married” (Tanzania 1997). In the Tanga region, a woman said, “If the fight has not been so bad, a woman may get a few more things, like a radio and a hoe, especially if the family is well off.” In Kasangezi, Kigoma region, a woman said, “In this village men have the bad habit of chasing women away after the harvest, so they can have a good sale for that year, and then try later to get them back.”
In neighboring Kenya, women reported taking items they had bought with their own money in the event of separation or divorce. Upon family break-up, some women would take all the money they could find in the home, and deny taking it if asked, as there would be no evidence. If a woman has a small baby at the time of divorce, she is expected to care for it until it stops breastfeeding, and then she must return the child to the man. Sometimes a woman may decide to take her children, which is often not challenged because children are seen as a woman’s only asset after divorce (Kenya 1996).

Many PPAs identify divorce as a contributing factor to women’s poverty. In Togo, “divorce reduces a household’s capacity to overcome external shocks and is one of the main causes of destitution” (Togo 1996). But in places such as Tunisia, where women have formal rights to inherit land and to acquire land in the case of divorce, divorce is not a determining factor of poverty (Tunisia 1995).

Some families continue to live together following a divorce for economic reasons. In Moldova, couples who divorced because of alcoholism and domestic violence continue to live together because neither spouse can afford to move out (Moldova 1997). A household in Central Macedonia, for example, continues to live together in the house of the former husband because after the divorce the woman did not have anywhere else to go with the children (Macedonia 1998).

Family maintenance and child support payments are reportedly rare. In South Africa, one woman who was able to extract 20 Rand from her divorced husband for child support had to give it back when he demanded it (South Africa 1998). Situations are difficult for divorced women in Latvia whose ex-husbands cannot pay child support because of disinterest or unemployment. Benita, age 43, is a divorced mother living in Riga, Latvia, where she is bringing up two children alone. As a result of “incompetently divided property” after the divorce, her husband received all their joint property, and he provides no support for the children (Latvia 1998).

In Benin, men benefit from the valuable labor of their children, except in the few cases in which the court may grant women custody or child support: “In the case of divorce, the ex-husband will generally take everything with him, including the children, while the parents of the wife still have to refund the bride price. If the children are very young, they will remain with the mother until they become potentially productive, that is, until they are six or seven years old. Payment of child support is a rare exception, although modern courts (only accessible to a small minority) tend to protect the child’s interests, thus occasionally granting custody to the mother, or requesting a family support payment from the father” (Benin 1994).

Unfortunately, legal proceedings following divorce do not ensure fair division of property. In Tanzania, some young and more educated women would pursue battles with the support of women’s organizations, which succeeded in securing some marital property in a handful of cases. Most women avoided legal action. As one woman
explains, “It is tiresome for the legal process to reach conclusion; and there is a possibility that the woman can fail to get her rights. This is because the man can give a lot of money to all the people dealing with legal rights to make sure the woman fails” (Tanzania 1997). In many countries women said that they were allowed back into their natal homes only if they had not brought the shame of public proceedings or become aggressive in trying to claim justice.

**Cooperation**

*Other than food, there aren’t any other expenses. Everything else depends on the relationship between an man and his wife.* —A Poor Woman in Bamako, Mali.

*If I knew you cannot live without money, I would not have gotten married. We loved each other a lot. Today we only fight.* —Macedonia 1998

Obviously not every family breaks down under stress. In Latvia, researchers concluded that poverty may affect families in one of two ways: “Either it brings family members together, in some cases even couples on the verge of divorce, as they realize that solidarity is the only way to cope with their economic problems. Or the daily stress of financial problems splits families, particularly those who had experienced discord in the past” (Latvia 1998).

Despite widespread breakdown of the family, many families work together to attempt to meet their needs. For example, a farming family with 13 children in Membrillal, Ecuador, receives income from the family’s combined efforts. “Tomas is primarily a farmer . . . he is always in search of ways to earn extra income. His major source of income is coffee, but productivity is low, and prices have dropped consistently for the past three years. This year he and Roberto (a son) went to the Oriente to work for a friend for six weeks. While Carmen considers herself to be a housewife, she harvests coffee in nearby plantations every June and July; this year three of her daughters accompanied her (Ecuador 1996a).

Households use a wide variety of strategies to “work their way out of poverty” and remain together. The most common strategy for generating family income lies in transforming as many family members as possible into workers. The following story of one family in Brazil demonstrates the degree of cooperation and coordination required among family members to cope:

In this family, consisting of the husband (52), the wife (32), and five children ranging in age from eight to 13, the husband worked outside the home at two jobs, selling lottery tickets and guarding a parking lot. The wife spent 38 hours at home doing housework and 35 hours working outside the home, washing clothes and cleaning house and as a manicurist for neighbors. The four boys attended school; the three eldest also worked at a parking lot and undertook minor chores. The 12-year old girl did not attend school, but rather played a key role in family survival. She spent 40 hours doing domestic work, freeing her mother for other
activities. She also helped care for the family’s chickens and even helped her mother at her paying jobs. (Motta and Scott, qtd. in Brazil 1995)

In sum, in many households, men are an important family resource, but due to low wages, the lack of jobs, and ill health, they are not able to generate sufficient income to help the family out of poverty. In South Africa, one man earns R250 a month as a farm worker. The PPA reports, “He earns only a little money. He shows [his wife] all the money, and only uses R12 or R24 to travel home. He does not drink beer. [He is a] good husband, but can’t survive on this sum — we help him” (South Africa 1998).

Many men share the view that cooperation is essential to survival. A migrant worker in East London said, “We are different from other men in the township because we have respect for our families. We do not just drink our wages away at month end” (South Africa 1998).

Female-Headed Households

I don’t have any house or any land or anything because I parted company with my husband and he does not want us. —Kenya 1997

One consequence of family breakdown is female-headed households. In some societies, female-headed households contend with the daily demands of economic survival in addition to facing ostracism from kinship systems that treat them as outcasts. The Ghana PPA reports that “female-headed households tend to be genuinely socially marginal under the patrilineal kinship systems that prevail in the north” (Ghana 1995a).

It is widely accepted that female-headed households are more likely to be poor than male-headed households (Folbre 1991:89-90), an observation supported by many reports including the Kenya PPA:

In 35 villages, people were asked to mark all of the female-headed households on a map. Overall, while 25 percent of the study population was categorized as very poor, there were over twice as many female-headed households (44 percent) as male-headed households (21 percent) in this group, while 59 percent of the male-headed households were categorized poor or very poor. This was true for 80 percent of the female-headed households. The pattern of greater poverty among female-headed households was true for every district and for all 35 villages. (Kenya 1996)

Similarly, the South Africa PPA reports that “many of the poorest households were female-headed where it was left to the grandmother or single female to look after the whole family. Consequently, they were excluded from many of the local income generating activities because they could not afford the joining fee or the time” (South Africa, 1998). A researcher in Nigeria observed, “Some categories of individuals are regarded as particularly vulnerable, especially female-headed households, particularly those with children too young to work. Widows and single mothers face special
difficulties when their children fall sick, since no one is willing or able to help them. They also lack the necessary farm labor and cannot afford to hire it” (Nigeria 65). Not all female-headed households are necessarily poor or the poorest in the community. There are multiple causes of female-headed households and these causes determine the households’ ability to cope. Hence, it is important to disaggregate the subcategories of female-headed households in order to understand which ones are poor, what their vulnerabilities are, and how they are coping. Some cultural traditions provide safety nets for women, such as the Islamic social category mustaheqeen, which “includes households without earning men . . . such as widows without family support” (Pakistan 1993). Mustaheqeen translates as “the deserving poor” and as such this group receives Zakat, which is an official “tax” that is disbursed by the government to the poor.

Women head households for several reasons, among them migration of male members, divorce, and men who are present but not contributing financially to the household. Male migration that leads to the creation of female-headed households around the world is usually for certain seasons, but sometimes for longer, leaving women to fend for themselves and their children.

Divorced women are another prominent category of female heads of households, and they are particularly vulnerable to poverty. A man may take his social networks with him, leaving his ex-wife to cope only with her own. In addition, a divorced woman typically has restricted access to the very basic household necessities such as housing and land for food production. Divorced women’s access to income is hampered by a range of factors including lack of child support from the ex-husband or his family. They also have limited employment opportunities due to demands of child rearing and pre-existing occupational segregation of women to low-income, low-security jobs. Finally, divorced women may face strong cultural stigmatization due to their divorced status. The combination of unemployment and female-headed household is particularly deleterious for the family. A young and unemployed single mother in Libreville explains, “I have to be both father and mother to my children. I never know what’s going to happen. If you don’t have any friends, you’re on your own. . . . The government doesn’t know or care about the problems of young mothers — all it can do is talk about birth control! . . . We live in constant insecurity — the local thugs have an easy time of it when they know a woman is living alone” (Gabon 1997). The issue of physical vulnerability of women living by themselves was mentioned in several countries.

The experience of vulnerability is not much different for this woman from rural Mali who was abandoned by her husband: “My husband went away ten years ago and never came back. If my eyes were not sick, I could go to the bush to pick wild fruits. . . . Now that my eyes hurt and I can barely see, I don’t know what to do. I asked my brothers, but they are too poor to be able to give me anything. I cannot ask my sister or my mother because they are widows, and on top of that, my mother is very old and half paralyzed. So I asked the women’s group, but they have nothing” (Mali 1993).

Some women find themselves heads of households when a man is present but is no longer contributing financially to the household. In these cases, household survival
depends upon the income earning potential of the wife and the children. A woman in Ethiopia, married with six children, had reservations about accepting the representation of households, including her own, as a “male-headed household.” She said, “Although we may take these families to be male-headed, the breadwinners for these households are women.” Her own husband lost his business and slid into poverty. Although he struggles to make money by selling meat he buys from butchers, the source of income for the household comes from kolo, oranges, and bananas sold by one of the daughters (Ethiopia 1998).

Finally, many women find themselves heads of households when their husbands die. (See Box 19) A PPA from Guatemala records, “The widows don’t have anyone to help them, and they don’t have even a small piece of land — not even to have a house, never mind to grow crops” (Guatemala 1994a).

**Box 19. Widows Organizing in Nigeria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Many PPA reports show that female-headed households with widows at the head are among the most poor and vulnerable groups in this category. However, the proliferation of widow’s associations in Nigeria provides an effective example of how organizing to share stories and resources can result in positive outcomes. “One of the most successful of these is the Widow’s Association in Adikpo... formed in 1986 [with] a membership of 350. Catholic missionaries were instrumental in assisting its establishment. The association’s main functions are those of educating and generally caring in the areas of health and social security for the children of widows. The association is also a thrift and credit organization. The Adikpo Widow’s Association has land on which it has citrus fruits and farms from which much revenue is generated. It has also installed a grinding machine, which apart from removing drudgery from grinding corn, brings revenue to the Association. In 1991, the Association won a prize for being the best organized women’s association in Benue State. However, some men interviewed are against the Association. They feel that if women can expect succor after the death of their husbands, they may have a tendency to neglect them and not care whether they live or not! Despite this opposition from some men, this association has grown in membership with the support of church organizations. This accords with the broader finding of this work that informal participatory structures can best obtain their objectives if they receive support and cooperation from formal structures.”</th>
</tr>
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<td>Source: Nigeria 1995</td>
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Conclusion

*Most of their men were lazy and did not contribute much to household income.* —South Africa 1998

Gender relations are in troubled transition in poor households. This basic fact needs to be a central part of poverty reduction strategies. In economically constrained environments, men appear to have great resistance to doing what are often considered demeaning jobs. Women on the other hand seem to have greater resilience and hit the streets and do whatever it takes to keep their families together. Many men react to their loss of power as breadwinner by collapsing into drugs, alcohol, depression, wife-beating or walking away. Women may find a new confidence through often tenuous economic opportunities, expose themselves to risk and take on work in the informal sector in addition to their household responsibilities. Families may cooperate or eventually collapse.

Overwhelmingly, the PPA reports echo the conclusion of Standing (1999) that the feminization of the labor force and the informalization of the economy reflect “the weakening position of men rather than improvement of the economic opportunities for women.” Taking on additional income earning roles has not necessarily lead to the social empowerment of women or greater equity and peace in the household. “The impact of employment on women appears to be ambiguous, with some women succeeding in gaining control over the affairs of the household, some women being able to establish their own male-free households, and some women continuing to subsidize men” (South Africa 1998). In some cases, the employment of women is viewed as a regrettable necessity, and the dream of achieving prosperity included the hope that daughters will be spared this necessity” (Pakistan 1994).

At the same time, some women feel a sense of empowerment with the chance to take new roles. “Some women reported that female economic independence had grown, improving their coping abilities and their capabilities, especially in terms of work outside the home and that in rural areas of central Uganda, changes in attitude towards the payment of bride price had occurred. In addition, younger women, particularly from urban areas, noted changes in attitudes towards and of women, as well as some changes in gender roles in recent years” (Uganda 1998).

What is clear from these studies is that the entire household, women, men and children pay a high price for adjusting to new gender roles and deeply held notions of gender identity. With few exceptions, international development agencies still use an approach focused on women-in-development rather than developing approaches to both poor men and women that acknowledge that men and women’s wellbeing are intertwined, and that to help women, it is also critical to understand men’s roles and reach men. Since men still dominate the public space, their involvement is critical in changing institutions. Change is likely to happen when there are alliances between powerful men within organizations and women. This is more likely to happen as women organize and gain economic power.
Two fundamental issues need to be addressed, one economic and the other social. (See figure 7.) Both, poor men and women need greater access to economic opportunities, especially for profitable self-employment. This is difficult in an environment of corruption, lack of organizations of the poor, lack of support to battered women and breakdown of law enforcement agencies.

Second, as individual women and men continue to struggle in negotiating change, to assist families, both women and men need social and psychological support to explore and navigate change which brings into question their worth as human beings. Deeply entrenched social norms will not automatically change with more women entering low paying jobs. Gender relations need to become an integral part of all poverty reduction strategies. This needs to be reflected in institutional goals, design, incentives and criteria of success that are monitored and evaluated. Poor women also need access to legal aid and police that protect rather than assault. Implementing gender strategies implies accepting that women’s and men’s lives are interlinked. Hence discussion of gender issues must include both men and women to increase the probability of less traumatic transition towards gender equity. Whether conversations about gender identity and gender relations need to happen in separate gender groups or mixed groups; whether this should be done by religious leaders, NGOs, governments or in the workplace is culture and context specific. A poor woman in Uganda suggested: “Women and men should sit at a round table to discuss their rights. Unless men are included, these things will not be understood. It will be like bathing in mud again.” (Uganda 1996).

**Figure 7. Women’s Political Representation and Economic Rights**

These charts illustrate the gender disparity of human capital accumulation, political representation and economic rights. The first chart illustrates the difference between men and women in educational attainment levels across regions; consistently, more men than women attain secondary education. In East Asia and the Pacific and Europe and Central Asia this difference is near 15%; between 20-30% of women attain secondary education, while 35-45% of men attain secondary education. The subsequent charts illustrate women’s political representation, indicated by proportion of seats occupied by women in the lower and upper chambers of Parliament, and their economic rights. Women in East Asia and the Pacific enjoy the greatest level of political representation relative to the other regions. Women’s economic rights illustrates whether women and men are entitled to equal pay for equal work, measured on a 1-4 scale. Women in Europe and Central Asia enjoy the greatest economic rights relative to other regions (Dollar and Gatti, 1995).
Case Study 6: Gender and Education

In the PPA reports, education and household gender issues intersect in six main areas: household literacy; distance and transportation; direct and indirect costs; family security; marriage; and sexual harassment and abuse. Girls tend to receive fewer years of formal education than boys. (See figures 8 and 9 at end of section.)

Household Literacy

We would like to go to school with enough books. —Children in Vietnam 1999a

Women are less literate than men, and female illiteracy has far-reaching implications for development because illiteracy further marginalizes women in the public sphere (see figure 9 at end of section). However, women are often simply unable to participate in literacy programs. In Mali, for example, adult female participation in functional literacy programs was extremely weak because women’s 17-hour work days prevented them from participating (Mali 1993). In a PPA from India, in a region where the number of girls attending school was less than half the number of boys, information distribution depends largely upon literacy; it is therefore not surprising that women are less aware than men of government programs or other services. Similarly, women are less aware of their legal rights, such as their right to own and inherit land (India 1997a).

Distance and Transportation

Schools are not what they used to be. —Guinea Bissau 1994

Kwame Lambor comes from a family of 19 children. Each morning he walks the one-and-a-half-mile stretch to his school, the Gambaga JSS. Kwame sometimes leaves home for school without eating. During the rainy seasons he is sometimes unable to go to school if the river which he has to cross floods its banks. —Ghana 1995

Schools are often far away for children, and attendance may require parents to bear the costs of transportation. Moreover, in many regions girls require traveling with chaperones or else risk violating social norms in their home region. Sexual harassment of girls and women traveling independently reinforces such gender norms. In Pakistan, for example, “Fear that girls would be teased or harassed on route to school was a constraint for households that could not spare an adult to accompany the child” (Pakistan 1994).

In a PPA from Bangladesh, the problem of educating children is identified as the highest priority followed by problems of water shortage. Women are particularly concerned about sending children to schools that are long distances from home, across rivers and unsafe hilly terrain. High schools are particularly far away (Bangladesh 1996). In Pakistan, distance was named second only to cost as the issue of greatest concern, and this issue is compounded for girls, who are unable to travel any distance alone due to cultural norms. Some mothers say they accompany their daughters to school, but mothers with pre-school children may be unable to do this. From one focus group we
learn, “In an urban slum near Rawalpindi, mothers voiced a positive desire to provide higher education for their daughters but said that in order to attend a girls’ secondary school, their daughters would have to travel (accompanied by a mother) three miles by bus and an additional mile on foot. The entire trip was said to require an hour and a half each way” (Pakistan 1994).

**Direct and Indirect Costs**

*We never finish the book in the prescribed year, yet the fees keep going up.*

Education costs include both school fees and costs associated with the loss of the child’s labor. In addition, families are often asked for bribes and donations from schools. All these costs are a significant disincentive for many poor families. And when weighing the costs, families frequently choose to educate boys in favor of girls.

Often families who wish to educate their children cannot afford to do so. In a Bangladesh PPA, men and women report being very supportive of education for girls and boys, and rural women insist that education must be made affordable. These women propose the following: no bribes for education; subsidized books and stationery; less costly admission fees; open and flexible school hours; distribution of wheat; and more schools in remote areas (Bangladesh 1996). In Zambia, the seasonal nature of educational fee payments was noted, unfortunately coinciding with the time food stocks are lowest (Zambia 1997). Women in Swaziland face constant stress finding the money to pay for schooling (Swaziland 1997). A woman in Brazil said, “The schools where they were wouldn’t let them attend without all the material. I couldn’t afford it. First it was the uniform; I managed to get them uniforms, but then it was all the other material. It’s very sad. I tell them you have to find some work to pay for your school supplies” (Brazil 1995).

Quite apart from the costs of fees and school supplies, many poor families bear a loss of children’s labor when children are in school. In Mali, although few people claimed that schooling was a burden on domestic life, it became evident from a number of statements that the additional labor provided by the child was sorely missed at home (Mali 1993). The labor of girl children is often described as particularly useful for families, and it is directly related to low female student enrollment. In India, girls’ time is devoted to household domestic purposes, preventing them from attending school (India 1997a).

In a community in Nigeria, parents were upset with government restructuring of education funding. They placed responsibility for efficient educational funding firmly on the shoulders of the government. “The government has messed up [the schools]. They should help teachers or hand the schools back to missionaries . . . It is for the government to do it. We have many oil wells, and everyday they pump oil overseas without improving our welfare” (Nigeria 1997).

When scarce resources require that parents must withhold education from some of their children, a disproportionate number of these children will be female. In Pakistan,
although a number of poor families were educating daughters, in no family did the team find a girl child who was educated in preference to her brother (Pakistan 1995). In part, this is because girls’ labor in the household is typically more valuable than boys’. In part it has to do with the family’s “investment strategy” for its own future security.

**Family Security**

*We want to be rich women.* —Nigeria, 1997

PPA descriptions frequently mention that parents seek future security and independence for their children, and this of course influenced education decisions. In many cases, both marriage and income provision for men and women factor into these decisions. For girls in Armenia, education lends status to potential wives and acts as a surrogate dowry. Urban women also mentioned the need for girls to have higher education, “because they need independence . . . to be prepared in life” (Armenia 1996). For boys, security and independence is often linked to being an income provider. There may be great cynicism about the correlation between higher levels of education and higher earnings or employment prospects. A father in Lusarpiur, Armenia, explained, “Because I have no money, I cannot support my son’s studies at the institute. There would be food, transport, lodging expenses — without mentioning bribes of which even a first-grader is aware. What would these expenses be for? So he can earn 10,000 dram salary? Now my son is keeping cows for 10,000 drams a day. Education is not the future” (Armenia 1996).

Some parents also fear that allowing their girls to venture into public spaces, such as schools, where they will encounter unrelated boys will lead to loss of reputation. Schooling could also encourage daughters to reject their parents’ choice of a (possibly illiterate) relative for a husband (Pakistan 1994). Further, many participants believe that girls in school are more likely to become pregnant before marriage. In Mali, respondents remarked, “Girls who become pregnant out of wedlock have jeopardized their marriage opportunities altogether and, in addition, will be thrown out of school” (Mali 1993). In order to avoid conflicts with school authorities, parents would rather keep their girls home altogether.

In some cases, children themselves prefer work to school, and were strategic about their own future plans. In Nigeria, two girls in a mixed-gender children’s focus group claimed that they prefer hawking (informal sales) to school because they could save up money by the time of their marriage. “We want to be rich women,” they said. Two boys, aged 7 and 9, who had never been to school, were working on a farm gang in Maidamashi (Northwest) and did not think they were missing much: “Our parents are farmers and have not found it necessary to send us to school. Farming is a better occupation because potentially it offers a lifetime’s livelihood” (Nigeria 1997).

**Marriage**

*My brother completed primary school and went on to college. I look forward to getting married someday.* —Nigeria 1996
Families are dissuaded from educating girls and young women in some countries due to marriage systems which place the daughter in the care of the husband’s family after marriage. This causes parents to see female education as a waste of money since it is like investing in someone else’s family (Togo 1996; Nigeria 1997). As a female respondent in South Africa explains, “It is wasting money to educate girls because they will marry and join another family” (South Africa 1998). Or as is explained in Pakistan, “Daughters are destined to be ‘other people’s property’” (Pakistan 1994).

In other societies, educating girls can actually increase the dowry required, as reported in Bangladesh: “The people of Refayetpur in Khustia told us how they assess the likely dowry rates. An educated girl who is unemployed requires the highest dowry. This is because social norms require that the boy is more educated than the girl, and boys are not willing to marry girls with higher education than themselves. If the girl is educated and has a job, the dowry rate is the lowest. An uneducated girl without a job commands a dowry in between” (Bangladesh 1996). From the family’s point of view, if prospects for a rich match for their daughter are not good in any case, it is not to their advantage to educate her. They will reduce the required dowry if she stays at home and learns useful household skills.

Finally, PPAs frequently mention that educational institutions do not adapt to adolescent pregnancy and marriage customs. Instead, the “problem” is defined as pregnancy among young women. Many PPAs report that girls and young women leave school when they become pregnant (Uganda 1998; South Africa 1998). Some young women may simultaneously be cast out of their families.

**Sexual Harassment and Abuse**

> I didn’t like the school because there were troublemakers, and the teacher hated me and hit me. —El Salvador 1995

Some young people, overwhelmingly girls, report abuse and sexual harassment in schools by male teachers and students. Educational institutions often have a slow or no response to these problems.

PPAs report that sexual harassment is a impediment to the education of girls. In Pakistan, for example, “Virtually all parents desire literacy for their children, but school enrollments, especially of girls, lag behind the stated desire for education. Parents also expressed fears that daughters would suffer harassment or reputation loss by attending school with boys. Poor attendance or supervision by teachers, and consequent classroom rowdiness, exacerbate these dangers. It is suggested that enrollments could be improved if monetary incentives were provided and if teacher performance and girls’ security issues were addressed” (Pakistan 1994). In Nigeria, it was noted that the unequal distribution of female teachers biased towards urban areas adversely affects girls school attendance in the rural areas (Nigeria 1997).

In Uganda, girls drop out of school at higher rates than boys because the boys harass them in school, and girls fear being “wooed into early sex by men with promises of
money and clothes” (Uganda 1998). In South Africa, sexual harassment is reported alongside pregnancy as contributing to girls’ failure to continue education (South Africa 1998). A girl from a village in Macedonia reported, “I did not continue to attend secondary school in Struga because I had to travel everyday by bus. Many boys would tease me, and people in the village would talk about me — look at her, alone in a bus or in a van — and that is why I do not want to go” (Macedonia 1998).

Children themselves may decide to not attend school due to poor security. For example, in one case from Pakistan, parents identified costs as a major impediment, followed by the children’s unwillingness to attend school: “[Parents] would enroll them if all expenses were paid — provided the children in question were willing to attend school. Four families mentioned that one or more of their children disliked school and refused to attend. Among these were a girl who had been beaten by a teacher and a pair of sisters who feared harassment from “wicked boys” (Pakistan 1994).

When teachers and staff abuse students, communities may find it difficult to remove offenders from their professional positions. In El Salvador, a male teacher abused his girl students. As an officially appointed teacher, he could not be fired, so the girls were removed from school for several years. Now, the community runs the school board and hires only female teachers (El Salvador 1997).
Case Study 7: Property Rights

*Men own everything because when they were born, they just found it like that.*  —Kanazi village, Kagera, Tanzania 1997

Family power relations are reflected in societal property rights, and property arrangements also affect gender relations in the family. Women and children are in some places regarded as property themselves, and their lives are regulated accordingly through marriage and labor practices. Meanwhile, the degradation of common property resources through larger institutional changes in land tenure and property rights often results in upsetting gender divisions of labor within the household, frequently increasing women’s workload.

**Women and Children as Property**

*There are three kinds of men that cause real problems: those that drink, those that have extra-marital affairs, and those that don’t bring home their wages. For me, the ideal man is not very good looking, he doesn’t drink, and he won’t squander money. But in life one cannot always be fortunate enough to choose.*  —South Africa 1998

Around the world, women are often legally considered the property of male family members. As property themselves, women are in a fundamentally compromised position when asserting independent rights to property or almost anything else. Children are also frequently considered property, particularly girl children in marriage negotiations. Male-centered inheritance systems and residential patterns dictate that a girl must take up residence with her husband and his extended family after marriage, and that her children and benefits of her labor belong to that family (Pakistan 1994). In Tanzania, when it comes to ownership of property following divorce, because a man pays a bride price, he is considered the owner of his wife, the product of her labor, and any children they had together. In Uganda, a husband’s possession of his wife is reinforced by the payment of brideprice, particularly in the north where it is seen as repayment to the family for loss of the woman’s labor. Male ownership of a women as property under marriage rationalizes marital rape (Uganda 1998).

Girl children and young women can be particularly vulnerable as “assets” that can be traded across borders. In Marneuli, Georgia, a 16-year-old girl had been raped while doing domestic work, and gave birth to a son. To hide this dishonor and also to improve the family’s terrible material conditions, the mother sold her daughter for 5,000 rubles (Georgia 1997).
Environment and Common Property

*My husbands’ parents are like strangers, yet one day they may leave their land there and claim my fields.* —Rwanda 1998

The degradation and disappearance of common property resources is a major issue for poor households. Acute water scarcity is a problem for women and men, but the impact on women is especially severe since in almost every culture they are responsible for collecting water. Deforestation similarly impacts women, since usually they are also responsible for collecting firewood and for non-timber forest products for the household.

In India, (1997b) women are the main collectors of non-timber products such as *rengal* to make leaf plates “Due to the low paying nature of non-timber products, many villagers, especially the male, tend to move away from collection of forest products to wage employment. This in fact adds additional burden to women, who needs to put extra effort to collect the leaves and make plates. Along with this, there are number of risk factors, especially harassment by forest officials in collecting forest products from reserve forests. Fuel wood collection appears to the more risky job, often attracting severe penalties and punishments” (India 1997b).

In Swaziland, while whole communities are impoverished by drought, the impact on women is particularly harsh “because women have to walk further for water and spend more hours each day obtaining food. Many women engaged when they could in informal vending and making crafts to sell, which is crucial for income in the winter. But drought conditions have depleted the grasses on which women depend for their crafts; even cutting grass for thatching as piece work has become precarious and liable. Women in the Maphilingo community (Lowveld), for example, now travel in winter and in spring as far as Malkerns for a species of grass they need to produce sleeping mats” (Swaziland 1997). To survive, women also engage in seasonal cotton picking and harvesting and selling wild green vegetables and aloe plants.

The depletion of common resources usually affects poor families first. In forest zone communities such as Derma, Ghana the income and nutrition benefits of gathering minor forest produce, such as snails, are less available. This follows a general pattern where environmental degradation disproportionately impacts the poor who have inadequate access to agricultural land. In other PPAs, poor farm families are seen to obtain additional income from temporary migration and from commercial activities such as the production of charcoal, which results in increasing deforestation and is likely to worsen the already poor quality of local soils (Ecuador 1996).

Urban communities also suffer from a poor sense of public responsibility for communal urban spaces (Latvia 1997). The environmental impacts of industrial pollution on human health are described in a Vietnam report where one man explains, “Only when one is taken to hospital and they say it was caused by a chemical can we know what its effects are. But knowing is just for knowing. Nobody can do anything but suffer” (Vietnam 1999).
Security of Home and Inheritance

Women with no male children must rely upon husbands or other male relatives for land access. —Nigeria 1996

Women are often not aware of their legal rights to own and inherit land due to a general lack of awareness of existing programs, often related to limited literacy (India 1997a). Poor women in Hathazari, Bangladesh express their main problem as access to land/house and homestead. “Women are both psychologically insecure and physically distressed with house, land, mortgaging arrangements and being residents on others’ land. With no land or house, men and women find it difficult to borrow capital, which is scarce, expensive, and not provided on easy terms” (Bangladesh 1996).

In many places where the PPAs were conducted, it was found that women cannot inherit property. In Uganda, inheritance exclusively by males is clearly connected to women’s lack of power, control, and decision making in marriage. There are stories of widows being mistreated by their in-laws even before the funeral, and having all property, including the children, taken from them (Uganda 1998). Inheritance in Swaziland is passed through male children, denying women ownership rights and forcing women to be dependent upon males for access to land.

In Kenya, women suffer twice from land inheritance practices. First, girls are often discriminated against in land inheritance from their birth families. Depending on the region, between 12 and 95 percent of poor families pass the majority of land to their sons. Second, whether a woman leaves her husband, or a man leaves his wife, ownership of the land stays with the man. Upon death, in-laws are entitled to seize the land, and may grant the widow limited cultivation and harvesting rights. There were various stories of widow’s land inheritance experiences in the Elugulu village in Busia district. Men stated that “when a husband dies and the woman has children with him, she may keep all the household assets.” The women told a different story: “The brothers-in-law . . . take all the valuable assets, leaving the widow with barely enough to give her a new start” (Kenya 1997).

Women in the Lubombo region of Swaziland expressed the hardship they face regarding the allocation of land within marriage: “If the wife was out of favor or neglected by the husband, she might find it more difficult to gain use rights to land since ‘we are too many and there is too little land.’ For a woman, even as a female head of household, her usufruct access would be facilitated through a male relative, including younger relatives and sons. Should these male relatives be absent or disinterested, the woman’s needs were disregarded” (Swaziland 1997).

Women with no male children must rely upon husbands or other male relatives for land access (Nigeria 1996). Infertile women may be condemned and disrespected. Mothers with only female daughters may suffer neglect from their husbands, face opposition from in-laws, and be denied access to husband’s property; their husbands may take other wives in an attempt to bear them male children (Nigeria 1996).
In South Africa, the form of land tenancy and land tenure (communal tribal land allocation) has increased the uncertainty of women’s right of access to land by only recognizing males as title holders. This has increased women’s food insecurity. Women proposed an alternative: “Since most men migrate to urban areas, they should have in place a system like a power of attorney which will enable them to make decisions as members of the household” (South Africa 1998). In Zambia, although no legal restriction on land use exists, women have a difficult time obtaining land from land authorities. Under the statutory system, in some districts, married women must provide evidence of their husband’s consent to obtain land, while unmarried women are often not recommended for allocation of land if they do not have children. PPA respondents in Zambia suggest a traditional tenure system in the PPA, with rights of long-term occupancy and use allocated to families by chiefs. They feared that land reform and titling would primarily benefit the rich and politically well connected (Zambia 1997), and urged appropriate consultation before any such programs were undertaken. “There is a great deal of debate about the appropriate land tenure policy for Zambia. There are fears that the rural poor might suffer from establishment of formal tenure systems on traditional land . . . because land is their only fixed productive resource” (Zambia 1997).

Control of Property Assets

_The pig is the woman’s cow._ — Swaziland 1997

As has been already discussed, women in most countries studied had very unequal access to land, homes or other capital assets including their own children. In Togo, for example, women cannot inherit, “but the levirate tradition makes it possible for their brother-in-law to inherit them along with the rest of the deceased husband’s estate (including children) (Togo 22). Women in the Lowveld region of Swaziland pointed out that men’s ownership of cattle did not help women and children because the men could decide to sell the cattle without family consultation and the money would not necessarily benefit the household. This could apply to the cattle that accompany women as dowry. Women’s assets were few. “Besides the utensils of the household and their traditional clothes, the women owned only chickens. None of them owned goats, donkeys, or cattle. Some women in the Lowveld reported that they have a greater say in the decisions about pigs — ‘The pig is the woman’s cow’— because the women are more involved in the husbandry of pigs. With chickens, women were free to slaughter or sell when they decided, but they would nevertheless usually consult with the men” (Swaziland 1997).

In some cases, women may inadvertently refuse control of assets. In Armenia, a 72-year-old refugee woman said, “They gave us land, but I refused to take cattle and now I’m sorry. They told me, ‘We can give you a cow, but you won’t be able to take care of it.’ I thought that being from the city, I wouldn’t know what to do with it, so I refused it. They evidently expected that—after all, they could have explained to me, convinced me, or promised to help me at first” (Armenia 1995).
Polygamy and Patriarchy in sub-Saharan Africa

So many children share the little land and they all suffer. —Uganda 1998

Polygamy, either de facto or de jure, was mentioned in eight PPA reports from Africa. It was generally regarded as a contributing factor of poverty in PPA reports, but not unambiguously. While polygamy is not officially recognized in Guinea Bissau and only monogamous marriages are legal, polygamy is widespread, mainly in the rural and Moslem environments. According to the same survey, 47 percent of husbands interviewed indicated that they wanted to be polygamous in order to have many children, and polygamy is widely practiced (Guinea Bissau 1994). While polygamy is legal in Togo, the PPA report is critical of this household structure as an inherently patriarchal practice that legitimates the idea of women as property: “Although the new constitution adopted in 1992 recognizes all citizens as equal before the law, traditions are difficult to change and the 1980 Family Code implicitly recognizes gender inequality by allowing polygamy and regulating — thus legitimizing — the bride price” (Togo 1996).

In Swaziland, women’s opinions concerning polygamous forms of marriage centered on the need for security. “It was the widespread opinion of women, shared by some men, that polygamy was a contributing factor in poverty. Women believed they should have independent rights to property and other assets, but this view was opposed by most men” (Swaziland 1997). “It was suggested by some women that it would be better to be single, because the men provided no support and merely increased the workloads of women” (Swaziland 1997).

Polygamy is found to be most useful where it supports agricultural labor. In a Zambia PPA, polygamous households are found to be “better situated” than female-headed households. Where the lack of male labor for clearing and tree cutting, together with their unfavorable dependency ratios, makes female-headed households particularly vulnerable to labor shortages, “polygamous households tend to be better situated with regard to labor supply” (Zambia 1997). Polygamy also makes economic sense in the south of Madagascar where “people felt an economic reasoning for the promotion of polygamy in the south. Polygamy allows the husbands to divide the work between the wives. Women get usufruct rights to husband’s fields. It is then usually the women who choose which crop to plant, and who harvest and control distribution. The husband then assists various wives in managing difficult tasks in the field” (Madagascar 1994).

Yet the opposite result is also described in the PPAs, with scarcity of resources rendering polygamy economically dysfunctional. For example, in Uganda, “Polygamy leads to strained relations in the home and scarcity of resources. Polygamy is one of the defects; it is a terrible thing that someone with two acres of land has five wives. So many children share the little land and they all suffer” (Uganda 1998).

A complex description of family breakdown comes from a Benin PPA, where the high dependency ratio of children in polygamous family structures results in a practice of
children being sent away, with the poorest children likely to receive unfortunate host families:

“In some cases, these children are placed with relatives, in others with friends or friends of relatives, and in others still with total strangers. The link between the child’s family and the host family tends to determine the living conditions of the child: the closer the link, the more likely the child is to be treated like the host family’s own children, that is, sent to school and properly cared for. . . . A survey of vidomegon girls in Cotonou, for example, found that all of their parents mentioned poverty as the main reason for sending their daughters away, often accompanied by polygamy. These tend to be the cases where children end up in families unknown to their own relatives, either through a chain of relationships or through professional intermediaries” (Benin 1994).

**Figure 8. Difference between Male and Female Illiteracy Rates, 1997**

This chart illustrates the difference in male and female illiteracy rates in 1997. Most countries show a positive difference, indicating that more women than men are illiterate. Yemen has the highest difference of 43%. Jamaica is an exception, with a negative difference, showing that Jamaican women are more literate than men.

Source: World Development Indicators (1998)
**Figure 9. Educational Attainment - Secondary and Higher by Region (%)**

Source: World Development Indicators (1998)