



Empirical approaches to the study of intergenerational transmission of poverty

Introduction

This theme set out to identify the range of factors that increase the likelihood that poverty is passed from one generation to the next. A fundamental question is whether the drivers of IGT poverty are different to those of persistent and chronic poverty. Research conducted under the 'Empirical Approaches to the Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty' theme should ultimately generate research findings about the relative importance of different shocks during the life course in driving the intergenerational transmission of poverty. It should also provide us with insights into the extent to which livelihood resilience can help protect individuals from transitory poverty becoming chronic and intergenerational and the extent to which it can protect from the development of 'irreversibilities'. Furthermore, it should identify how important different bundles of assets are in protecting individuals from intergenerationally transmitted poverty, and what mix of assets or what absolute amounts are necessary. Lastly, it is anticipated that the research should assess the role of agency or choice in the intergenerational transmission of poverty and how agency interacts with assets to influence poverty outcomes.

These priorities were developed through the process of drafting the IGT theme's background paper (Bird, 2007) and through discussion with CPRC senior management.

The theme has attempted to build on work undertaken under Phase 2. This work used life history interviewing, in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants, and focus group discussions and attempted to draw on a range of methods from sociology, anthropology and micro-economics to develop in-depth analysis with a focus on the household and intra-household levels.

The CPRC Phase 3 proposal said that:

[w]hile this research stream will focus primarily on the intra-household level, it is recognised that the household is not the only nor, in many cases, even the main domain of IGT processes.....the research will, when applicable, explore the other important structures in which children, young people and other household members live, whether they are inside or outside households. Within communities, schools, and workplaces, children's assets, aspirations and long-term well-being can be affected by a range of actors, particularly extra-household relatives; peers, friends and schoolmates; neighbours; teachers; employers and co-workers; and religious leaders. Likewise other age-groups and ascribed groups (e.g. people with physical impairments) will be influenced and affected by inter-relationships, institutions and structural factors.

It was anticipated that a limited number of research questions would be identified and would complement work undertaken under poverty dynamics. This would 'help develop a "big picture" understanding based on the study of certain cohorts (e.g. all children in a particular country, all girls aged 10-14 etc) and at certain "moments" (e.g. a financial crash, the end of conflict, the introduction of UPE). This will be used to contextualise the largely household and intra-household analysis undertaken under this theme.'

There are also a number of gaps, which it is unlikely the CPRC will be able to fill, given resource limitations. These include the following:

- nurture, psycho-social issues and the intergenerational transmission of poverty;
- aspirations and agency and an individual's potential to have agency in different contexts – this work might

What is Chronic Poverty?

The distinguishing feature of chronic poverty is extended duration in absolute poverty. Therefore, chronically poor people always, or usually, live below a poverty line, which is normally defined in terms of a money indicator (e.g. consumption, income, etc.), but could also be defined in terms of wider or subjective aspects of deprivation. This is different from the transitorily poor, who move in and out of poverty, or only occasionally fall below the poverty line.



explore psychological development, the role of parents and violence;

- What are the processes by which the (differential) aspirations of individuals influence the transmission of poverty intergenerationally?
- What determines people's aspirations and norms?
- To what extent are aspirations and norms set by parents and to what extent are they set or influenced by others and by other factors (e.g. school, experience of discrimination and labour market rigidities)?
- To what extent are low aspirations the result of the internalisation of discrimination?
- What factors influence the transformation of aspirations into outcomes, and to what extent do unmet aspirations foster poverty that persists over lives and generations (important to recognise that 'big dreams' are important, 'feasible dreams' are better)?
- adolescence, young adulthood and the intergenerational transmission of poverty;
- neighbourhood – cultures of poverty, location, situational poverty, does it exist outside the north, the importance of social context;
- ethnicity, class and caste (ascribed status) - linked to adverse incorporation, discrimination, political contexts (and some gender issues);
- the impact of health and care deficits associated with the rise in women's paid employment, especially informal work;
- a gendered analysis of the relationship between child labour and the IGT of poverty;
- migration;
- institutionalised care and the IGT of poverty.

Our approach

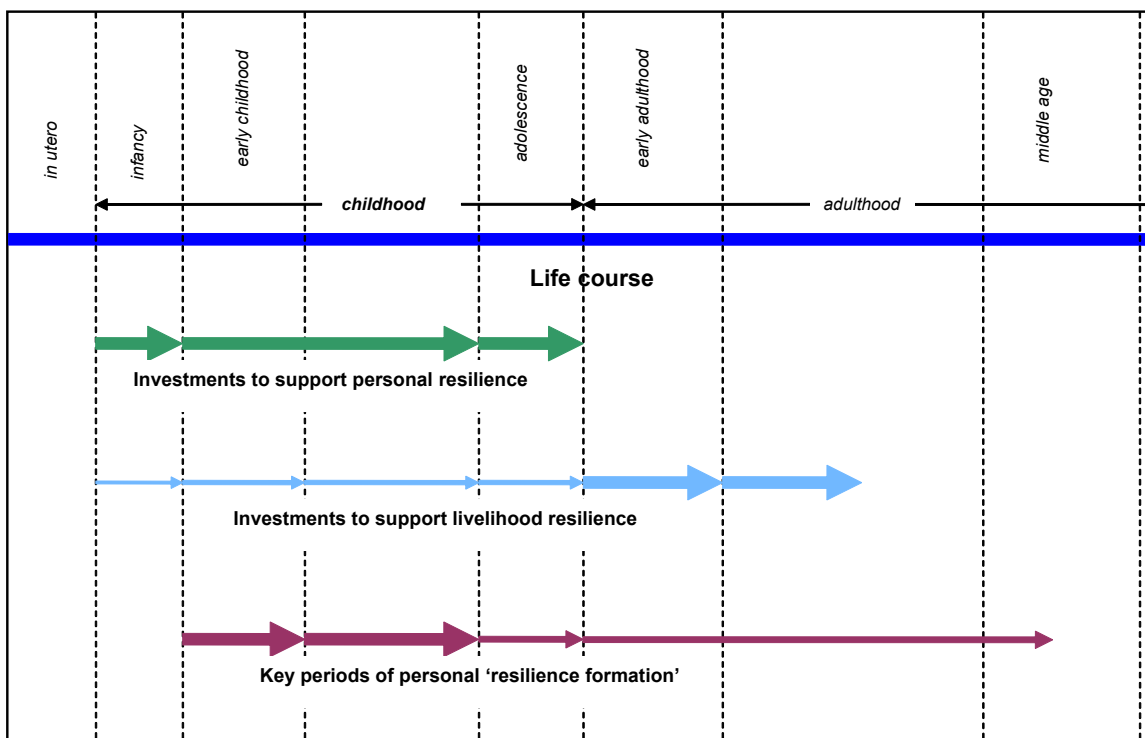
A range of factors and events influence an individual's well-being during their life course. Positive events and consistent nourishment, good parenting, education and skills transfer build the individual's capabilities and agency, while exposure to negative shocks and the absence of nurturing, investments in human capital and opportunities is likely to compromise the individual's future. Identifying which events in which period during the life course are more important than others, in terms of building resilience or creating irreversibilities is an empirical challenge (see Figure 1, below). We have attempted to respond to this challenge by focusing on how assets (including human capital and social assets) and inheritance influence resilience, the creation of 'irreversibilities' and the creation and interruption of IGT poverty.

Emerging Findings

This research has continued the process (begun in Phase 1 of the CPRC and by other researchers) of disentangling the key factors and processes that, within the context of the broader economic and socio-political context, determines the poverty status of individuals and their households, the sources of this status, and the potential 'poverty trajectories' for those growing up in poor households.

A range of factors were identified during Phase 1 as influencing the IGT of poverty. These include differentiated access to and control of resources and the returns on those resources, unequal investments in the human capital formation of household members and unequal

Figure 1: Investing in resilience during the life course



distributions of leisure and labour time. Factors important in determining these systematic inequalities were found to be due, in part, to: non-cooperative household decision-making processes, conflict and household disintegration; alcohol and drug dependence; mental distress; preferences within polygamous and joint-households; and differentiation based on social status (e.g. gender, age, mental or physical impairment, relationship to household head, birth order etc.) Many of these factors – for example lower investment in the education and nutrition of girls – clearly have negative long-term poverty implications. Other factors, such as a failed enterprise or livelihood activity due to a lack of parental cooperation, may have far more complex long-term effects on their children’s lives and livelihoods, and these need further investigation.

Although highly context specific, an individual’s asset bundle, their capabilities, and their power to exercise agency have been found to combine to generate ‘irreversibilities’, moulding the life-course of that individual (and their household). Research undertaken by CHIP (Childhood Poverty Research and Policy Centre) in Phase 2 identified a range of factors which increase the likelihood of an individual’s poverty status being irreversible. Systematic discrimination based on ethnicity or gender, for example, has been shown to limit the beneficial impact of pro-poor policy interventions on some groups of people. An individual’s aspirations, and how they are influenced by early life experiences, have also been found to play a strong role in the extent to which s/he is able to extract maximum benefit from any policy or programmatic interventions that create new opportunities over the individual’s life course. Other work has shown that older people can be vitally important with regard to the intergenerational transmission of poverty, especially through their role as carers and particularly in areas with high levels of morbidity and mortality from chronic disease. This research also reminds us that poverty can be transmitted ‘both ways’ – ie. that the poverty status of older people is affected by the status and behaviour of younger generations.

As mentioned above, much of the initial work of the theme was on developing a conceptual framework for the examination of the intergenerational transmission of poverty and on enriching the methodological toolbox for empirical research. In this section, we first present a taster of findings from the methodological papers before moving on to provide an overview of the empirical work undertaken by this theme.

Concepts and methods for IGT research

Studies of intergenerational transmission of poverty (IGT) often focus on household and intra-household level factors which affect IGT and its interruption. Yet during the two generations necessary for study of IGT, ‘context’ can change radically. This means that we need to adopt concepts and methods to link household and intra-household analyses of the IGT of poverty to an analysis of the external ‘changing context’. This can be achieved through linking multi-generational life histories with an updated, critical realist political economy perspective

(da Corta, 2009a, forthcoming).

The IGT theme has commissioned 2 papers on qualitative research (Miller, 2008; da Corta, 2009b forthcoming). They show that collecting family histories is a useful addition to the methodological toolbox and that an approach to semi-structured interviewing can enhance the quality of recall, reducing error and bias when respondents are reconstructing information about past changes in incomes and assets.

More specifically, Miller (2008) proposes a method of collecting family histories which links households from panel studies with individual life histories. He argues that in researching the IGT of poverty, family histories would augment panel studies in a number of ways:

- by placing quantitative findings into a context of expressed meaning;
- by providing a holistic view of the family, useful for investigating issues such as whether there is a ‘family strategy’ for mobility;
- by extending the space dimension provided by household panel data to households and individuals within the same family but located separately;
- by extending the time dimension provided by panel data, through the retrospective recall of events and the prospective anticipation of the future; and
- by allowing for the direct examination of generational change in the family and the persistence of poverty across generations of the same family.

da Corta illustrates how recall methods can help jog people’s memories and enable them to date, rank and quantify historical data (2009b, forthcoming). Such methods enable the construction of panel-type data, where a panel does not exist and allows researchers to link individuals or households in the panel to their accounts of changes in their poverty status and the social relations which underpin such poverty. da Corta proposes that recall methods might be useful in the study of IGT poverty to:

- create a multi-generational panel data ‘from scratch’;
- complete existing panel data sets by enhancing the range of variables or by extending existing surveys back into the past;
- complement good quality panel data by linking a smaller, sub-sample to in-depth qualitative life/family history data, and to;
- investigate the deeper historical origins of a process identified in field research.

In another paper, da Corta critically reviews existing Q-squared studies on chronic poverty based on panel and life history analysis (da Corta, 2009a forthcoming). Studies which construct livelihood trajectories are found to be enormously useful for revealing sequences of impoverishing or enriching events and strategies leading up to downward or upward mobility over the life course, lending some preliminary insight into causal processes. However, because there is a tendency to follow the methodological individualism of the panel and rely heavily on actors’ accounts, such studies might be relatively weaker in the analysis of transforming social

relations which underpin the deeper causes of changes in poverty status. As a result, these studies benefit from more determined, supplemental research into:

- intra-household conjugal and generational relations which affect the intra-household distribution of health, nutritional and educational investments during different phases of childhood and at inheritance. Such distributions can strongly influence subsequent mobility trajectories for each household member;
- extra-household relations of 'adverse incorporation and social exclusion' (AISE) in different institutional arenas including market, state and civil society shaped by intra-household domestic relations, gender, class, caste, ethnicity and age.

Both sets of social relational concepts help to restore the dialectic between the agency of actor's strategies and the structural constraints placed on them in their relations with the more powerful.

da Corta suggests moving beyond a q-squared approach to a q-cubed approach, where quantitative analysis of panel data on mobility and correlated characteristics (quantitative) is linked via households from the panel to multi-generational life histories which capture:

- an individual's livelihood strategies taken over their life course and their accounts of change (livelihood trajectories) (qualitative 1);
- linked to that individual's changes in social relations over their life course, within and outside the home, and the discursive bases of such relations (qualitative 2);
- linked to an analysis of the circumstances surrounding changing social relations through systematically linking such changes to local and macro contextual events and trends. Crucially this requires interviewing elites (qualitative 3).

The Comparative Life History Project's work, which has begun in Kenya and builds on earlier work in Bangladesh, is attempting to apply these approaches.

The theme has also commissioned work to identify the best ways to analyse quantitative data sets when seeking to explore the IGT of poverty. There is strong evidence from household surveys from industrialised countries that growing up poor has a negative impact on future life chances, but that the degree of impact depends on the variables that are explored and the analytical approach used. In other words, methods matter (Jenkins and Siedler, 2007a).

Robust quantitative data collection and analysis on intergenerational poverty is challenging in the most well-resourced contexts; in developing countries, the challenge is greater. Where obstacles are overcome quantitative analysis can improve the basis for poverty trajectories and explore the impact that changes (including policy change) can have on poverty outcomes (Behrman, 2006).

Quantitative data needs to meet stringent criteria if it is to be useful for the empirical analysis of the IGT of poverty (Jenkins and Siedler, 2007a). It must be able to link data within families across generations, so that individual outcomes can be linked with family background. In

addition, it must contain:

- appropriate measures of well-being and poverty;
- measures of other factors relevant to intergenerational poverty processes (e.g. parental education);
- a large, representative sample that remains so over time;
- repeated observations on key variables (e.g. income) over time, to facilitate 'longitudinal averaging' to reduce the potential impact of measurement errors and transitory variation, and to enable researchers to investigate issues such as whether the timing of poverty during childhood matters (ibid).

Where such data exists, the following variables are useful in the analysis of IGT poverty:

- individual and familial decisions related to intergenerational poverty;
 - eg. capacities and endowments of the 'child' (human, physical, financial and 'genetic' assets), and the factors that determine and affect these;
- parental background;
- asset transfers and resource allocations at different points in the life-course;
- 'sharing rules' (distributional norms);
- community contexts;
- market and service (education, health) provision.

Household panel surveys can meet these data requirements relatively well. Family Life Surveys (from Indonesia, Malaysia and Mexico) and other longitudinal studies such as retrospective surveys, cohort panels, rotating panels and linked data from administrative records might also be used, but have strengths as well as weaknesses (Jenkins and Siedler, 2007a).

Expertise in statistical analysis is required to make sense of such data, particularly to distinguish between correlation and causation. A range of statistical methods can be applied to IGT related work, including parametric regression models with 'level', 'sibling difference' and 'instrumental variable' estimators; non-parametric bounds estimators; and propensity score matching methods (Jenkins and Siedler, 2007a).

Empirical results

A range of factors are associated with the intergenerational transmission of poverty. Analysis so far has focused largely on household and intra-household level factors, but there is recognition that a number of crucial contextual and structural extra-household factors exist. Growing up disadvantaged has a pervasive and deleterious influence on a wide range of adult disadvantages. This impact is not wholly explained by other factors themselves correlated with childhood poverty (Jenkins and Siedler, 2007b; Hobcraft, 2007)

Household characteristics and initial endowments are important in influencing the intergenerational transmission of poverty. These might include an individual's asset bundle, their capabilities and characteristics, and their power to exercise agency. In addition, agency, status and the social constructions determining roles can combine



to result in differentiated access to, and control of, resources and the returns on those resources, unequal investments in the human capital formation of household members and unequal distributions of leisure and labour time. Other important factors include (Bird, 2007):

- systematic inequalities within and between households;
- adolescent pregnancy;
- early child-care and development practices;
- domestic violence; household income;
- household and individual assets;
- household decision-making;
- livelihood and survival strategies;
- service uptake;
- exposure and vulnerability to risk and resilience or ability to cope.

Good quality health, and education provision (including pre-school) are important instruments to limit the intergenerational transmission of poverty and anti-discrimination measures, combined with policies to improve the functioning of labour markets, have the potential to enable socio-economic mobility. This suggests that policy failures and the absence of a developmental state will increase the likelihood of poverty being transmitted intergenerationally. Where not only governance is poor but the state is either fragile or failed, the provision of key services is likely to be weak. Conflict has also been shown to be an important driver of intergenerationally transmitted poverty (ibid).

It is clear that parental income is a key correlate of IGT poverty. This suggests that policies that support sustainable livelihoods, employment and pro-poor growth are likely to be significant in supporting its interruption (Bird, 2007).

A range of factors and events influence an individual's well-being during their life course. Positive events and consistent nourishment, good parenting, education and skills transfer build an individual's capabilities and agency, while exposure to negative shocks and the absence of nurturing, investments in human capital and opportunities is likely to compromise an individual's future. Identifying which events in which period during the life course are more important than others, in terms of building resilience or creating irreversibilities is an empirical challenge (ibid).

The IGT theme has commissioned four papers on inheritance. Three of these papers are literature reviews and the fourth is an analysis of panel data from Bangladesh. The first of the literature reviews focuses on *de jure* and *de facto* rules and norms of inheritance practices in African societies, particularly of physical assets, and their effects on IGT poverty. It identifies recent scholarship which has contributed to the case for investigating the links between inheritance systems and IGT poverty; so-called 'traditional' inheritance practices among particular societies in Africa; legal and socio-political contexts within which inheritance systems in African countries operate, and how and why inheritance rules and practices change; gender inequality and inheritance systems; and the poverty effects of exclusionary inheritance rules and practices on vulnerable groups, covering widowed women, children and household affected by HIV/AIDS

(Cooper, 2008, forthcoming).

The second takes a strong gender approach to explore inheritance practices and IGT poverty in Asia (Dutta, 2009, forthcoming). It examines definitions, concepts and methodologies applied to the study of chronic poverty and inheritance practices; theories of inheritance; approaches to inheritance (including primogeniture, patrilineal and matrilineal inheritance practices); the relationship between marriage, the family and the household and inheritance; tradition and contemporary change in land and housing inheritance practices; and finally, inheritance in Asia in relation to the vulnerable (exploring gender and spousal inheritance, and the case of widows specifically).

The third paper in this series examines intrahousehold asset dynamics and their effects on IGT poverty. It reviews differential intrahousehold access to and control of assets and its short and longer run effects, including on IGT poverty. The paper discusses the links between poverty and asset dynamics; the main factors shaping the intrahousehold allocation of assets and resources; asset dynamics and its effects on IGT poverty, specifically in relation to agriculture and land, health and nutrition and human capital and education; and the importance of taking into account social norms and cultural contexts in the study of intrahousehold allocation and poverty dynamics. The paper emphasises the value of anthropology in exploring these issues (Soto, 2008, forthcoming).

Demographic and life-cycle factors have been identified in rural Bangladesh as among the important drivers of poverty (Quisumbing, 2007). In particular, the proportions of men and women aged 55 years and older in a household were significant predictors of chronic poverty, whereas the probability of never being poor increased with the educational attainment of the household head and with household assets, but decreased with the proportion of household members in the younger age groups. Higher proportions of children and older people are also significantly associated with lower per capita consumption, pointing to the importance of life-cycle and demographic factors in the creation and transmission of poverty.

Having older household members also makes the household vulnerable to shocks such as illness, death, and property division. When property is divided upon the parents' death or children grow up and leave, the resources of the original household are often reduced, sometimes significantly.

Illness shocks — in particular, the income foregone when an income earner falls ill — are important contributors to poverty. The impact of these and other shocks — such as dowry and wedding expenses, floods, and legal costs — in reducing consumption is shown to depend on the amount of land and assets owned by the household together with the schooling of the household head.

Dowry expenses — a type of intergenerational transfer — represent a substantial drain on household resources, as suggested by both the quantitative and qualitative work. In a society where consumption levels are already low, dowries represent forced savings as households with daughters significantly reduce consumption to save up for dowries.

This study generated some surprising results in terms

of the ways in which shocks affect households with different characteristics. Illness-related income losses and death of a household member are both associated with higher per capita consumption of households whose heads have less than four years of schooling; and dowry and wedding expenses, while having a negative impact on households as a whole, are associated with higher per capita consumption for households whose heads have less than four years of schooling. The complete analysis of qualitative data collected alongside the quantitative data is required to fully understand these results.

In Uganda, work by Janet Seeley explores the role of HIV and AIDS in the intergenerational transmission of poverty in rural Uganda using longitudinal survey and case study data (Seeley, 2008). The study focuses on:

- the factors that contribute to chronic poverty in rural Uganda;
- the patterns of intergenerational transfers and asset inheritance in the study households;
- the impact on children orphaned by AIDS and on older people of the intergenerational transmission of poverty, and
- the gender aspects in the transmission of intergenerational poverty in the context of the AIDS epidemic.

Data from 15 case study households, drawn from the findings of a longitudinal study of rural households in South-West Uganda, is used to examine these factors. The case study households were – or are – all headed by women, a number of whom have experienced relationship instability and have as a consequence struggled to take care of children and grandchildren, with little support from partners. The paper describes their experience of managing land and property transfers, the provision for children's education and skill-training and health care and examines the impact on the transmission of poverty to children of HIV and AIDS, as well as its impact on older people. It examines the strategies employed by household members to break the cycle of poverty, including migration for waged work and marriage. Some policy implications of the findings are outlined: the provision of anti-retroviral therapy, food security as well as access to good education and work and the importance of kin in the provision of support.

The study shows how having the support of a large network of kin and associates provides an effective safety net for many poor families in times of need. However, members of poor families who prosper often find themselves with additional mouths to feed, and this can place a strain on their resources. So, while the kin network remains a vital safety net in the absence of other social support, it can also function as a levelling force: keeping poor adults and their children poor, as resources are stretched, shared and traded.

An important conclusion of this study is that the conditions in which poverty exists are reproduced through similar mechanisms to those experienced by previous generations: poverty is not 'transmitted' so much as recreated because external and internal factors continue to constrain the opportunities to build assets.

A study to understand the role of asset inheritance and

transfer (schooling, land and assets) in IGT poverty in Bangladesh shows complex picture (Quisumbing, 2008). In Bangladesh, while marriage provides an occasion for families to make large transfers to the new couple, the final division of the parents' property occurs upon death. The timing of intergenerational transfers is gender-specific, with transfers to daughters occurring as dowries at the time of marriage, and bequests, largely to sons, occurring at the death of the parent.

The paper estimates the determinants of intergenerational transfers and assets at marriage, as a function of individual characteristics and family background. It compares the impact of inherited assets and intergenerational transfers, more broadly defined, on current landholdings, asset, and consumption. It then explores how households' poverty transition categories (e.g. whether they are chronically poor, moving out of poverty, falling into poverty, or never poor) are affected by inherited human and physical capital of both husband and wife, sibling support networks, household characteristics as of the baseline survey, and shocks experienced by the household, controlling for unobserved community characteristics.

The study reveals that in rural Bangladesh, intergenerational transfers are biased against women, and play an important role in the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

- First, parental investment in children, whether through investment in schooling or transfers of land and assets, tends to be biased against girls. Even if transfers at marriage favour brides, they do not compensate for the asset gap in inherited assets and schooling.
- Second, sisters often relinquish their share of inheritance to their brothers, in return for economic and social support. Indeed, one of the most important safety nets to protect a couple against falling into chronic poverty is the number of brothers that the wife has. Thus, a very small share of the couple's human and physical assets comes from wives.
- Third, intergenerational transfers are important determinants of current outcomes. Most of the transfers that significantly affect monetary measures of well-being are male-held transfers, such as husband's schooling, husband's land, and husband's assets, although the totality of intergenerationally transferred assets to wives is also an important determinant of current assets.

Taking these results at face value, it seems that intergenerational transfers received by women do not play an important role in family welfare. However, these results need to be interpreted carefully in the Bangladeshi context. First, women not only bring extremely low levels of schooling and assets to marriage, but also operate in an environment where they may not be able to realise economic or monetary returns to those transfers, so it is not surprising to see low returns to women's physical and human assets. In contrast, the existing analysis shows high returns to women's social networks — their network of brothers. Taken together, these findings imply that women are extremely

dependent on male relatives — their husbands and brothers. Second, future analysis needs to be expanded to explore how intergenerational transfers affect non-monetary factors related to the poverty and well-being of future generations, such as investments in education, health, and nutrition. Earlier studies looking at these relationships show that resources controlled by women increase investments in child schooling, and improve child health, particularly those of girls. In an environment where women are restricted from realising monetary or economic returns to intergenerationally transferred assets, women invest in non-monetary assets — their children — and also realise returns from non-monetary assets, such as their support network of brothers. Any analysis of IGT poverty should therefore do well not only to examine physical and financial assets transferred, but also intergenerational support networks.

A study focusing on Guatemala explores the effects of mothers' 'intellectual human capital' (cognitive skills as well as schooling attainment) and 'biological human capital' (long-run nutritional status) on children's intellectual and biological human capital (Quisumbing, Behrman, Murphy

and Yount, 2009, forthcoming). Results suggest that:

- maternal human capital is more important than standard estimates suggest;
- maternal cognitive skills have a greater impact on children's biological human capital than maternal schooling attainment;
- for some important indicators of children's human capital, maternal biological capital has a larger effect than maternal intellectual capital.

These results imply that breaking the intergenerational transmission of poverty, malnutrition and intellectual deprivation through investing in women's human capital may be even more effective than the previous literature has suggested, but requires approaches that take into account more dimensions of women's human capital than just their schooling. Effective interventions to improve women's biological and intellectual human capital often begin in utero or in early childhood and so will take longer before they are effective than if it was possible to simply rely on increased schooling.

This research summary was written by Kate Bird

This paper draws heavily on Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty Research Briefs Vols. 1-4, edited mainly by Karen Moore and Kate Higgins.

Relevant CPRC publications

(items marked * were commissioned/ produced under the IGT theme).

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The Chronic Poverty Research Centre

(CPRC) is an international partnership of universities, research institutes and NGOs, with the central aim of creating knowledge that contributes to both the speed and quality of poverty reduction, and a focus on assisting those who are trapped in poverty, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

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Overseas Development Institute, UK

Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies, South Africa

University of Legon, Ghana

University of Sussex, UK

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Contact:

Julia Brunt,
CPRC Programme Manager
j.brunt@odi.org.uk