



## WOMEN AND POVERTY

When Gods took place of Goddesses everything has changed against women. Beforehand women were the ones who started planting the soil, breeding the animals and giving start to economy. In every aspect of life women were the dominant spirit! But today, unfortunately we are discussing in this platform, “Women and Poverty”.

It is well known that, poverty is a persisting problem of the world, and its conceptualization and measuring remains problematic as the concept is multidimensional and political. I would like to start to share our approach related to the international definitions and analyzes on the poverty. It is widely accepted that poverty manifests itself in diverse ways; it includes the lack of income and access to productive resources. Poverty is also manifested in the lack of, or limited access to education and other basic services such as health care and housing. On the other hand, poverty means hunger, bad nutrition and poor health. Poverty increases the morbidity and mortality, besides all of these it also increases discrimination and social exclusion. The exclusion and discrimination provoked by poverty lead to the loss of well-being and restrict the fundamental human rights. It is world widely accepted; poverty is not the product of individual processes or particular pathologies or psychologies. But it is rather a product of complex power relationships that produce, maintain and reproduce it. It is the direct consequence of the unequal development generated by global, national and local economic and social policies.

Although, almost nearly last thirty years, “Women and Poverty” is studied in the wide range of concerns and discussed in the related literature, poverty and gender issues still need to be widely analyzed in several layers. Thorough review of the related literature exist many field studies that have provided extensive analyses of issues related to trade and labor, property rights, and legal aspects of women’s rights. Some of the researches have emphasized the continuing gap between rhetoric and reality in women’s rights, and in their access to property, resources and services. Besides these, some of the studies also showed scarce examples of innovative efforts, but also noted the insufficiencies of progress. It is showed that, besides the innovative efforts, economic inequalities between men and women are widening, for many reasons. It is clear that, discriminatory practices at all levels continue to prevent women from taking opportunity of any economic and social improvement in their societies.

We should take into account the discussions on the vanished concept of “feminization of poverty” while we are talking about “women and poverty”.

It is well known that, the concept of feminization of poverty was introduced at the end of the seventies. This concept has been popularized not only at the level of academic and feminist literature, but also at international forums. It highlighted that the particular impact of poverty on the lives of women throughout the world. The claim was supported by research that showed the many ways in which poverty affects women. This effort produced an important body of literature that documented how poverty among women, far from diminishing, had been increasing. But at the end of the nineties, the concept of feminization of poverty began to be questioned.

The concept is also not mentioned in the Millennium Project documents which elaborated by the Millennium Project Working Committee on Gender Equality. The situation of women is analyzed by looking at gender inequality and its relationship with poverty, in detail by this committee. The report of the Working Committee states that; "...gender is a social construction that defines and differentiates roles, rights, responsibilities and obligations of women and men. Although the specific nature and degree of these differentiated norms vary throughout societies and time, at the beginning of the 21st Century they still favor men and boys, giving them better access to the capacities, resources and opportunities that are important for the enjoyment of economic, political, and social power..."

In all societies we find norms and practices based on gender, producing and reproducing views and realities that keep women in situations of subordination and exclusion. The household is the key site in which gender discrimination is expressed. Unequal gender relations within the household are reproduced in labor, trade, legal frame, laws and government. Besides all of the international conventions and national legislations regarding all kind of discrimination against women, the world's poor are still dominantly women. How could be explained the achieved situation?

Another approach that the situation of poverty among women was outlined by Nilufer Cagatay, Turkish Professor of Economics and member of the Middle East Studies and Women's Studies Program, in a study prepared by the United Nations Development Program. She defines the human poverty as the deprivation of opportunities and options to live a tolerable and basically human life. She points out that the concept of human poverty reveals the relationship between gender, inequality and poverty. She notes that; women are more vulnerable to chronic poverty due to gender inequalities with respect to income distribution, access to credit, control of property and income earned through work, as well as gender bias in the labor market.

To understand the social, economic and politic positions of women, firstly their health, education, employment, fertility, literacy, political participation must be examined. Let's look at the well documented studies revealed that, in the nineties, throughout the world, more boys than girls finished elementary school. Since then, the gap in elementary school participation between boys and girls has been narrowing. As of 2004, a total of 114 million children around the world did not receive even basic education and 584 million women were illiterate. In most of the world's regions, female participation in secondary and tertiary education is smaller than male participation. Without access to education, women's and girls' opportunities to reach economic independence are more difficult. However, a greater rate of participation in education does not necessarily mean a greater development index for women, in all societies.

It is believed that property rights and control over goods are essential for life and economic security. Even besides the legally equal regulations, unfortunately, women in many countries of the world do not own property and do not control goods. Moreover, the lack of these rights affects access to credit and the possibility of reaching economic independence.

Access to paid work is essential to the process of empowering women. The participation of women in economic activities increased throughout the world during the eighties and nineties. Nonetheless, in all countries of the world, the status of women in the labor market is substantially lower than that of men in terms of the nature, conditions and quality of the jobs available to them. Documented inequalities are manifested in the nature and terms of hiring and discrimination based on women's reproductive role.

The fact that, even though the countries have signed the relevant conventions on international agreements regarding discrimination against women (CEDAW and ILO convention), do not guarantee

equal access. It is well known that those have Constitution and relevant legislation prohibit gender-based discrimination. Many restrictions, such as maternity and child leave protections, exceed accepted international norms are also appearing in the relevant labor legislations. But unfortunately, such legal restrictions to protect women lead also to some limit in their job opportunities. Widely accepted cultural discriminative values influence the employee attitudes towards women applicants. Furthermore, employers' stereotypical assumptions, about women's inability to manage family and work responsibilities together, have had deviated the worst side. Under new legal frame, women workers cost much more than men. All those have unintended effect of making women less competitive candidates in trade and labor. As a result, women are increasingly pushed into low-wage jobs or the unregulated informal sectors.

On the other hand, the participation of women in political positions and political decision-making processes permits incorporation of women's perspective and vision into the analysis of problems, while improving the quality of the governmental process. It is defined that, countries in which the representation of women in positions of political power is smaller than 30% tend to be less inclusive, less equitable and less democratic. Nevertheless, in all countries of the world women are substantially absent from political decision-making bodies. In 2004, 27 countries provided women with only between 20 and 29% of the positions in political bodies.

The other emphasizing approach to the topic is equality. Equality between men and women cannot be reached if reproductive and sexual rights are not guaranteed to women and girls. These rights are essential so women and girls can take control of their lives and destinies. Lack of access to these rights is reported the cause of almost a fifth of the world's morbidity and premature mortality of women of reproductive age. It is obvious that, violence against women is the clearest manifestation of women's unequal condition in societies. It is estimated that, by WHO, violence against women is as serious a cause of death and disability among women of reproductive age, as cancer. It is not possible to determine with certainty the magnitude of violence against women because women do not report many of the incidents of violence and authorities do not maintain reliable data. Nevertheless, available surveys show that all kind of violence against women occurs in all socioeconomic, religious, and racial sectors, and in all geographical areas. It is fed by the social and historical construction of the differences between men and women that places the sexes in hierarchical positions. Violence has a serious impact on women's sexual, emotional, and physical health, as well as on their economic and social development, and limits their possibilities for empowerment. In spite of the fact that many countries have adopted laws and public policies to prevent and punish violence against women, few countries adequately apply the national and international legal provisions.

In most societies women tend to work more hours than men, have lower education, lower incomes, less capital and less access to credit, to information and to knowledge. ... In fact, gender relations affect all aspects of economic life and build up economies in gendered structures. Moreover, power relationships based on gender mean that women experience poverty in a different way as men perceive it. For men poverty is only related to loss of his job whenever he finds a new job, he is capable of getting over it but for women poverty may exist while having a job because of low payments, part time jobs or unpaid services. If woman is divorced or a widow she could end up changing her social class, from middle to lower class, which means poverty.

It is a known fact that economic development does not necessarily eliminate poverty, while countries with different development levels and welfare state policies experience different levels of poverty. Hence, poverty has become a major problem for both the developed and the developing countries, and in Turkey it has gained in importance since 1990. Various governments during the 1990-2004 periods recognized the fact that poverty is no longer a transitory problem and that it has an increasing tendency. Since 1999, restructuring of the

existing welfare programs, especially focusing on poverty alleviation, has started. Turkey is not a poor country by global standards, although the Turkish State Statistical Institute found that a fifth of the population were at risk of poverty in 2005. Public awareness tends to be limited to the misapprehension that such widespread poverty is a problem of individuals themselves rather than the lack of an adequate social support system.

Policies that promote greater social equality are expected to lower poverty; however, if such policies fail to take into account internal dynamics and heterogeneity, they may actually reinforce inequalities within the same household. Although gender is a key determinant in the distribution of rights and resources, it is not the only factor, as seen in the findings of various field studies, in Turkey. Since awareness has started very recently, a consensus has not yet been reached about how poverty can be defined in the Turkish context, what is the extent of poverty, what are the appropriate indicators, and what are the major risk groups.

In Turkey, social and cultural dimensions of poverty are even more significant than the economic factors. However, they are not preferred because they are "not measurable". For example, if we try to understand poverty in Turkey in terms of equality of life chances and human rights, we can not use economic criteria only.

All those arguments for conceptualization of poverty in Turkey can be understood better if we can analyze different dynamics of poverty and their effects separately. The major dynamics of poverty in Turkey might be analyzed in two groups. Firstly, there will be a discussion of absolute figures in terms on employment, education and income distribution. Secondly, more qualitative dynamics like family and social networks, mutual help systems and the role of women in the labor force should be taking into account.

In Turkey, the unemployment rate is rather high. According to the report of the State Institute of Statistics (SIS) in 2002; 45, 01 % of the casual and seasonal workers, working for daily wages is reported as poor. Among the unemployed, 2, 06 % officially, but it is much higher, up to even 10 – 12 %, the poverty rate is 32, 44 % in general. But when urban- rural differences are considered, among the unemployed in the urban areas the poverty rate is 22, 99 %, while it is 62, 56 % among the unemployed in the rural areas. Among the economic sectors employment in agriculture, forestry and construction sectors are most vulnerable. Employment in the informal sector is also significant with relation to poverty, due to low wage, low status and insecure jobs. This group is usually called "the working poor" in the literature.

Additionally, according to the SIS Household Labor Force Survey for 2004, the population 15 years of age and over is 50 million and the annual average of labor force participation rate in Turkey is 48.7 %. The labor force participation is 72.3% and 25.4% for men and women consecutively. The employment rates are 62.2% and 20.8% for men and women respectively. The SIS Household Labor Force Survey for 2004 also reveals that unregistered employment is 53% of the total employment. Every year nearly 700-800 thousand people are added to the labor force but the employment capacity is not sufficient to absorb these new comers. Besides the general unemployment problem, unemployment among qualified and long term unemployed are crucial problems of the labor market since the economic crisis in 2001.

According to the SIS Household Labor Force Surveys, total informal employment is in agricultural sector in the form of "unpaid family workers" mainly composed of women. All these

statistics show that unemployment and underemployment in the informal sector are important dimensions of poverty in Turkey.

According to the 2000 Census of Population, while the population at the age of 6 and above is about 60 million, the percentage of illiterate population is 12.6%; 25 % of whom are men and 75 % of whom are women. The rate of school leavers after primary school is 14 % in general, 10.5 % for boys and 19 % for girls.

The figures of 1999 Child Labor Force Survey state that, in Turkey, a lack of interest in education and a lack of belief in the importance of education. The educational costs, difficulties in access to schools in rural areas and a need of making an economic contribution to families are the reasons for children aged at 6-17 not attending a school and having left school. Another point worth noting is that the percentage of girls in the education system is significantly lower than the percentage of boys. Limited opportunities for education are a major parameter of poverty in Turkey.

The SIS statistics reveal that access to the education the most useful explanatory factor for poverty. The higher the level of education the lower the level of poverty both in rural and urban areas. Thus, the poverty rate for the illiterate population, which constitutes the 11.2 % of the total population, is 41.0 % whereas it is 1.5 % for the university graduates which constitute 3.7 % of the total population. The poverty rates for the same groups in rural areas are 46.4 % and 4.3 % respectively.

Turkey is one of the countries where inequalities in income distribution are quite high. According to SIS Household Budget Survey 2003, 20 % of the population consisting of the people at the lowest income level received only 6 % and 20 % of the population consisting of the people at the highest income level received 48.3 % of total income.

The Poverty Study conducted by SIS in 2002, figures out that 1.3 % of the population of Turkey, 2.0 % of the rural population and 0.9 % of the urban population is below the food poverty threshold. Poverty risks according to age are 32.0 % for 0-15 age group, 22.0 % for 16-64 age group, and 22.7 % for 65 and over age.

Hence, according to all mentioned indicators, which are mainly dependent on income level, the conceptualization of dynamics of poverty needs to consider the nature and the level of employment, educational attainment, household size, number of children, and the type of housing more than anything else. In fact, so far the dynamics of poverty were rather related to absolute conditions, where poverty is defined as the incapability of getting access to basic human needs.

The level of public social spending and the extent and nature of poverty alleviation programs in a country have a significant impact on the rate of poverty. In Turkey, such programs are still very inadequate. So the family or kin solidarities have been a major factor of resisting poverty and keeping its members alive for many years.

It is obvious that, the gendered poverty is invisible if we take the family as the unit of analysis. In relation to gender as a factor, in Turkey, migrant and rural women's poverty is reflected in terms of lack of labor market participation and inevitable dependent situation. Women have lack of empowerment, initiative, and representation in the public sphere. Another aspect of gender is that women themselves are the major resources of the family pool. They either work outside "contribute to the family budget"; or do homeworking/piecework for very low returns and no security of any kind. They are the ones who are sent to local governors or to neighbors to ask for money or for food, since men's pride should not be diminished. Also, women have a major role in connecting the social networks to the family/kin network through their relations with other women in the neighborhood; they carry information about cheap food, or news about a possible job, or about the help distributed by the municipalities. Nonetheless, even if women are employed and earn money, they do not have the right to keep their money, and are more severely afflicted by poverty.

Although Turkey's achievements in gender equality date back to the 1930s, when Turkish women were granted full voting rights, it was the country's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against women (CEDAW) in 1986 that led to the establishment of a national machinery for the promotion of gender equity. Since then Turkey has increased its commitment to achieving genuine gender equality by passing milestone legal reforms that eliminate fundamental discriminatory provisions against women, including those on violence, poverty and economic exploitation.

As a part of a field study, in the scope of various development projects and initiatives, highlight inequalities in resource distribution in all poor households, with women having less access to resources than men, regardless of the degree of household poverty. However, resource allocation also varies among women themselves, and is influenced by such factors as age, marital status, employment status and location in rural or urban.

The data show that poor women's access to fundamental resources varies. Poor women's access to household monetary resources also varies. In some region of Turkey, where seasonal migration of male household members is a widespread coping strategy, women take over the household responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, while the men are absent. However, while they may act as the "household safety valve", women require permission from the men of the household before making actual expenditures, and young women require permission from older women.

In terms of labor force participation, poor urban women are differentiated from poor rural women by their status as wage earners; however, poor working women in varying regions are not a homogeneous group. For example, whereas regular wage-earners feel they have a certain amount of control over how their earnings are spent, women who are casual employees have no such control, with their daily income, in some cases, paid directly to their husbands. In a field study is reported that women's control over their own earnings also varies according to their marital status. Relying on the data, half of the married women indicated that they can spend their earnings on the needs of their children without asking their husbands. Young working women, on the other hand, to a great extent are denied control over their earnings without much questioning.

The studies show that women in Turkey, regardless of their age, marital and employment status, or location, suffer from increasing inequality in access to food and basic services such as healthcare. Current poverty line definitions and poverty alleviation schemes in Turkey to a great extent ignore household dynamics. Although a wide range of work on intra-household poverty dynamics exists, their interactions with gender issues have been largely neglected. Besides all of these, ineffective use of available resources and policies that do not touch the main causes of poverty and deprivation are the result. The multi-dimensional nature of poverty requires revisions in these definitions and policy approaches, in Turkey, in order to better reflect the complex dynamics between and within genders and age groups in the household.

While Turkey has made considerable progress in achieving legal gender equality, the existing challenge is implementation. Behavioral change has not necessarily followed legislative change, creating a gap between law and practice. Turkey remains far from the desired levels in terms of basic development indicators, including women's participation in decision-making. Women are still extremely under-represented in Turkey's parliament, 6 % for the last election in 2007; violence against women remains a social problem; and allocation of resources is still gender biased. Advancements are also being overshadowed by growing socio-economic and regional disparities: inequality and poverty are more prevalent in the eastern part of the country, in rural versus urban settings, in low-educated versus highly-educated. Unfortunately, recently growing power of fundamentalist activities is pushing the women and girl child to the worse subordinated situation.

Advocacy, awareness, and available resources are virtually needed. Women are often restrained in exercising their rights fully or are unaware of the scope of their rights. Collaborative efforts between local and national government, NGO's, labor market partners, media and private co-operations in the area of women's rights are needed.

What can be done to overcome poverty?

All these discussions and arguments show that poverty among women is a serious problem that requires immediate and sustained attention of all groups. The fact is that, today, the need to eradicate inequality between men and women as an imperative to the eradication of poverty cannot be questioned. The actions that this task needs, nevertheless, require a revision of the perspective of neutrality feeding constitutional theory in liberal societies. Eradicating poverty requires positive interventions, affirmative action, control over public and private employers, and promotion of cultural changes, as well as access to decision-making processes for those who are living in poverty. None of this is promoted by an interpretation of the Constitution and human rights norms based on the notion of a non-intervening State and a free market model. If Law is to participate in the transformation of poverty, the transformation of Law itself will be required.

We would like following suggestions for action that can be taken to remedy the situation: access to health care; access to education; good nutrition; child protection; and the right to live in a secure family environment. It is not possible to understand in detail the impact of macroeconomic policies, globalization, or neoliberalism, in the life of women unless we listen to women. It is also worthy important to promote and make the participation of women in the planning as well as in monitoring and evaluation of the projects and programs intended to benefit them. In line with Masonic principles and virtues, our goal should be to take an active role in the provision of such action for the betterment of the society and women.

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