

Case Study 5. UNU-WIDER: The Gendered Nature of Asset Accumulation in Urban Contexts: Longitudinal Results from Guayaquil, Ecuador

Country: Ecuador

Year(s) of project/ study: 1978-2004

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Background: The study examines the gendered nature of asset accumulation between 1978 and 2004 in Indio Guayas, a low-income community on the periphery of the city of Guayaquil, Ecuador. In so doing, it emphasizes both the importance of combining quantitative and qualitative intra-household data, as well as taking a longitudinal perspective rather than at a single point in time. This study seeks to examine the relationship not only between gender and urban income poverty but also, more importantly, between gender and urban asset accumulation, illustrating how the combination of quantitative econometric measurement of assets and qualitative in-depth anthropological findings on the complex underlying gender relations both contribute to a far more comprehensive analysis of asset accumulation processes in urban contexts than can be gained from any single methodological approach.

Methodology: The research methodology combined fieldwork (based on anthropological participant observation), with a longitudinal sociological survey. At the data analysis stage, the study further elaborated on the cross-disciplinary combined 'qual-quant' methodology and developed what is termed 'narrative econometrics'. This combines the econometric measurement of changes in asset accumulation derived from the sociological panel data surveys, with in-depth anthropological narratives. The project also constructed an 'Asset Index' to measure asset accumulation, see study by Moser and Felton (2007):

Findings: The central finding of the study is that female-headed households actually do better than male-headed households in terms of income poverty, but worse in terms of asset accumulation. These results point to the limitations of simple generalizations relating to female headship and poverty. They show the importance of longitudinal data that better reflect different stages in the lifecycle. The fact that the qualitative anthropological narrative provides the causal explanation as to why income poverty and asset accumulation are not necessarily entirely interrelated demonstrates the advantages of research that adopts a mixed methods approach.

For more information:

Moser, Caroline. 2009. Ordinary families, extraordinary lives: Assets and poverty reduction in Guayaquil 1978-2004. Washington DC, Brookings Press. Available at:

<http://www.brookings.edu/press/Books/2009/ordinaryfamiliesextraordinarylives.aspx>

Moser, Caroline, and Andrew Felton. 2010. The gendered nature of asset accumulation in urban contexts: Longitudinal results from Guayaquil, Ecuador. Working Paper No. 2010/17, UNU World Institute for Development Economics Research (UNU-WIDER). Available at: <http://www.wider.unu.edu/stc/repec/pdfs/wp2010/wp2010-17.pdf>

Moser, Caroline, and Andrew Felton. 2007. The construction of an asset index: Measuring asset accumulation in Ecuador. CPRC Working Paper 87. Washington DC: Brookings Institution. Available at: http://www.dfid.gov.uk/r4d/PDF/Outputs/ChronicPoverty_RC/87Moser_Felton.pdf

Feedback on case study 5 methodology based on an interviews with Caroline Moser and Andrew Felton:

- 1. What are the unique gender-asset questions/indicators you collected in your survey instrument that were particularly valuable or reflective of methodologies you would like to see replicated in future work and why?**

The asset index we developed was based on human, social, physical and financial/productive capital but with important asset index categories. Probably the most important was the differentiation between household and community social capital.

- 2. Asset-gender dynamics are heterogeneous, complex and rooted in social, economic and institutional factors—are there any background factors that relate strongly to gender-asset dynamics that you either collected or wish you had collected?**

The importance of community social capital in the early days of the community consolidation was linked to the lack of infrastructure, etc. As this was acquired so community social capital declined, while the shift to a neo-liberal privatized economy meant household social capital became stronger.

- 3. Are there any particularities about the region or country of implementation which you think are important to recognize in relation to the gender-asset indicators you collected which are important for other researchers to be aware of? Did any of these context- or country-specific factors influence your survey implementation methodology, and how?**

This was an urban study – hence the importance of housing as the first most important asset.

- 4. What do you see as the largest methodological challenges in collecting gender-asset data in general and how can we as a research community work towards filling this gap?**

The critical methodological issue in my work has been the combination of the quantitative asset index with in-depth qualitative data obtained by living as an anthropologist in the community over 30 years, hence the construction of ‘narrative econometrics’. I did not set out to look at gender-assets but at household assets – this is a critical difference. Therefore the data when cut from a gender perspective was obviously more limited than had it been a specific gender-asset study. On the other hand the qualitative data was largely constructed around the lives of five women – and their first and second generation families. Finally an important difference from most studies is it has a 30 year longitudinal perspective and so is able to provide interpretations more difficult in ‘snap-shots’ done at specific points in time.