Foreword

GENDER ECONOMICS: A FOREWORD

In mainstream economics, there is no role for gender. The fundamental decision making unit is “rational economic man” which, despite the name, is genderless. All people are assumed to be essentially the same, only distinguished by their initial endowment of resources and by their preferences. By focusing on economic behaviour in this way, among other serious problems, economics ignores the role of gender. However, gender matters. It affects access to employment opportunities, to pay, to education, to political entitlement and to finance. It influences all aspects of economic and social behaviour. It has a profound impact on development and development potential. By neutering “rational economic man”, economists abstract from one of the important aspects of economic reality.

Acknowledging the importance of gender has led to fundamental policy changes, which impact on the economic environment for everyone. An important example, particularly in the context of economic development is the role of micro finance as a method to extend finance to the poorest and most marginalised members of society. In fact, the importance of aiming development policy predominantly at women has long been acknowledged as an important strategy, which generates significant flow on effects for everyone.

Susanne Moore has been extremely active in placing the agenda of gender economics in the public arena. She has set up The Centre for Gender Economics and Innovation Australia, and organised the first Global Gender Economics Conference, which provided the inspiration and papers for this volume. In doing so she has defined a space for the relatively new study of Gender Economics.

Gender Economics is multidisciplinary, drawing on other disciplines including, economics, gender studies, sociology, management, finance and law. As such, this broad array of disciplines makes it hard for mainstream economics to engage with the main issues. However, heterodox traditions, despite their own multidisciplinary base, have also been poor at considering the implications of gender differences. Gender Economics differs from Feminist Economics in ways which are important and are outlined in Chapters 1 and 2 in this volume. Although there is a strong feminist tradition in economics, Gender Economics has been much neglected.

The underlying theme of the book, and of Gender Economics, is to stress the importance of gender diversity in all aspects of economic and social relations, as gender makes a difference to both. As such, it makes an important contribution to our understanding of the role of gender in society.

Peter Kriesler
University of New South Wales, Australia