The Commodity Chain of the Household: From Survey Design to Policy Planning

Ernestina Coast (LSE)
Sara Randall (UCL)
Tiziana Leone (LSE)
Beth Bishop (UCL)

Funded by ESRC
Do household definitions matter?

‘The household is central to the development process. Not only is the household a production unit but it is also a consumption, social and demographic unit’

Kenya: Ministry of Planning and National Development 2003:59
The Issue

Why does the definition matter?

What are consequences of household definition?
  – Data commissioners
  – Data collectors
  – Data analysts
  – Data users
    • Policy makers
    • Planning / implementing targeted interventions

What are the implications for “household” members?
We are not.....

Redefining the definition of the household
Data designers & collectors have:
- clear ideas about why need something called ‘household’
- clear aims
- clear understanding of household definition

BUT what about analysts / users / consumers far removed from collection?

MIGHT: look at definition and assume this is the unit of production, consumption, socialisation central to the development process

MIGHT: not even look at definition because they assume they know what a household is
Do household definitions matter?

- More variables being added in ‘household section’
  - Way of measuring wealth / poverty / access to facilities which influence health
  - New level of analysis / explanation

- More use (researchers & policy makers) made of publicly available data

- Recognition of importance of society’s basic unit as influence upon members’ well-being
Methods

1. Document review (1950-present) Sub-Saharan Africa

2. Key informant interviews (International)

3. Ground truthing fieldwork (Tanzania case study)
   1. Cognitive interviews
   2. Ethnographic interviews

4. Modelling differences, to include:
   1. Female headed households
   2. Household dependency ratios
   3. Asset indices
   4. Household size
Census Data Collection: issues in household definition

**AIM**: complete enumeration of population along with individual level characteristics for planning purposes

**Themes in definitions**

- **Eating together**
- **Common housekeeping**
- **Living together**
- **Answerable to head**

- A group of persons who normally live and eat together *Kenya 1969*
- A group of persons who normally live and eat together, whether or not they are related by blood or marriage *Kenya 1979/89*
- Adds answerable to the same household head *Kenya 1999*

- 'Private household' defined as a group of persons living together and sharing living expenses. *Tanzania 1967/78/88*
- "Respondents who live in the same housing unit or in connected premises and have common cooking arrangements (eat their food together) *Ethiopia 1994*

- A household consists of a person, or a group of persons, who occupy a common dwelling (or part of it) for at least four days a week and who provide themselves jointly with food and other essentials for living. In other words, they live together as a unit. *S.Africa 1996*
Census Data Collection: issues in household definition

Summary:

• household definition is practical solution to census aims of total enumeration
• recognition (usually) that is a reduced social unit
• recognition that compromises are made
• set of rules for enumerators to follow
• continuity over time – comparability

Creation of what van de Walle (2006) calls ‘a statistical household’
Sample surveys: issues in household definition (eg: WFS, DHS, WHS)

Household definition

**practical:** to enable the identification of individuals for individual questionnaires

“The household is a device used to get at the individual. The household is the sampling unit while the individual is the observational unit.”

*World Health Survey 2002*

‘main purpose of household questionnaire was to identify women who were eligible for the individual interview’

*Zambia DHS 1992, 1996*
Do household definitions matter?

Issues of misrepresentation

– Labour / resources / consumption / poverty…

• Sub-groups
  ▪ Homeless
  ▪ Street children
  ▪ Mobile production systems (fishers, pastoralists, miners, construction)
  ▪ Migrants
  ▪ Single person households
Do household definitions matter?

Increasing use of ‘indicators’

Many indicators calculated at the household level

- MDGs
- Poverty reduction
- Asset indicators
  - Access to piped water / latrine
  - Access to key resources (production or communication)
  - Consumption and expenditure
    - Including food
Emerging themes

• Single person households

• Urban affluent
  • Household headship?

• Migrants and mobility
  • Low-income rental neighbourhoods

• Occupations
  • Mining
  • Agribusiness
  • Construction

Where is the cooking pot?