HOUSEHOLDS AND THE ANALYSIS OF THEIR LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

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An important contribution of gender studies to social science research has been to highlight the roles of different categories of people within domestic groups. This paper reviews studies that show the need to focus on the household as a social and economic unit. Such a focus permits a better understanding of how and why people organise their activities. The use of the concept of household livelihood strategies will facilitate a a clearer view of both collective and individual processes of decision—making. Illustrations of the use of these methods of field work and analysis will be drawn from work in Java and Papua New Guinea¹

Households are a basic social and economic unit in which many people interact and organise themselves for shelter, sustenance and reproduction. Households may wholly or partially comprise nuclear or extended families. They may include servants, workers, adopted children or old people in addition to the nuclear family. Families, on the other hand, are defined by kinship – biological affiliation. Households are commonly defined as comprising those living and eating together and include other people, not biologically related, who are part of the sharing unit: this therefore excludes family members who live elsewhere.

Research, particularly in the less—developed world, shows how rural people make a living in a variety of different ecological, cultural and economic situations and also how the ways of making a living have changed within living memory. The focus of such research should not be individuals: rather it should be the lowest level unit within which individuals are organised – the household. It is a generally—accepted principle of human behaviour that people are gregarious and act in association with others – except in extreme situations. In order to understand their selection of activities to sustain themselves it is necessary to focus on the household unit and the ways in which each person's activity is related to that of other household members. Deere has pointed out that it is no longer acceptable to categorise households by the occupation of the male head of household for this ignores the age and gender divisions within the household (Deere 1990 fn).

The activities of household members and their use of time and environmental resources can be conceptualised as strands that interweave to make up the fabric of household livelihood strategies. The use of these two concepts, household and household livelihood strategy, can clarify the nature of data that needs to be collected in the field and facilitate the study of both relations between households and environment and between households and the wider economic and cultural world of which they are

¹. The field work on which this is based was carried out during the tenure of a Senior Research Fellowship in the Department of Human Geography in the Institute of Advanced Studies at the Australian National University (ANU). A preliminary version of this paper was given to a seminar at the ANU.

part. Neither concept is new and we review the use that has been made of each and the ways in which they enable a better understanding of the use of different livelihood strategies. Interest in the household as a widespread social unit has focused on the variations in its form and function in different societies but has tended to stress its universality as a form of organisation (Goody 1976, Yanagisako 1979). There has also been widespread acceptance of the increasing importance of the nuclear family and the household in non-industrial societies as a consequence of greater integration into capitalist economic systems at a world, national and regional level, in particular as a direct consequence of colonial domination. Thus, while the family was the focus of traditional anthropological concern for understanding interpersonal and intergroup relations through kinship (Fox 1973) the understanding of the household was more rooted in its role as the main organisational unit within the domestic mode of production (White 1980). The internal cohesion of this unit - based on the satisfaction of household (small-group) needs - and its relationship with other, larger economic units can best be comprehended if one recognises that the maintenance of this cohesion is a priority in household decision-making (Sahlins 1972, Meillasoux 1981).

It is also necessary to recognise that households contain individuals some of whose actions are best explained by the desire to satisfy their personal objectives as well as their interest in maintenance or strengthening their household. Tensions arise between the individuals within a household and give rise to activities that may benefit the individual rather than the household. While accepting the value of households as units of analysis, it is still necessary to recognise the unequal distribution of power between its members (Sage 1989). It is useful to recognise the validity of two models of relations in household economies - moral (subsistence) economy, and (commodified) political economy (Cheal 1990). These are parallel systems which may logically coexist. Where household relations are structured by both sets of principles, individual household members adhere to one or other set of principles in their day-to-day work allocation decisions according to their particular need at that time. To adhere only to one of these models would afford less freedom of action and jeopardise personal and domestic security.

Although the household is a basic unit for the study of the ways in which people sustain themselves it should be recognised that in some situations households may be difficult to define and an inappropriate unit of analysis. In some cultures primary kinship relations are with blood relations in different households — with uncles, for instance — and decision—making in relation to many activities involves senior kinsfolk rather than senior members of the same household. Furthermore in many circumstances, particularly where migration is important, individuals may make economic contributions to, or use the resources of village households even though they live elsewhere. The fluidity of village life may also lead the composition of households to vary from week to week or even day to

day. None of these limitations, however, diminishes the importance of the household as a primary unit of analysis, particularly in relation to larger aggregations of population whether village, town or region. The challenge is to adequately take account of this dynamism in household analysis.

German and US sociological research on the relationships between primary and secondary reproduction and the world economy uses households, whatever the limitations of such units, as the focal unit of initial analysis (Smith et al. 1984). Stauth viewed the household as an economic unit created by capitalism from the twin components of home and family (Stauth 1984: 91). These are the twin functions of the reproduction of its organic existence through the maintenance of human life and procreation, and the production of food and other commodities both for auto—consumption and for surplus—dispersal. Even so if households are an economic necessity for capitalism they can also be the locus of resistance to those elements of capitalism which cause most human suffering.

Analyses of the division of labour within society are also strongly rooted in the analysis of household-level activity. Even Harris, who argues strongly that households are not necessarily universal, nor even similar, in different cultural contexts, agrees that "household organisation is fundamental to ideologies of womanhood ... and the context for much of women's lives" (Harris 1981: 52). Deere and others, in a widely quoted heorisation of gender, class and economic change, view the household as the fundamental socio-economic unit in the various tiers of the capitalist system (Deere et al. 1982).

An excellent example of how insights into social and economic evolution can be provided by a household focus is found in the writings of social historians and historical demographers, in particular in the work of Laslett and his associates at Cambridge. Drawing on historical sources such as parish registers, legal records and property registers, they have provided a wealth of quantitative data that enables the composition of households in the past to be studied in detail (see especially Laslett and Wall 1972, Wall et al 1983). There are problems in interpreting the dynamic characteristics of households. For example, they may be classified according to the age of the senior members of household. However, it is unlikely that households in each age cohort possess characteristics that can be related to one another nor can much be deduced from identifying the changing character-istics of succeeding age groups. A study of household economies in Brazil (São Paulo) in the late 18th century shows the changes that took place in household structure and composition as the city grew and the urban economies became more market-oriented (Kuznesof 1986). Wall raises the important doubt about whether the independence of households may be assumed, particularly when newlyformed households may retain a variety of links with their parents (Wall 1983). Goody likewise stresses the importance of analysing the actual

management of inheritance of goods, ncluding land, to understand both domestic livelihood strategies and inter-household links according to age and relationship (Goody 1976).

LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

Households group together individuals of different gender, age, and with distinct interests and personalities. What people do to sustain themselves is a function of the opportunities available, individual preference and individual and group needs. The range of activities of all members of the household makes up a collective household strategy, some elements of which may primarily satisfy individual needs but others of which may be undertaken primarily out of responsibility to the group as a whole. The sum of all activities, both individual and collective, represent the means by which individuals and groups ensure their continued existence. The recording of such activity is complex, but a necessary first stage in aiding the understanding of how groups make a living and how they are linked with larger political, economic and social structures.

Analysis of livelihood strategies has been undertaken primarily by demographers seeking a conceptual framework within which to analyse the behavioural characteristics of migration (Wood 1981). It has also been used by social scientists seeking to explain economic behaviour and access to productive resources in small—scale societies. As White has cogently argued

"detailed analyses of the internal organisation of the domestic economy should be firmly located with a more dynamic political economy of rural life" (White 1980: 24).

The role of particular categories of people, such as women, within households is reflected in their part in household livelihood strategies and the detailed analysis of such strategies is a prerequisite for better understanding (Radcliffe 1986). There is a growing awareness of the need to understand the use of time. New research into the black economy in industrial societies finds that informal work assumes greater importance as formal unemployment increases (Pahl 1984) and concepts such as unemployment and underemployment applied in the context of household activity appear to have limited descriptive power.

In research into livelihood strategies terms such as farmer, housewife, head of household refer to very simple but potentially misleading stereotypes. In households there is frequently great flexibility in the carrying out of work. The value of focusing attention on household activity is that it facilitates analysis of activity according to various theoretical frameworks. Thus Wood's presentation of Deere and de Janvry's model of the organisation of household production and reproduction focuses on the quantifiable movement of goods through a system driven by individual and

group activity (Fig. 1). An alternative representation of the same model could focus on the use of natural resources in domestic production and seek to show the dimensions of the physical action space used (Fig. 2).

In either case the full value of the model lies in its power to identify the consequences of change in the supply of resources, labour power, or terms of trade by comparing the operation of the model at different time periods. The effects of a natural hazard, such as a flood or drought, may be represented – in both diagrammatic and quantitative terms, as may the consequences of increased family or household size or a deterioration in the terms of trade via say price of betel nuts or rice. The model is of only limited use in representing the social, cultural and political environment within which household members take decisions about the use of time and energy.

Although the ultimate justification for the use of concepts such as household livelihood strategy must be through insights that come from analysis employing such models, two major benefits can be outlined.

Firstly, the extent to which households and communities are involved in the world-economy and the mechanisms of such incorporation can be seen in the structure of household economies and their dynamic development. As Stauth observes "the State mediates between world-economy and specific, local political and cultural forms by influencing the composition. quantity and quality of income..." (Stauth 1984: 94). The disparity and diversity of household structures and livelihood strategies reflect state policy. The fundamental antagonism between individual, household or local control of production systems is likely to be reflected in the household. The increasing importance of socially-determined needs similarly causes households to strain their resources to satisfy intrahousehold demands, particularly relating to childrens' needs. The household resists state/world-initiated trends that may undermine the stability of household production systems by increasing economic risk and reducing people's control over productive processes. This resistance to external pressures to safeguard the means of sustenance can take various forms, including passive resistance and more violent reaction, in the ways outlined by Scott (1985) and Huizer (1973). An similar form of response is the development of alternative forms of production (the black economy) which are clandestine and less subject to external pressures.

The linkages between household divisions of labour and the world—economy can be seen, for instance, in the increase in female work in subsistence farming while men sell their labour in towns. Such workers are able to accept less than a subsistence wage since subsistence needs are partially met at home. Similarly young female textile workers are able to accept low—wage work because it offers a continuing cash income enabling them to contribute to the cost of their maintenance which would otherwise have been met by their households (Wolf 1986).

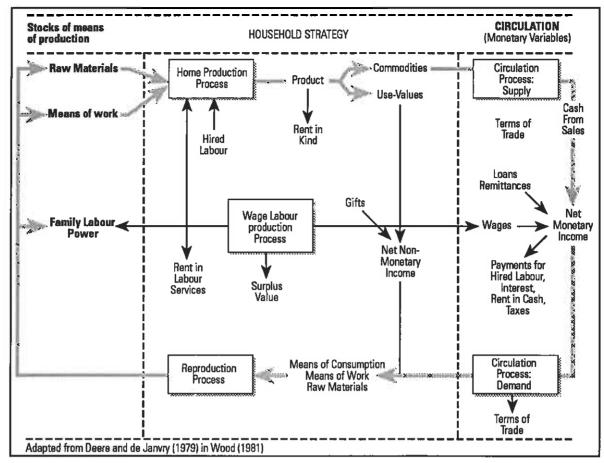


Figure 1: Schematic organisation of household production

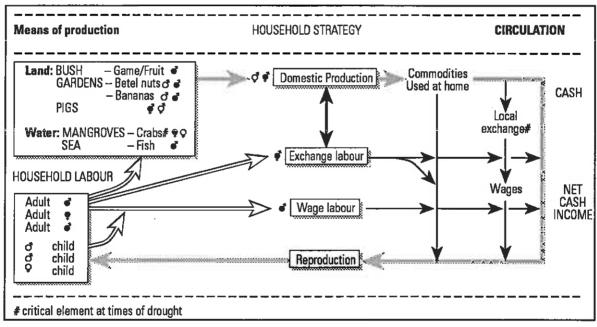


Figure 2: Organisation of household production Rapa, Central Province, Papua New Guinea

Secondly, knowledge of household livelihood strategies within a community or region provides information about the detailed defence that households have against both State and nature, that is diversity. By concentrating attention on commercial production or on a single crop - or even on the most productive part of say rice growing in a single village, attention is drawn away from production in house gardens or the continued use of traditional rice varieties and from the range of nonfarming based activities that may provide as much for the sustenance of the household as the miracle rice. By studying the linkages that exist between and within households it is also possible to see how many households use access to a wider range of resources than just one or two neighbouring domestic units. Murra's revelation of the importance of access of members of Andean communities to multiple ecological zones (Murra 1975) may be parallelled elsewhere by the custom of intracommunity exchange to equalise access to resources by households in different clans or ecological areas. This, in normal years, is on a basis of reciprocity and serves to reaffirm inter-regional solidarity. In crisis years it serves to redistribute appropriate goods to aid those who are in need.

DEMONSTRATING HOUSEHOLD LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

Despite the range of literature which now considers and analyses the value of households and household livelihood strategies, there has been little quantitative recording of household strategies in order to show that such data can identify differences within populations and between households. In recent work in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea, summary data have been collected which show the relative importance of different elements in household strategies that may serve to illustrate the potential value of such data. The ways in which data may be collected relating to individual time allocation has been reviewed by White (1984). He and Hart collected data from informants for over a year in different communities in Central Java (White 1976 and Hart 1986). They show the hours spent on each category of task by sex and age of informants and such work permitted detailed analysis of the role of different tasks in household strategies. Such data collection is invaluable but timeconsuming. The alternative strategy used in Java and Papua New Guinea, reported here and elsewhere (Preston 1990, 1989a, 1989b), collected simplified data in a single interview with each household.

In these interviews, the order of importance of each of six classes of work was established for each household member over 15 years of age, according to their own evaluation (or that of another household member, if they were absent). The categories of work used were those agreed with our hamlet field assistants to include the most important forms of work and interviewers used terms that were readily understood by local people. This priorit—isation was given a numerical value expressed as a percentage. First priority categories were given a value of 50, second 25 and third 15

(usually only three categories of work were mentioned as important). The numerical representation of the livelihood strategy of each household was calculated by totalling the value of each category across the household and then calculating the percentage values for each category. These statistics enable one, therefore, to assess the collective importance of each of the major categories of activity and also to compare the relative importance of different categories of work for individuals in a community according to age, sex or access to land (or any other data collected at this level). Data from two Javanese hamlets are shown in Tables 1–3.

Table 1:

Household livelihood strategies				
Class of work	Serang	Girinyono		
Household	31.2	27.0		
Business	6.1	7.9		
Craft	4.5	5.8		
Blue-collar	33.3	22.4		
Farming	18.5	35.7		
White-collar	6.5	1.2		
Other	0.5	0.1		
	100.0	100.0		

Table 1 shows the contrast in the livelihoods of people from each of the two hamlets. Girinyono is the more isolated¹ and traditional village with rainfed rice-fields and land on the hill-sides. Serang is 2 kms. nearer to a town, has only level land, either rice-fields or gardens, and has less land per household. Fourty per cent of households own no land. Farming is a less important component of household livelihoods and both blue-collar and white-collar work is much more important than in Girinyono.

Table 2:

Livelihood Strategies and Household Life Cycle				ycle			
Serang							
	House– hold	Business	Craft	Blue- collar	Farming	White- collar	Other
Young	34.7	6.2	4.4	36.8	9.9	8.1	0.0
Inter- mediate	29.6	6.5	4.5	33.4	18.5	6.9	0.6
Old	33.4	5.3	4.7	31.7	22.3	2.4	0.3

^{1.} The isolation is only relative; the village is only 6 kms. from the nearest market town.

When the household data in the previous table are presented according to the stage of in the household development cycle, the effects of schooling and less traditional lifestyles of younger households are evident (Table 2). White-collar work, restricted to the literate and educated, decreases with age; craft work, on the other hand, increases slightly with age. Household work is judged least important when there are active children in the household and perhaps all are busily engaged in a wide range of activities.

Table 3:

Principal occupation by sex: Girinyono						
	Household	Business	Craft	Work	Farming	Other
Females Males	84.5 3.4	4.2 6.4	2.5 8.0	2.5 8.0	3.9 67.8	2.5 2.5

In Table 3 data for individuals are used to show the principal occupation and the gender of informants. The expected gender differences with regard to farming and household work appear, craftwork is clearly largely a male activity. Business activity is shared although males assign it a more important role but, for women, it is quite the most important occupation besides household work.

The data show quite well the differences between communities that might be expected. They also enable some quantitative assessment of differences between groups of people and communities to be made. A further test of the validity of the method is the presentation of strictly comparable data in a different cultural context. Following field work in Java, comparative research was carried out in coastal Papua New Guinea some 160 kms. north—west of Port Moresby. A group of field assistants from the villages collected data on livelihood strategies after having discussed the validity of the categories of work. The data are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4:

Papua Livelihood Strategies			
Class of work	Rapa	Pinupaka	
Household	 25.5	21.2	
Business	1.1	0.4	
Fishing	14.3	38.3	
Gardens/pigs	46.9	30.1	
Sport/gambling	0.8	4.4	
Other	7.4	5.8	

Both villages had access to coastal inlets and the sea and the collecting of crabs (by women), shellfish and fishing (by men) were important adjuncts to farming - tending gardens and raising pigs. Land was abundant although Pinupaka was short of good quality garden land. There were no opportunities for earning money by working by the day except through migration. The table shows the greater importance of fishing in the village located on the shore whose land was of inferior quality. The inclusion of sport - largely engaged in by young males - was insisted on by various informants, largely female, and reflects an important cultural phenomenon. A comparison of the data from Indonesia and Papua New Guinea villages shows interesting similarities and differences. The relative importance of domestic work is similar and the importance of farming/ fishing + working for wages is similar (60%) in the two areas. This implies that the data gathered in this way do reflect the relative importance of different activities. Work currently in progress in Andean America will further test the value of such household livelihood strategy data both for inter-and intra-community analysis but also for making broader comparisons between world areas. It will be interesting to resurvey some villages to see whether changes in activities over time can be detected.

CONCLUSION

Current interest in the domestic economy can assist geographers, anthropologists and sociologists as well as economists to understand more about the ways in which people use, either individually or collectively, the different resources available to them and to discern the longer—term changes in the use of different strands of livelihood strategies. Field workers have to face the formidable challenge of organising the volume of data that house—hold studies can generate in a way that allows the development more insights to enrich theory.

The potential value of the development of ways of using house-holds as units of analysis is boundless. Repeated studies can show how household livelihood strategies change over time, how individual households change their composition and use of resources as their members age and multiply. Such studies could be a valuable means of identifying how households have responded to pressures from changing national and world economies. The use of methods of quantifying the relative importance of different elements of household livelihood strategies, such as those presented in this paper may facilitate inter—community comparisons but they need further testing in a range of geographical and cultural contexts. The growing awareness of the importance of households needs to be matched by new methods of investigation and more imaginative analysis.

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ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGE AND HOUSEHOLD LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES

This paper is associated with a programme of research, which commenced in 1983 is concerned with identifying the means by which rural people make a living, in particular the importance attached to the use of natural resources, and the way in which this has changed within living memory. Case studies have been carried out in highland Ecuador, in the highlands of central Luzon, Philippines, in central Java, Indonesia and in coastal Papua, Papua New Guinea.

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