

**A feminist analysis of the 1996 South African population census with  
specific focus on the questions pertaining to the household:  
Implications for development policy and practice**

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## Declaration

I, Zohra Khan, do hereby declare that with the exception of the quotations indicated in the text, this dissertation is my own work and has not been submitted to any other university for any degree or examination.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Abstract**

This study analyses the 1996 South African population census from a feminist perspective by focusing on the questions pertaining to the household. It considers the issue of gender power relations operating at the level of the household and challenges the underlying patriarchal ideology embedded in the census itself. The study into households is situated within the context of current development discourse and practice, and is premised on the role of the census as a key national resource providing information on all sectors of society. Individual structured interviews were carried out with members of the census task team who provided valuable insight into the process of census making. Interviews with academics and activists working on gender issues were also conducted. A semi-structured focus group discussion was conducted with five women living in the Molweni district in KwaZulu-Natal in August 1998 to gather information on productive, reproductive and community managing work and activities. The study makes an argument about the importance of including unpaid reproductive work in our national statistics. The census questionnaire is analysed and a few adjustments are recommended that may allow for the inclusion of unpaid, reproductive labour in the national statistical system.

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## **1. Introduction**

This study analyses the 1996 population census from a feminist perspective. It makes the argument that the census reflects a bias toward paid work and relies on the neo-liberal model of household behaviour that assumes internal reciprocity and altruism. I argue that such biases negatively affect poor women as reproductive labour and gender inequalities in the household remain invisible in development policy and practice.

The study is based on the assumption that targeting women is an effective strategy for poverty reduction in South Africa as women make up the majority of the poor. Yet, statistics and indicators often mask the nature and form of women's poverty. The dissertation focuses on households as a key site for the construction of gender roles and responsibilities and argues that how we collect information about the household reflects a set of political choices that often marginalise women.

The dissertation also acknowledges that information is central to development and unless we have reliable and accurate information the process of socio-economic change can be limited. Statistics and indicators are key to the process of policy making and implementation (Hedman et al, 1996; Valodia, 1997).

The dearth of adequate statistics and indicators on race and gender issues in South Africa has posed a major challenge for the new government. The Central Statistical Services (CSS) under the apartheid government was not concerned with accurate data since the overall apartheid social engineering did not rest on a response to population dynamics but rather supported the exercise of power by the government (May, 1998). South Africa's past statistical system was riddled with gross inaccuracies. The government funded some Bantustans demographic data collection but this was intended to facilitate its policy of racial division rather than respond to the needs of all South Africans.

The collection of statistical data was enmeshed in the racist political ideology of the government. Development at that time comprised separate and unequal distribution of

resources and the absence of basic social services, such as water and electricity, in rural areas exacerbated high levels of under-development and disadvantage.

The new democratically elected government faced a major task of collecting reliable socio-economic data as the country's statistical base was skewed. A key challenge for the new government was to develop a system that responded to its new transformation agenda. Since the new government was committed to changing the lives of the poorest people, collecting statistics on the needs of rural and poor households became particularly important.

In a relatively short period, South Africa has developed a strong foundation of basic demographic data that includes the recent census and the October Household Surveys (CASE, 1999: 5). While these provide important demographic and socio-economic data, they do not provide information on women's unpaid labour, nor do they reflect the diversity of South African households. This information gap means that labour performed by poor women to sustain households goes unaccounted and that standard models of household behaviour continue to inform how we collect information. I have chosen to focus on statistical instruments because of the importance attached to statistics, but also to examine the limitations of current models and explore what we need to do to ensure that our statistics provide enough information to enable us to achieve gender equality goals in development programmes.

## **1.1 Overview of the study**

This study is premised on two key assumptions:

- The South African government is committed to achieving gender equality and social justice;
- Statistics and indicators are important tools for achieving these goals.

I have conducted this investigation with these two assumptions in mind. South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994 created a favourable environment to promote women's human rights. The government has made a strong effort to ensure that gender equality is a key pillar in the struggle for a more just and equitable society. Drawing on international and regional models, South Africa developed a unique structural framework to facilitate the promotion of gender equality. Often cited as the most comprehensive globally, the national machinery includes the Parliamentary Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and the Status of Women; Commission on Gender Equality; Office on the Status of Women in the Presidents Office; gender focal points in most government departments. These structures are responsible for supporting constitutional democracy by promoting and protecting gender equality and women's human rights.

The government is also committed to implementing international law pertaining to women's rights. It has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) committing itself to ensuring that women participate equally in the economic, political and social development of the country and that they benefit from these changes, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action which is the most comprehensive global commitment to women's human rights. There is no doubt that the government is serious about ensuring women's human rights take central place in the discourse on poverty reduction. However, achieving gender equality and social justice goals require data and information on these inequalities and this is sorely lacking.

This study sets out to analyse what information collection instruments we have and explores some of the limitations of these. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to look at all the instruments and therefore I focus on the census. I want to unpack some of the definitions and concepts that were used, rather than provide a comprehensive critique of the census. In interviews with academics and officials working in the field of statistical production, I was advised that a census is an inappropriate instrument to capture reproductive labour (Ardington, 1999; Budlender, 1999; May, 1998). Many valid arguments were presented including the huge cost associated with designing a more

detailed questionnaire that might give the information we need, time considerations, reliability of information and many others. Officials argued that household surveys provide sufficient information on the household and this information need not be included in a census which has both a different focus and purpose. I conducted my research with these arguments in mind but note that other countries have managed to capture women's reproductive labour in censuses:

Some countries (India and Australia) are currently measuring the time women spend on unpaid work through the collecting of census information<sup>1</sup>, and are seeking ways to calculate its imputed value in terms of production of goods and services for household consumption (Taylor, 1997: 18).

This dissertation is not about the appropriateness of the census to collect information on unpaid labour, but rather a critique of the assumptions and underlying principles that are the basis of both the household survey and the census. It is these assumptions that I wish to interrogate in this dissertation. While the South African statistical agency has made significant progress in developing new instruments drawing on international best practice, I argue that there is a significant gap in our information. Data collected through the national census and the household surveys provide limited information on the gender inequalities in the household. Globally feminists and those working on gender issues have critiqued data collection instruments because they gloss over important social and economic forms of discrimination. For example women's organisation in the United States of America, United Kingdom and Canada are campaigning hard to ensure that unpaid labour in the households, the work that keeps countries running, gets recognised and valued. They argue that if it is not counted - it does not exist. Some countries have developed satellite accounts that compliment national accounts.

Another instrument of importance to this investigation is the October Household Survey (OHS) which records information about households. It has been conducted annually since 1993. However, neither the census nor the household survey captures reproductive

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<sup>1</sup> My emphasis.

labour. A time use study has been in the pipeline for three or four years. Time-use provides a budget on how people allocate time to particular household tasks and then provides a monetary estimate of what those tasks are worth. The gender desk has lead responsibility for this (May, 1998). At the time of this study, Debbie Budlender was working on the draft questionnaire and was consulting with the reference group tasked to oversee the process.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore too early to comment on the outcomes.

While this is a very positive development, time use surveys have certain limitations. For example, they require a high level of literacy among respondents and commitment of both interviewer and interviewee to the process. Collecting detailed information is also difficult in the developing country context where boundaries between work and home are so fluid. For example working on a farm that is part of the rural homestead could be recorded as housework even though crop may be exchanged for cash. Further, in the South African context the historical distrust of people regarding data collection should not be under-estimated.

It is for these reasons that my study focuses on the census. It does not aim to analyse the gender implications of *all* the questions appearing in the questionnaire, rather it focuses specifically on some of the questions pertaining to the household. This does not imply that the other questions are less important but rather that to tackle gender inequality we need to challenge existing power relations in the home. Feminist economists and development theorists like Kabeer (1994), Sen (1990) and Moser (1993) see households as a potential entry point for advancing social change. Information on households is therefore important. This study identifies gaps in our statistics and explores the policy implications of this. By critically analysing the definitions of household and work and looking at the questions on basic services, I will argue that the census reflects male bias that further entrenches gender inequality.

Data collection techniques have reflected assumptions about those activities that are economic and important to record and those that are not economic and therefore remain

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<sup>2</sup> Email correspondence with Budlender.

unrecorded. Feminist economists have argued that ignoring the value of women's work as producers and reproducers makes their contribution to the national accounts invisible (Waring, 1990). In particular, Standing et al (1996) have shown that including women's unpaid labour to the GDP of South Africa would add 20-25 percent to the overall labour force activity rate.

The collection of data on economic activities is therefore important for feminist analysis as it challenges assumptions about the value of women's contribution to socio-economic development. Despite this, policy makers remain reluctant to find new paradigms and approaches to development that would include women's reproductive labour. Taylor (1997) suggests that the absence of a gendered perspective in economic planning is linked to the perception that women and men are able to access the formal market economy equally and on the same footing. However, the 1995 South African *Income and Expenditure Survey* shows that income patterns remain unequal between blacks and whites with black women and children disproportionately represented among the poor. Women are unable to access the formal market economy for a range of reasons and therefore do not benefit equally from economic policy. They remain poor and marginal to mainstream economic initiatives.

In her work on structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in developing countries, Diane Elson (1997: 24) identifies three types of male bias that underpins SAPs:

- The sexual division of labour that assigns specific tasks (and value) to men and women;
- Unpaid domestic work necessary for producing and maintaining human resources performed primarily by women;
- The workings of the household.

She argues that the success of structural adjustment programmes is contingent on the exploitation of women and their reproductive labour. The same argument is applicable to

most countries looking at the current macro-economic frameworks of globalisation and trade liberalisation

This dissertation tests some of these biases through an examination of material related to the 1996 national census, posing questions around the various meanings and interpretations women give to reproductive labour. The collection of statistics and other data on household activities need to reflect the unequal and uneven power relations that are features of most households. In this dissertation I analyse a few of the questions from the census and explore the policy implications of this approach to gender and the household.

## **1.2 Motivation for the study**

I embarked on this study for two reasons. First, household analysis is a neglected area of academic concern in economic theory and practice as Patricia McFadden (1998) points out:

One of the areas that is most neglected within the academy is the issue of gendered relations within the family and the household. In most cases, the reproduction of the family is still assumed to be a natural role that does not have scientific relevance, and therefore women's domestic labour remains largely unremunerated, and uncoded in economic accounting terms (1998: 70).

McFadden raises the importance of household analysis for academic inquiry and provides an explanation for the relative dearth of information on women and gendered household relations. Household analysis is important for feminists because it is often at the level of the household that women's subordination is most pronounced. Of course, it is replicated at other levels of society but this is where it is most acute.

The implications of this are that we do not have sufficient information to effectively reduce gender inequality at this level because the household is also considered a private

sphere. Challenging the public/ private dichotomy and convincing policy makers that they need to engage at this level becomes increasingly important for feminists tackling gender discrimination. It is the sexual division of labour and the unequal access to and control over resources in households that contribute to the social construction of gender inequality and difference. In chapter two of this dissertation, I provide qualitative studies on domestic diversity and fluidity challenging the neo-liberal model.

My second reason is that if we want to achieve our goals of gender equality and social justice, dialogue between users and producers of statistics is essential. It is easy for us to critique the census but as users of the information, feminists and gender activists need to be much more proactive in expressing their needs to census officials. Further, feminist analysts need to engage with quantitative study methods. Phumelele Ntombela-Nzimande, deputy chairperson of the Commission on Gender Equality, made this comment in an interview that I conducted with her in November 1999:

As gender activists, we tend to focus on qualitative techniques of study and shy away from the quantitative. Therefore, studies like these should be done. We need to engage with statistics (1999: 6).

Engaging with statistics and indicators on the situation of women and men is an important part of feminist and gender struggles. In addition to being a powerful advocacy tool, it creates a space for women to engage with methodologies that are traditionally associated with economic analysis and stereotypically with men.

### **1.3 Methodology**

My research was carried out during the period February 1998 to November 1999. I have used a qualitative-interpretative method because of the nature of the study and the kind of data I attempted to collect about the household and household relations more generally. It took into account the changes in recent economic policy and the on-going development of the country's statistical base. The research methodology included: textual analyses of

primary and secondary sources, such as the census questionnaires, newspaper reports and Government Acts; individual interviews with key informants; and focus group discussions. Much of the analysis in this research is based on a reading of existing theoretical and empirical studies of households and their dynamics.

Structured individual interviews with various professionals working in the field of statistical analysis, gender and development were conducted between May 1998 to November 1999. While questions posed to these individuals were around the broad aims and objectives of the census and their particular role within the profession and as a part of the task teams, the focus of the interview was on the aspect of unpaid household labour and the pros and cons associated with including questions on this issue in the national census. Interviews were conducted with the following individuals and members of organisations:

- A member of the census task team;
- An academic involved in policy formulation;
- Various key feminist and gender activists like Everjoice Winn, Chloe Hardy, Shireen Motara, Colleen Lowe Morna;
- Members of the Commission on Gender Equality;
- Members of the Women's National Coalition.

The group provided valuable insight into the production and application of statistics and were both producers and users. The selection of this particular group of individuals should be seen in the light of Hedman's (1996) comment:

A close and continuous co-operation between users and producers (of statistics) is crucial to successfully produce and improve gender statistics in a country. Users of statistics have different needs which producers of gender statistics have to meet with specific statistical products (1996: 9).

The research therefore recommends that links between users and producers of statistics be strengthened in order for statistical needs of users to be met.

Using this methodology, the specific objectives of my study are as follows:

- Challenge assumptions about households and household functioning by drawing on existing literature;
- Highlight the importance of statistical information for programmes and policies that would facilitate in bringing about gender equality;
- Provide a feminist analysis of the census questionnaire, focusing specifically on the concepts household and work, and finally to;
- Explore policy implications of the census's approach to the household.

#### **1.4 Structure of the dissertation**

This dissertation is organised into three chapters. This chapter provides an overview of the problem I wish to tackle and explains how I conducted my research. The next chapter is a literature review on key feminist analysis of households. The third chapter analyses the census and the final chapter concludes with some points for consideration.

Chapter two involves an investigation into households. It challenges traditional assumptions about intra-household distribution and argues that a proper assessment of households should recognise the dynamism of household relations. For context, the effect of the migrant labour system on the disintegration of the rural household and its specific impact on women's lives is examined briefly. The chapter looks at the sexual division of labour and argues that if women are to benefit from socio-economic development, data on households and women's role within it should be targeted, collected and analysed. The analysis in this chapter draws heavily on existing theoretical and empirical literature on household dynamics, while data from the focus group interview is used to reinforce the findings of international and South African studies.

The third chapter deals specifically with the 1996 population census. It offers a critique of the questions pertaining to the household by focusing on the patriarchal assumptions underlying the definitions of *household* and *work*. The chapter suggests that census officials should take into account how households are constructed, the manner in which women perceive themselves and domestic activities, as well as the issue of resource allocation within the household. It looks briefly at the OHS but argues that both instruments do not provide adequate information on reproductive labour. The chapter argues that with a few suitable additions to the census questionnaire, we would have a more accurate picture of how gender inequality operates at household level.

The concluding chapter argues that current data collection instruments cannot be gender neutral as these instruments often mask male biases. Rather, data collection techniques need to be gender sensitive in order for government to respond to the needs of expanding numbers of poor women in South Africa. The dissertation therefore concludes that statistics and indicators are crucial for monitoring our gender equality efforts.

## **2. Households: reproductive work, resources and decision making**

This chapter explores some methodological, conceptual and theoretical positions of the household. It challenges traditional assumptions about intra-household distribution and decision-making and addresses the theoretical limitations of current household modelling. The chapter deals with two common male biases highlighted in the previous section, namely the gender division of labour that assigns different tasks to men and women and unpaid reproductive work in the household performed mostly by women. I argue that ignoring such biases in development policy and practice affects poor women negatively.

### **2.1 Gender and the neo-liberal economic model**

Mainstream neo-liberal economic theory and practice have informed development policies and programmes, as traditionally economics is the baseline for development. Because economic policies focus on the gross domestic product (GDP), imports and exports, production and efficiency, inequalities within social groups along gender, ethnic and regional lines receive little attention. Household analysis usually does not feature in economic analysis. The sexual division of labour and gender inequalities at this level are often ignored (Elson, 1992: 48). It is no surprise therefore that women's' needs and concerns have been marginalised in the greater macro-economic picture. Their contribution to the GDP in the form of reproductive activity is generally assumed to contribute nothing at all to economic development. The traditional assumption is that women and men benefit equally from economic development initiatives through trickle-down; the reality is somewhat different.

Central to this neo-liberal approach is the assumption that the overall welfare of the household depends on the benevolent dictator who heads the household and ensures equitable distribution of resources to all its members. Development theorists and practitioners drawing on this framework maintain that the household is a harmonious economic unit where equitable distribution of resources takes place. They locate the home in the realm of the 'moral economy' and assume reciprocity and altruism. This

model continues to exert a strong influence on development policy and practice. Folbre (1988) argues that altruism, described as the 'unselfish concern for the welfare of others', is more common within the household than in any other institutional sphere. She argues that reciprocal altruism is possible within households because of the process of socialisation where children are encouraged to share (1998: 259). Within this context, sharing is a 'responsibility' while in the market-orientated society it is 'charity' (Ibid: 261). Smith and Sudler (1992) argue that although sharing does take place within households it not necessarily based on altruism *or* equity but rather to the economic expansion and contraction of the world economy (1992: 271).

The growing body of feminist research on the household challenges this assumption and argues that we need to take into account distributional inequalities and imbalances in individual access to resources (Posel, 1997). This is because members of households often have different decision-making power because of their age, gender and economic status. These factors directly influence who and how decisions are made, with women often having less power and exerting less influence over decision-making. The neo-liberal analysis glosses over such complex power relations between individuals in the household.

Social science and economics theorists have started to analyse individual household behaviour to better understand and measure gender inequality (Elson, 1991; Kabeer, 1994; Moser, 1993; Taylor, 1997; Posel, 1997). This change resulted from the realisation that current household modelling - based on the neo-liberal paradigm - needs to be challenged as this analysis has led to policy makers misinterpreting the needs of poor households (Spiegel et al, 1996). Feminist economists working in the field of development have begun to challenge the rigid assumptions about intra-household relations and distribution and offer alternatives while locating household analysis within broader macro-economic policy, as Moore points out:

Households are important in feminist analysis because they organise a large part of women's domestic/reproductive labour. As a result, both the composition and

the organisation of households have a direct impact on women's lives and on their ability to gain access to resources, labour and income (1988: 55).

Because of these developments, a range of insightful and useful theoretical analyses on households and household functioning has emerged (see Dwyer and Bruce, 1988). This chapter looks at some of these (Kabeer, Moser and Sen) and makes the argument for a new model of household analysis that reflects the diversity of households and takes into account women's reproductive work. Linked to this, I argue that statistics and indicators should reflect these changes so that we have a more accurate basis to develop policy.

I have chosen to focus on the household because of the central role that households play in forming and shaping women's lives. This entry point has become increasingly popular among non-governmental organisations and the women's movement as a nexus for social change. The Division for the Advancement of Women included this comment in their 1991 Report:

The goal of development is material and non-material betterment for all people. Development implies change but changes that do not ensure that the household, the basic social unit, and all individuals who are a part of it share in the betterment are not development. It is therefore essential to assess development by looking at changes that affect the household (1991: 30).

This chapter will argue that it is at the level of the household that gender inequality is most pronounced due to the sexual division of labour and unequal access to resources and power. Moreover, the household is very resistant to change because it is the most intimate arena of human relations (Kabeer, 1994). By drawing on existing case studies on households and their dynamics, I argue that new and representative models have to be developed to address gender inequality. This is important if poverty and deprivation is to be targeted at its roots. Illustrative material from the focus group interview I conducted in Molweni (KwaZulu-Natal) will be discussed in this chapter to explore some of the theoretical debates first-hand.

## 2.2 Why we need statistics on the household

The production of statistics on households has embodied assumptions about women and their role within it informing the way economic policy is conceived and practised. In the *Second Women's Budget* (1997) Budlender argues that one of the blind spots of traditional economic theory is the obliviousness of policy-makers to the issue of unpaid labour in the household. Elson (1991) states that economists are often concerned with monetary variables and paid work in the productive economy while ignoring unpaid work in the reproductive economy. Labour and national income statistics and accounts in South Africa do not reflect women's reproductive work (Meer, 1993:13). Official statistics reflecting economic activity are therefore skewed and provide a distorted view of the role of women as part of an economically active population. Valodia (1996) argues that if these distortions were rectified, women would make up 50,4% of the extended labour force. Far too great a number for statisticians and economists to ignore.

The lack of adequate statistical information and research on women's contribution to economic development is not unique to South Africa. Globally there is insufficient gender disaggregated data on paid and unpaid activities women perform. The demand for gender sensitive statistics and indicators that bridge this gap arose during the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985) and intensified by the time of the 1985 Nairobi conference. The Nairobi strategies for empowering women called on governments to help compile statistics and carry out periodic evaluations in order to detect stereotypes and cases of inequality.

The call for more systematic collection of sex disaggregated data was made at the 1995 Beijing conference. The Beijing Platform for Action calls on governments to generate and disseminate sex disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation. It goes further than Nairobi as it spells out certain actions that government must take:

To develop more comprehensive knowledge of all work and employment modes....acknowledging women's economic contribution and bringing to the fore the unequal distribution of paid and unpaid labour between women and men by developing methods of relevant forums, to calculate value of the unpaid labour not contemplated in National Accounts, such as preparing meals and caring for dependents, and to reflect this in Satellite Accounts or in other types of official accounts, prepared separately or consistent with the National Accounts.

Since then, many governments have improved their statistical systems and instruments. Countries like Canada, Australia and Sweden are finding new ways to include women's work in national accounts. However many developing countries are still struggling to do this.

One challenge is how concepts and definitions are developed and used. Statistics Sweden has made progress in this area and many countries have drawn from their work.<sup>3</sup> In *Engendering Statistics: A Tool for Change* (1996) published by Statistics Sweden, the authors argue that one of the basic components in compiling gender statistics is the 'formulation of concepts and definitions that adequately reflect the diversity of women and men in society'.

Good definitions reflecting such diversity are important for development policy and practice. In South Africa women do not form a homogenous group. Race, class, geographical location and many other factors compound discrimination. Addressing gender inequality requires acknowledging these differences and pushing for radical change in how we collect information about gender discrimination.

## **2.3 Definitions of household**

A common definition of the household and one that tends to inform development work is the following:

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<sup>3</sup> Statistics Sweden is assisting South Africa with the time use study mentioned in the previous chapter.

[A household may be defined as] a group of related individuals who share a home, share meals and who pool their resources for the benefit of the group. If conflicts of interest should arise, it is assumed that the male head, in the role of major breadwinner, will act as arbiter (Posel. 1997: 53).

In this model, the male head of household is the primary breadwinner and occupies the public sphere or the wage-based economy while the woman, whose income is supplementary, occupies the private sphere of the home. Despite well-authenticated studies showing that women are often primary breadwinners and spend their income in the collective aspect of family expenditure (Dwyer and Bruce) this model retains its appeal for policy makers.

Theorists like Kabeer (1994) and Moser (1993) unpack neo-liberal household analysis. They argue that understanding how women access and control household resources, is critical for developing and implementing gender sensitive policy. Assuming reciprocity, sharing and trickle-down ignores important questions like: who gets what; who gets left out; who makes these decisions? These questions need to be asked to measure gender inequality at the level of the household. A very common example of gender discrimination in poor households is where boys are favoured in education, or girls get less food than boys. The way decisions are made at the level of the household affects the life opportunities and chances of girls and boys and men and women in different ways.

In *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought* (1994), Kabeer critiques two main methodological approaches to the study of the household. These are the neo-classical and anthropological approaches. She argues that the altruistic model of neo-classical economics continues to exert a very powerful influence on the ways in which households are thought about and how data is collected (1994: 96). She challenges the assumption of internal harmony. Micro level research has confirmed the existence of gender bias in intra-household distribution (Sen, 1990). Conflicting interests between household members must be considered in household analysis. In her comparison of the

neo-classical and the anthropological paradigms, she concludes that the neo-classical economic paradigm is severely limiting as it ignores the structural dimensions of gender and power that affect the ability of individual household members to influence decision making within a particular household. The anthropological paradigm, on the other hand, provides a useful framework for analysing gender inequality. It maintains that households are dynamic and changes in socio-economic conditions will impact internal household relations (1994: 114). The appeal of this approach is the idea that households and household relations are not static but rather responsive to internal and external changes.

According to Young (1993), understanding the issue of women's role in the household is extremely important for sustainable development. Because unequal distribution of power is a common feature in most households, development theorists and practitioners need to take into account the issue of competing power relations within the household, as well as the extent to which individuals within the household are able to exercise that power. Policies focusing on the household that fail to take these factors into account will invariably fail to provide benefit to all household members, especially women and children.

Defining households and domestic groupings is a complex process that requires careful consideration of issues of domestic diversity and fluidity. Spiegel et al argue that conventional definitions of households are made up of four main criteria: co-residence, productive co-operation, income sharing, commensality (1996: 12). These criteria assume a degree of co-operation and reciprocity in households but they fail to capture the diversity of household forms. Changing residential patterns and distributional inequalities need to be an integral part of any definition. In the South African context a number of anthropological studies show that distributional and other inequalities are features of many homes. The next section looks at case studies and draws out the policy implications of these.

## 2.4 Case studies

Traditional household analysis assumes reciprocity and altruism among household members. Since the 1980s, feminist critics have argued that power relations within households should factor into development policy and planning. In the following section, I provide examples of South African case studies to show why it is important for policy makers to consider alternative, realistic definitions of the household. While this approach is very challenging and would require a great deal more research, financial and political will, we cannot afford not to.

Spiegel (1996) argues that the model of the nuclear family household represents only a small proportion of domestic groupings in the world. In South Africa, diverse family forms characterised by fluid, dynamic and flexible domestic relations and partnerships are a norm. Development policy seldom reflects this. For example, in South Africa the migrant labour system and influx control laws have undermined pre-colonial African family forms. The migration of men to urban areas altered the nature and form of household labour leading to the disintegration of the rural homestead. Male migration had the effect of exacerbating women's work and resulted in severe deprivation in rural areas as households became increasingly dependent on the wages of migrants.

Large numbers of women migrated to urban areas leaving children and other family members behind. The extended family system facilitated female migration by providing support for children and other family members left behind. In this example, households configured and re-configured in response to external pressure i. e. apartheid policy and practice.

The growing body of South African research (Liebenberg, 1997; Spiegel, 1996; Field, 1990) on domestic diversity and fluidity has challenged the assumption that households are static and that they operate as harmonious economic units. This wealth of qualitative information provides valuable insight into the ways in which households function. With regard to housing policy, Spiegel argues:

Housing policy formulation has until very recently tended to invoke a model of 'standardising' or 'normalising' discourse. Its central, if often only implicit, point of reference is a model of stable, nuclear family-based households with regularised patterns of co-residence, commensality and income-pooling, as well as shared 'life projects' or 'ideologies of purpose' (1996: 7).

Current household modelling based on such assumptions does not reflect the needs and lives of poor people. Domestic processes and household composition are fluid and changing and while having a model is important, it needs to encapsulate the diversity of family forms and patterns of living. Existing models do not do this.

Micro level research has contributed enormously to our understanding of households. Such studies have provided valuable insight into household relations and gender power struggles within. Field's 1990 study into women's lives in a working class area in Cape Town shows how women resist and challenge male supremacy but this so-called power is defined and restricted by a very structured set of patriarchal values and social practices. A husband only *tolerates* his wife's power insofar as it does not infringe on his ultimate right to control and make final decisions. Field terms this 'matrifocal' and argues that this refers to situations where women are dominant whether a man is present or not. However, he acknowledges that while matrifocal households seem to challenge stereotypes women do not have substantial power. They manage the household in a supervisory sense by controlling the centre stage of domestic affairs but where important decisions have to be made, the male head of household decides:

The general pattern of matrifocal relations entails the wife taking the centre role as co-ordinator of house duties, nurturing of children, financial administration and transactions. In effect, the wife dominates the household in a supervisory sense and when important decisions need to be taken she approaches the husband for advice. The husband generally defers the practical and emotional running of the household to his wife. [Therefore] the dominance of the matrifocal figure is

allowed by the male head insofar as it removes the burden of the domestic responsibilities from his shoulders but does *not directly undermine his authority and power in the household* (1991: 63).

Much of women's subordination is linked, either directly or indirectly, to decision making power in the household. The kinds of life choices women and girls have are often limited by culture and traditional practices that view men and boys as more important. Field's study highlights the very complex nature of power and how those with more power establish and determine household relations.

Decision making power is central to any consideration of gender equality. A Gender Opinion Survey (1999) on gender views and attitudes published by the Commission on Gender Equality indicated the following:

- 47% of respondents were supportive of women making decisions in all spheres.
- 45% of respondents were supportive of women making decisions in some spheres.
- 8% felt they women were unable to make decisions.
- Men (37%) were less supportive of women making decisions than women (63%) themselves.

The Gender Opinion Survey differentiated between financial and other forms of decision making in the household. For example 60% of the respondents reported that the man in the household made the important financial decisions, compared to 28% who indicated that it was a woman, while the others claimed that decision making was shared. There was a general consensus that when it came to decision-making regarding children and household responsibilities, women were primary decision-makers. Women therefore have restricted decision-making power over those aspects of life that fall in the 'reproductive' realm.

In contrast to Field's study however, Jones's study on female-headed households in Bathurst entitled "Husbands cause too many problems" (1993) indicated that women

exert a great deal of autonomy over their lives. He argues that the predominance of female-headed households in Bathurst is not linked to the absence of male migrants but rather to the refusal of women to enter into marriage. The choice to remain single is succinctly encapsulated in the following respondent's comment:

We will never marry, not to anyone. Husbands cause too many problems. They sleep with girlfriends, they drink the money, and they give nothing for the children. Marriage is worthless. That is why we [with reference to the three sisters living together] built this house. The house belongs to all of us. We pay for it together, and we look after our children together. We built it so that we will always have a place for our children. I am a householder. If a man wants to marry me, he will have to live in my house. I don't think any man will do that (1993: 19).

The greater degree of autonomy and self-reliance experienced by these women is linked directly to the fluid social relations and domestic arrangements that characterise South African society. While the nature and composition of South African households and families is changing rapidly producing diverse family forms and structures, conventional notions of the household continue to inform policy making. Gender power dynamics operating at the level of the family define and influence relationships and processes of decision-making within the household, yet there appears to be a general reluctance among development policy makers and practitioners to critically address these issues.

## **2.5 Income retention in households**

Household expenditure patterns often show that women contribute more to the collective consumption of the household than men (Duggan, 1997). However, women generally earn less than men. They are concentrated in low paid, low status jobs, and their contribution to the collective household income is often viewed as supplementing that of the male breadwinner.

The assumption that individual members act for the benefit of the entire household has been contested. Reports on income retention among male members of the household were very common at the Poverty Hearings held in June 1998 in South Africa. Gwagwa (1998) points out that male income retention is a feature of many households and negatively affects the well being of the household (1998: 35). The research I conducted in KwaZulu-Natal in 1998 supports this phenomenon. It indicated that women were largely responsible for financial household maintenance even where men were considered breadwinners and permanently resident. Where men were separated from their wives, problems of maintenance and child support were common (1998: 8). The study indicated that women were primarily responsible for 'putting food on the table'. Altruistic behaviour was therefore a common feature in women's lives, while reciprocal altruism on the part of men was linked to their needs at a specific time.

Mainstream economic analysis has used the assumption of the altruistic household to measure the well-being of household members:

Mainstream economic analysis answers the question [of who ensures that resources are equitably distributed] by locating the household in the realm of the 'moral economy' and assumes that the equal sharing of total household resources will be secured by the altruism of household members (Posel, 1997: 53).

Importantly though the belief that the altruistic household is the rule rather than the exception further mystifies our understanding of household behaviour. The assumption that resources are equitably distributed at the level of the household is a false one as evidence indicating distributional inequalities between men and women are wide scale (Posel, 1997). Moore (1994) in her commentary on domestic fluidity entitled "Households and Gender in a South African Bantustans" argues:

Many men have responded to [changing economic circumstances] by deserting their families and/or refusing to support wives and children. Research from other parts of Africa suggests that if income levels are adequate then husbands will seek

to maintain family/ household units, and may attempt to retain resources within an increasingly restricted range of kin if that will improve consumption levels without endangering resource supply. However, in situations where families/ households are a net drain on income, they will be abandoned (1994: 139).

In terms of division of expenditure, women are more likely to support their families even in times of extreme economic hardship. At the *National Speak Out on Poverty Hearings* held in the Northern Province in June 1998 Lydia Julius explained how women bear the disproportionate burden of household poverty:

The children don't ask the pa if there's food, they go to the ma (1998: 67).

A vivid illustration of the responsibility of the mother to provide for her children in the face of limited resources and financial hardship. Research (Moore, 1994; Posel, 1997) also shows that women usually behave altruistically by spending money on food and other necessities while men spend their money on leisure activities and personal items. Also at the Poverty Hearings:

Since we started here, we have seen where the grandmothers' pensions go to, but we have not heard where the grandfathers' pensions go to (1998).

The comment made in the context of grandmothers' pensions supporting extended families, draws attention to the fact that while men view social security as money for personal use, women view it as money for family consumption. The ideal of altruism between household members therefore is often not reciprocal and balanced but rather, as Moore points out, dependent on very specific circumstances and contexts.

## **2.6 Households and the implications of the sexual division of labour**

Women take on a disproportionate burden of reproductive work in both developing and developed countries. It is fair to say that this limits their ability to access work outside of

the home, gain education, qualification and skills. According to Caroline Moser (1993) women play three vital roles in their lives. The first is the productive role which is formal work conducted for a wage. The second is the reproductive role, which includes child bearing and rearing, and other forms of unpaid labour conducted in the home. The third is community managing which duties are taken on at community level that are often unremunerated activities. Moser's analysis is important for this study because it highlights the multiple roles that women perform to ensure that households function smoothly. She further argues gender sensitive planning should be formulated on the reality of women's lives and this means recognising that women perform these multiple roles.

Research conducted in 1998 in KwaZulu-Natal provided proof of this. The Domestic Violence Assistance Programme (DVAP) in Molweni, the testing-ground for the research, is a project that addresses issues of domestic and other forms of violence against women. They are self-funded and have very limited human resource capacity. The women interviewed for this study form the core of this group. From the interviews I conducted it was clear that even in the face of limited finances and time the women were committed to the project. They provide this service to the community in addition to formal paid employment and caring for their families (Focus Group: 1998). I visited the community as part of my work at the Commission on Gender Equality. We were invited to attend their National Women's Day celebrations. About three hundred women attended and Commissioner Beatrice Ngcobo gave a talk about the role and function of the CGE.

In Molweni and other similar communities, men often claim that they are too tired or do not have enough interest to get involved in community activities. While women have become community organisers. These women were organised and they came out in large numbers to hear what we had to say. Their presence and enthusiasm challenged every stereotype about women not wanting to engage in politics, or understand what happens beyond the home. They were community mobilisers. Apply Moser's analysis to a community like Molweni, and it becomes abundantly clear that women take more responsibility for the household and community than men do.

The sexual division of labour across many world societies ensures that women bear a disproportionate burden of reproductive work. Yet, they lack corresponding decision making power and authority. Young (1997) points out that because unequal distribution of decision making power is a common feature in households policies that fail to take this into account will invariably fail to provide benefit to all household members, especially women and children.

In the last few decades, bargaining models have been used to analyse expenditure patterns and decision making in households. This form of model abandons the idea of household altruism and tends to focus on the relative power of individual household members to influence decision-making processes (Duggan, 1997). This is a positive move as it highlights the role of power as a structural factor that enables some individuals to constrain and change the options and actions of others (Kabeer, 1994:134). The elusiveness of gender power within the household is the greater because it is embedded in the most intimate arena of human relations viz., the family (Kabeer, 1994). The unequal distribution of power and access to and control over resources in the household, has resulted in women having very little influence over how income is distributed:

The control and allocation of resources within the household is a complex process which has to be seen in relation to a web of rights and obligations. The management of labour, income and resources is something which is crucially bound up with household organisation and the sexual division of labour (Moore, 1988:56).

The bargaining model highlights some of these contradictions and argues that decision making is closely connected to who has power within a household.

## **2.7 Including reproductive work in the national accounts**

In her article "Accounting for Women's Work: the Progress of Two Decades" (1997) Beneria points out that since the 1970s, the problem of underestimation of women's work in labour force statistics and national accounts has been repeatedly pointed out (1997: 112). She assesses progress made towards including women's work in national accounting systems and argues that ignoring the inherent value of women's work will give an incorrect assessment of reality. She lists four areas where underestimation is visible: subsistence production; informal paid work; domestic production and related tasks; and volunteer work (1997: 112). Williams reports in her article "Women's Eyes on the World Bank" (1997) that:

Many participants at Beijing challenged the neo-liberal economic model and provoked discussion on its inherent bias against women. They argued that because most women are engaged in unpaid labour that is not counted in official statistics, their enormous contributions to the economy are invisible. Many have argued that the success of the neo-liberal economic model actually depends on the exploitation of women through this unpaid work (1997: 103).

Women perform the bulk of the world's work yet this is not included in national accounting systems because it does not have market value. Little notice is given to the fact that women are responsible for the bulk of the food production in Africa as Levy argues:

Much of what women do in this world-the labours that keep families and communities functioning-is not reflected in the gross national product of any country, is not a factor in economic planning, and is rarely part of recorded history. The United Nations estimates that they probably do more than half the world's work. Yet, because the economic and social support that women provide society is not part of the cash economy, it is often invisible (1988: ix).

In this section I want to deal with one of Beneria's four areas: unpaid reproductive work.

At the *Fourth United World Conference on Women* held in Beijing, a resolution was passed committing all member governments to assign value to non-market work and including this in their national accounts. Member governments committed themselves to:

Seek to develop a more comprehensive knowledge of work and employment through, *inter alia*, efforts to measure and better understand the type, extent and distribution of unremunerated work, particularly work in caring for dependants and unremunerated work done for family farms or businesses, and encourage the sharing and dissemination of information on studies and experience in this field, including the development of methods for assessing its value in quantitative terms, for possible reflection in accounts that may be produced separately from, but consistent with, core national accounts 165 (g) (1996: 98).

This above action point follows strategic objective "F1" which is to promote women's economic rights and independence including access to employment, appropriate working conditions and control over economic resources (1996: 97). The link between economic independence and accounting for women's unpaid labour with the household becomes clear here.

The sexual division of labour ensures that women are confined to the domestic realm. The way in which economic policy is formulated and practised reinforces this idea. Maharaj's opinion piece in the "Business Day" (1999) states that housework actually subsidises the economy. She argues that economists in other parts of the world are now addressing the failure to reflect women's contribution to the economy by quantifying reproductive activities:

Statistics Canada estimated in 1994 that the work a woman in Canada (with at least one pre-school child) does at home carried a replacement cost of \$26 310 a

year. The total value of household work was \$284,9 billion, or nearly 40% of the GDP. (June 1999)

In South Africa where most women live in rural areas we can expect this figure to be much higher given the fact that most women perform additional domestic responsibilities in the form of collecting water and fire wood, as well as growing crops for family consumption (Maharaj: 1998). The CGE's Gender Opinion Survey indicated that 69% of women, across race, age, geographical location and employment status spent more than two hours a day performing domestic tasks. Of the men 22% indicated that they spent more than two hours a day on domestic tasks while 48% of men and 10% of women said that they spent no time at all on household tasks (1999: 18)<sup>4</sup>.

The new government is under enormous pressure to deliver on programmes to improve the socio-economic position of poor women. At present statistics recording women's work is not quantified and their overall contribution to development is invisible. The recognition of this work would enable policy makers to obtain an accurate reflection of the multiple burdens women face and direct resources towards their upliftment. But they are reluctant to do so. The next section of this chapter asks why and attempts to understand what the impact of such an omission is.

## **2.8 The reluctance of policy makers to respond to women's needs**

Issues of gender inequality and the household are often marginalised, or altogether ignored, in the work of development policy makers and practitioners. There are a number of ideological and practical reasons for this omission. These include the assumption that the household is a *private* sphere and as a result is off limits to state intervention or information gathering. Second, men are the heads of households even in their absence. Ostegaard (1992) estimates that at any point in time a third of the world's households are female headed either temporarily due to male partner's migration or permanently due to separation, abandonment, divorce or death. These households are disproportionately

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<sup>4</sup> The analysis was confined to households with one adult male and female.

represented among the poor yet policy makers choose to ignore these because of the efficiency and ease of believing that men are the heads of households. Third, despite wide scale evidence of distributional inequalities within households in both developing and developed countries, the altruistic household remains an attractive formulation largely because it does not challenge the existing assumptions about the household (Bruce and Dwyer: 1988). The model focuses on the household as an economic unit and fails to address the behaviour of individuals within the household. In her study “Counting the Poor: Who gets what in which Households?” Dori Posel (1997) offers an explanation for distributional inequalities within the household:

Empirical studies suggest that in households where men are the primary breadwinners, they do not behave altruistically; nor do they share their income equitably with their partners and children. On the contrary, the appearance that wages are individually earned and the private property of labour combined with the perception that housework and wage labour are not comparable, often results in an uneven exchange of resources between men and women (1997:56).

The case studies discussed in section 2.4 indicate that women often assume more responsibility for their children than men do, while male income retention is a feature of many households. To cite Posel:

Households headed by women spend more income on the nutritional needs of household members than other households do. In fact, May et al (1995) estimated that if consumption patterns in male-headed households were to mirror those in female headed households, the incidence of under-nutrition in South Africa would fall by some 12 percent (1997:56).

The use of the household as an altruistic economic unit where equitable distribution of resources takes place remains unchallenged because of its convenience as a policy tool. Highlighting distributional inequalities and domestic diversity would complicate the process and raise new challenges for all. In their book, *A Home Divided: Women and*

*Income in the Third World* (1988), Bruce and Dwyer highlight the main reasons for the resistance into conducting this kind of research:

[The first point of resistance into conducting research into the internal decision making processes of the household] is the simplicity with which households as a unit in contrast to individuals may be integrated into economic decision making. [Second] is scepticism that such potentially demanding research will bring with it explanatory measures powers far beyond those of the current model. [Third] the assumption that households behave as economically rational units is not only analytically simpler to understand but suits practical taste as well (1988: 3).

Census officials I interviewed provided quite similar reasons for not including women's work in the national census even though they understood the importance of doing so. They indicated that a census is an inappropriate instrument to collect information about unpaid labour as one task team member pointed out:

The census should provide an adequate count and some information about gender and education and to some extent it is hoped that it will provide information on employment, they often don't. Some censuses in the world provide information about household income but it is not viewed as the best way of getting information about household income or wealth or poverty. You need too many questions to get that kind of information.

At the same time, the member admitted that the South African government spends far too little on collecting information:

This country spends woefully little on gathering information. I think we were supposed to spend R6 a person on gathering information. Botswana spends five times that amount of money. Zimbabwe spends about three times that amount of money. So it became evident that we did not have enough money to do what the

job required. There still had to be some cutting in order to shorten the questionnaire to allow it to be done with the funds that were available.

I would argue that if the government is serious about changing the lives of the poorest people, we need to have adequate information about their lives. We need to ensure that we back our political commitments with financial clout.

This chapter explored some of methodological, conceptual and theoretical understandings of the household and argued that current household modelling needs to be re-appraised for it fails to capture the shifting social realities of our society. This recognition is not a new one yet it remains unpopular among mainstream development theorists and practitioners. The urgent need to revise notions of the household and its internal workings, as well as to derive statistics that reflect this, is critical for sustainable development.

The new government is under enormous pressure to deliver on development programmes that will improve the socio-economic position of poor women. In order to deliver, social and economic policies and programmes should focus on the work that women perform to sustain households and subsidise the economy. Improving women's health and education can also have positive spin-offs for the economy. At present statistics on women's unpaid contribution to the household is not quantified. Recognising this work would enable the government to obtain an accurate reflection of the multiple burdens that women face and direct resources towards their upliftment. The next chapter looks at the 1996 population census from a feminist perspective and analyses the questions pertaining to the household.

### **3. A feminist analysis of the 1996 national Census**

Gender statistics are urgently needed. If the government is targeting women for poverty reduction, statistics on the nature and form of women's discrimination are crucial. This chapter focuses on the 1996 national census. I argue that the census reflects two of the male biases outlined in the previous chapters.

#### **3.1 The international context**

Internationally there has been growing awareness of the need for gender statistics as a basis for developing, implementing and monitoring policies and programmes aimed to redress gender inequality (Hedman et al, 1996). In the past the collection and interpretation of statistical information has reflected certain male biases. Conventional statistics did not reflect women's issues because they were constructed from a male perspective. Efforts to change this and introduce more gender sensitive methods of data collection arose. In particular, reproductive labour was recognised as contributing to the overall socio-economic development of countries and therefore needed to be included in national statistics. In the *1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action* national and international statistical organisations have agreed to:

- Collect gender and age-disaggregated data on poverty and all aspects of economic activity and develop qualitative and quantitative statistical indicators to facilitate the assessment of economic performance from a gender perspective;
- Devise suitable statistical means to recognise and make visible the full extent of the work of women and all their contribution to the national economy, including their contribution in the unremunerated and domestic sectors, and examine the relationship of women's unremunerated work to the incidence of and their vulnerability to poverty (1996: 46).

While countries like Canada and India have fairly well established statistical systems, South Africa is currently involved in the process of developing various aspects of its

statistical base. Past discriminatory policies and legislation led to a statistical service that supported the political ideology of the Apartheid state with devastating effects on the country's statistical base. The immediate result of this is the relative dearth of reliable statistics and indicators on gender and race issues. The South African government is committed to addressing race and gender inequalities but requires proper information and data to do so. Almost all of the up-to-date gender and race disaggregated statistics are based on the 1995 October Household Survey and the 1996 national census. These instruments play a crucial role in our understanding of inequalities in our society. The importance of accurate, reliable and timely statistics cannot be over emphasised. Considering that the statistics produced by the census will inform Government decisions on the allocation of resources to provinces and large-scale national priorities such as housing, education and health care, *accuracy* and *reliability* are crucial outcomes of statistical production (Crawthra and Kraak, 1999).

This chapter analyses a few of the questions pertaining to the household appearing in the 1996 census questionnaire. Because of the complexity of the census questionnaire and the processes involved, the chapter focuses specifically on the definitions of the *household* and *work* in order to draw out the policy implications of the census' approach to the household, as well as productive and reproductive activities within it.

I argue that the census is biased towards paid work and relies heavily on a co-operative model of household behaviour. The previous chapter has argued that such assumptions give a distorted picture of economic processes and women's contribution to the productive economy. In this chapter, I argue that these assumptions are embedded in the collection of national statistics in both the national census and the household survey. By focusing on the census, the chapter concludes by arguing that there is room for improvement of the questionnaire and recommends qualitative research on the issue of distributional inequalities within the household that could inform the work of the statistical agency.

Information collected in the census reflects a political choice, for e.g. housing was a key issue for the new government and therefore much attention was paid to collecting information that would provide an overall picture of the state of housing (May, 1998). Similarly, if gender equality is a key issue of concern for the government, as reflected in major policy documents, then we need radical change in the way we theorise gender inequality and collect information about such discrimination.

### **3.2 Background to the census**

The national statistical system under Apartheid was organised to support the policies and practices of the state. As such, it did not rest on a response to population dynamics at all. At the time the role of the Central Statistical Services was to support the political ideology of the government and the collection of demographic data therefore was inadequate and biased. Data collected through the national census excluded information on the former Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei (TBVC) states (Posel, 1997: 49) which was predominantly black.

The legislation guiding CSS supported this exercise of discrimination. The Statistics Act No. 66 of 1976 gave the Minister extensive powers with regard to the organisational functioning of CSS. Under previous CSS management the production of statistical information was charged with political interference and subjectivity. The relationship between the state and the CSS was of critical importance in sustaining the political ideology of the government as Deborah Posel (1996) points out:

Routines of statistical measurement of the population were certainly enmeshed with the exercise of power. From this perspective governance consisted of solving big national problems through large-scale interventions co-ordinated from the centre. Moreover, the agent of social transformation was a bigger, more powerful, more knowledgeable state [therefore] centralised statistical information played an important part (1996).

The Apartheid government therefore considered the CSS an important ally in facilitating and supporting its policies of separate and unequal development. In fact, CSS played a crucial role in this process by using biased and unscientific methods of data collection resulting in a dearth of reliable statistics and indicators for planning. The relationship between counting and controlling was evident. An attempt to describe the nature and extent of poverty and under-development in the country was therefore extremely difficult.

The first post-Apartheid census was conducted with the specific aim of providing policy makers with reliable national data to address the socio-economic imbalances of the past. The new democratic government was committed to making decisions based on the needs of its citizens, rather than on a political ideology. The independence of the new statistical agency was therefore very important, as Bernstein (1999) remarks:

The independence of statistics is crucial. Even in a democracy there must be an 'iron wall' between people doing demographic work and the politicians who may have an interest in influencing information to suit their own needs. It is vital to ensure the non-political objectivity and analytical reliability of national demographic data collection (1999:4).

In 1993, the RDP Office commissioned the establishment of a task team that would be responsible for conducting an investigation into the establishment of a Statistics Council. Proposals tabled by the task team resulted in the appointment of a new head (Mark Orkin) and the establishment of a Statistics Council consisting of various professional communities and stakeholders (May, 1998). The Council was charged with restructuring the old statistical agency and included various stakeholder communities. This ensured that the new agency was better equipped to deal with the challenges posed by demographic research in post-Apartheid South Africa (Orkin, 1999: 5) as it brought different and varied interest groups to the table.

The restructuring and transformation of the CSS began in 1994 and marked the beginning of the process of producing reliable demographic information. The role of the statistical

agency in the new South Africa is radically different from the role of the old agency. In fact, one of the primary aims of the new Statistics Act No. 6 of 1999 is to ensure the *independence* of statistics and statistical research in South Africa (Orkin, 1999). The Act provides for the independence and autonomy of the statistical agency as well as the process of statistical production. However, the question remains whether they are meeting the new demand for reliable socio-economic data.

I will argue that the new agency has undergone rapid change over the past few years. This process of transformation has been spearheaded by committed staff who have a history of genuine commitment and interest in socio-economic change and justice. The following sentiments expressed by Statistics Sweden, the agency that provided technical assistance to the South African government, provides some indication of the success of this process thus far:

The speed and flexibility of the transformation of CSS is probably without parallel anywhere in the world (1997:1).

The transformation of CSS products, structures, systems and staffing is shaped by three key national policies:

- The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which has been the impetus for the overhaul of the census and the household survey programmes in the interest of more inclusive development planning;
- The Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy, which has guided the re-engineering of CSS's hundred-plus economic series in order to provide more timely and comprehensive information regarding the economy;
- The goals of the public service transformation set by the Deputy President, which have shaped the transformation of the CSS's institutional being in terms of recruitment, training, performance management and strategic planning for improved service delivery (1997:3).

The transformation of CSS has resulted in a statistical service that moves beyond a set of scientific expertise to one that is responsive to policy and user needs (May, 1998).

### **3.3 Reforming the census process**

The 1996 national census was a mammoth task for the new government. It was undertaken within the context of competing agendas and methodologies and required many compromises before reaching its final form, which attempted to combine different demographic models. The reference group mandated to develop the questionnaire was made up of various stakeholders and professional communities with diverse interests. Representatives from the Women's National Co-alition (WNC), the Self Employed Women's Union (SEWU), and Debbie Budlender from the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) participated in the reference group discussions and ensured that a strong gender perspective was present. However, the extent to which the gender lobby actually influenced the final questionnaire is unknown.

The wide-scale institutional transformation of CSS brought with it changes in how data was collected. Stats SA was tasked with changing existing methods of data collection as rural areas were generally under-enumerated and under-researched (Budlender, 1997). A great deal of research and effort went into developing new and reliable methods to respond to the need for policy relevant data. The differences between the previous population censuses and the 1996 census highlighted below provide evidence of this.

First, the inclusion of the TBVC states ensured that no part of South Africa was excluded from participating in the process. Previously statistics collected through the national census excluded information on the former Bantustans or Apartheid created self-governing homelands (CSS, 1997:3). As well as being racist, the exclusion also constituted a gender bias because almost 60% of the TBVC population is female (Budlender, 1997). The inclusion of these states guaranteed that citizens of these areas, mostly rural women, were counted as part of the South African population for the very first time.

Second, before 1996 the statistical agency did not conduct door-to-door surveys to count people living in rural areas, informal settlements and townships. Instead, they relied on aerial photography and arbitrary estimates on the number of people in a household (Crawthra and Kraak, 1999:25). A uniform 'ground based methodology' (Orkin, 1999) was used across the country. This involved a process of demarcation that involved breaking large areas into smaller more manageable pieces, resulting in more accurate enumeration in all areas (May, 1998). The demarcated enumerator areas (EAs) consisted of between one to two hundred dwellings and ensured better access to individual households. Orkin suggests that a contributing factor to the high participation levels in the 1996 census was black-led enumeration that overcame the historical distrust of black South Africans toward the census process (Orkin, 1999).

The final difference relates to the questionnaire developed in consultation with a reference group consisting of various stakeholders and professional communities. It was translated into eleven languages and respondents were allowed the choice of completing the questionnaire themselves or, if the respondent was not literate, being interviewed by an enumerator. The face-to-face interviews significantly improved enumeration in rural areas where high levels of illiteracy are common. While this method increased the overall cost of the census, it ensured that factors like illiteracy did not decrease participation levels significantly (May, 1998).

These methodological changes were intended to ensure that the resulting statistics provided more reliable and accurate information on South African society. However it may be argued that the questionnaire itself, the focus of this study, did not change too drastically as Julian May points out:

I do not think that there are major differences in the questionnaire itself [compared to previous censuses]. There are improvements in some of the concepts that are used. I think generally the questions are much shorter than some of the earlier ones that contained a great deal of information now collected in the

October Household Survey. Possibly that is another major difference. I think that the census is one instrument of collecting information; it is not seen as an isolated instrument. So for example, there were decisions taken to exclude questions from the census because they are in the October Household Survey (1998, 5).

While this study acknowledges that the census and the household surveys are complementary both instruments fail to capture reproductive labour. As such, they do not account for the invisible labour that women perform that allows the formal economy to function effectively. The existing statistical system remains heavily geared towards recognising and accounting for work in the formal productive sphere, leaving household work unaccounted. Further, the fact that 'there are no major differences in the questionnaire itself' (May: 1998) calls into question the quality and reliability of the information.

The previous chapter has argued that conventional definitions of household and work fail to show the inequalities between men and women. In this chapter, I argue that we need to produce statistics that allow us to get a better sense of gender inequality so that we may work at transforming gender relations with positive outcomes for both women and men.

### **3.4 The invisible woman**

Data collected through the census plays a key role in determining national priorities and targeting vulnerable groups. In recent years there has been debate around whether a census, as a data gathering exercise, adequately serves the needs of various stakeholders. While some argue that a census should provide an adequate count of the population and some basic demographic information (May; Ardington, 1998) others argue that a census should provide a more detailed picture of the population of the country particularly in relation to gender inequality (Ntombela-Nzimande, 1999). Those concerned with the production and application of statistical information should take this debate on board. Sweden, a leading country on gender statistics, pushes for more dialogue between users and producers of statistical information. The new Statistics Act No 6 of 1999 does not set

out the objectives of a population census. It does however stipulate that a census of the population should be taken in the year 2001 and every five years thereafter. The Act defines *statistics* as:

Aggregated numerical information relating to demographic, economic, financial, environmental, social or similar matters, at national, provincial or local level, which is compiled and analysed according to relevant scientific and statistical methodology (1999: 4).

Further, the purpose of official statistics and statistical principles as listed in the Act is to:

Assist organs of state, businesses, other organisations or the public in planning, decision making or other actions and the monitoring or assessment of policies, decision making or other actions (1999: 6).

For government's purposes, a census is key to providing more detailed information on the nature and form of discrimination and disadvantage. While Stats SA has attempted to disaggregate statistics according to gender, our statistical base is still inadequate. Hedman et al sum up the importance of formulating statistics and indicators on gender issues in the following comment:

Statistics and indicators on the situation of women and men in all spheres of society are an important tool in promoting equality. Gender statistics have an essential role in the elimination of stereotypes, in the formulation of policies and in monitoring progress towards full equality. The production of adequate gender statistics concerns the entire official statistical system as well as different statistical sources and fields. It also implies the development and improvement of concepts, definitions, classifications and methods (1996:9).

So gender statistics includes more than a male/female breakdown of the population. It is part of an overall strategy to achieve gender equality. Hedman's comment also draws

attention to the use of accurate concepts and definitions in the production of gender statistics. This section of the dissertation examines two definitions *work* and *household* used in the census questionnaire and analyses them from a feminist perspective. I argue that the use of these definitions reflects patriarchal thinking that contributes to making women's work in the household invisible in national statistics. Implicit in the use of these concepts is the assumption that households operate as altruistic units and that work performed to sustain a family is non-productive. In addition to this, I will analyse the questions pertaining to services as information on service provision is key to monitoring progress towards women's empowerment.

### **3.5 The definitions**

#### **3.5.1 Work**

The definitions and concepts used in the Act and the census questionnaire reflects a particular male bias. Waring (1988) argues that male-centred definitions of production and reproduction may also reflect an uncritical acceptance of biological determinism implying that women perform household and child care work because it is part of their physiology (1988: 29). Policy makers in general tend to cut up household social relations into neat compartments making assumptions about the ways in which individuals within the household go about their lives. So for e.g.: women at home are considered economically inactive, while men at home are considered temporarily unemployed or retired.

The concepts statistical agencies use often do not take into account that women face a different set of challenges from men. Because there is enormous pressure to quantify, statistical agencies often use generalised and universally accepted definitions and conceptual categories. Much of women's subordination does not lend itself neatly to quantifiable analysis. How is the impact of male income retention or the girl child's withdrawal from school, quantifiable? But statistics are useful and we need this

information if we are to propose action for change. So we need to change the language we use, how we develop our concepts and how we challenge gender bias in statistics.

The following question from the 1996 census questionnaire highlights the bias I describe above:

Does (the respondent) work? (For pay, profit or family gain) Answer **yes** for formal work for a salary or wage. Also answer **yes** for informal work such as making things for sale or selling things or rendering a service. Also answer **yes** for work on a farm or the land, whether for a wage or as part of the household's farming activities. Otherwise answer **no** (1996: 6).

The above description of *work* is synonymous with activities that have market value i.e. activities producing goods exchanged for cash. While the question mentions 'farming activities', it does not make any reference to reproductive and other activities (such as bearing children, cooking, ironing, cleaning, preparing children for school) usually performed by women. According to this definition reproductive activity does not constitute work. Informal work is mainly limited to service provision and the definition has a strong bias toward paid activity. If one considers that in both developing and developed countries women take up a disproportionate share of reproductive labour, then the definition is biased because it does not account for women's contribution to sustaining the household. An additional section on unpaid labour including all household tasks would provide information on the division of responsibilities within the household, and allow policy makers and researchers to estimate the value of reproductive labour in a household. Further there may be some scope to include household labour in this definition as it constitutes work done for family gain but the qualifying questions still takes on a neo-liberal interpretation of work.

Efforts to measure and value household work has increased in recent years and many developed countries have established separate satellite accounts. Yet in developing countries where women perform much more housework, there has been little progress in

this area. The reasons for this include undeveloped statistical systems and structures, lack of political will to address issues of gender inequality and nature of work in developing countries where formal and informal economies are inextricably linked. Given these reasons, it is difficult to understand why South Africa has not made much progress in this area of statistical production.

### 3.5.2 Household

The census defines a *household* as:

A group of people who live together at least four nights a week, eat together and share resources, or a single person who lives alone (1999: 4).

The definition suggests reciprocity and sharing and invokes a particular understanding of how households work. The previous chapter has argued that treating households as harmonious socio-economic units have resulted in policy makers seriously misinterpreting the needs of impoverished households. There appears to be a general failure to recognise that an important feature of households, especially poor ones, is that they often configure and reconfigure depending on the welfare of the household at a particular time. Co-operative household functioning usually occurs when households are stable.

In order to respond to these variations in household structure therefore, statistics need to reflect the often uncomfortable reality that household members do not always act selflessly;

Implicit in the collection of data on the household is the assumption that households exist as co-operative entities in which total household resources are equitably distributed to all residents. Consequently most household surveys do not ask questions that would allow researchers to unravel the complexity of resource distribution when household members do not care unselfishly about one another, and when kinship networks are not characterised by reciprocity (Posel, 1997: 49).

Family income usually defines and influences relationships and processes of decision making in the household. In most households the male head usually makes important decisions about finances and the distribution of resources. Women have little if any influence over how resources are distributed within the household. Even where women contribute significantly to collective family income, they often do not make decisions about how that money is spent. In poor households women bear the burden of shortages in food and other resources while men simply abandon the household. Where poverty levels are very high food and other resources go to male members of the household (Kabeer, 1994). There is ample evidence of this pattern in many developing countries.

Chapter two has argued that issues of domestic fluidity are crucial to an understanding of households. Definition of households and household functioning based on static, patriarchal models are not useful for developing countries. Definitions are important in providing an analytical framework but defining terms and concepts is a political process reflecting political choices we make and impacting the information we collect. Hedman et al (1996) argue that the choice of concepts and definitions used can affect the quality of gender statistics:

Concepts, definitions and classifications are the elements that influence the quality of gender statistics the most and determine whether or not data reflect the real situation of women and men in society. Questionnaire design and language used are critical issues affecting women and men's answers and can introduce gender biases (1996: 60).

Using inadequate concepts and definitions in censuses and surveys result in data gaps. It is therefore important that definitions reflect the reality that households are not homogenous in nature; they vary in structure and composition depending on various internal and external factors. Ignoring the complex relationship between rural and urban settings in a South African context further limits our understanding of household functioning.

Stats SA definition of the household assumes a degree of sharing however in many households resources are unequally distributed between men and women. While it may be argued that in the case of *some* households there might be enough sharing (albeit unequal) to constitute a household in the way Stats SA has done in the census, this is not the case in *most* households. Feminists have challenged assumptions about family household unity and sharing (Wolf, 1997: 118). They have argued that in most households there is an unequal distribution of resources that have gendered patterns. Family members do not act in the best interest of the family unit and women and girls often receive less of total family income than boys and men. The lack of information on intra-household dynamics prevents researchers from gaining more insight into male biases in the household and its impact on women and girls.

While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to provide a more relevant definition of the household I argue that if the existing definition is used, it should be followed by additional questions that query distributional inequalities in the household.<sup>5</sup> The lack of probing questions in this regard limits our understanding of intra-household gender dynamics. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the census captures demographic information for a particular piece of time. If households re-configure often this would need to be reflected through longitudinal studies of household composition: a task that the census is poorly equipped to do but that other surveys, like the OHS and the SALDRU/ World Bank survey, are attempting.<sup>6</sup> However, neither the household nor the World Bank surveys capture adequate information about reproductive labour so the question of accounting for women's work remains unchallenged in statistical collection and analysis. In fact many measures of poverty use per capita household income as an indicator, assuming that resources are equally shared between income earners and dependants - this rarely happens owing to power dynamics in the family.

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<sup>5</sup> I would like to thank an anonymous external examiner who added this comment.

<sup>6</sup> Thanks again to the external examiner.

### 3.6 Critique of the questions pertaining to the household (Annex 1)

This section analyses the questions pertaining to the household as they appeared in the census questionnaire. The *questions related to the household* provide information on:

- Additional income generated by the household;
- Migrancy information;
- Physical structure of the household and
- Services used by the household.

Questions are divided into two parts (section B of the questionnaire) under the headings: a) *general questions related to the household* and b) *services used by the household* (census '96 questionnaire).

This following part of the dissertation will critically examine the questions on the household. It pays specific attention to the section on services because women are primary users of basic services (Budlender, 1997: 20) and therefore suffer the impact of non-delivery of services. The section will also look at the general questions about the household and the information that we are able to obtain from it.

An important gap in our information on households is the links between rural and urban households. Questions on this aspect of household support are necessary to gather more information on how rural and urban households sometimes engage in co-operative functioning. In most rural and economic data there is the assumption that rural households have no income, low levels of literacy and poor socio-economic conditions (Ardington, 1998). However many rural houses obtain income from people living and working in cities. Previous censuses did not attempt to collect this information at all, resulting in lack of data on urban households that support rural households. Questions on this would allow researchers to establish how rural economies operate and the role of women within it. On the other hand, it is important to note that households that are reliant on income from migrant labourers and/ or children working away from home are

particularly vulnerable because they are dependent on the benevolence of the earner. In addition to this, where migrant labourers enter into other intimate relationships in urban areas families living in rural areas could suffer effects of income retention. In such instances the burden of support usually falls on the female head of household.

Understanding the economic links between rural and urban households is important in establishing household welfare. Often people live and work in urban areas but spend a large proportion of their income sustaining rural households:

Employment statistics may therefore indicate that female headed households in urban areas have high employment levels, however if the income is distributed amongst those who are reliant on it a very different picture emerges (Ardington, 1998: 2).

Focusing in more detail on the household, the additional questions in the following areas are more relevant in establishing household well-being:

- Migrant workers;
- Additional income that the household generates and
- Remittances or payment received by the household.

These questions provide further important data on the links between rural and urban households, however while the questionnaire makes reference to households that *receive* remittances or payments, it does not pay attention to the households that *pay* remittances thus making it difficult to establish the well being of urban households that support rural households. An important feature of the majority of South African households is the urban households often support rural households as Ardington mentions above.

### 3.7 Questions on services

The section *services used by this household* provide important infra-structural information for socio-economic development. Questions on energy supply, water supply, refuse collection and telecommunications will provide necessary data for service provision. In South Africa rural and peri-urban areas are marked by a general absence of basic services. It is therefore important to have detailed information on the needs of people living in these areas. In general, women are more dependent on the provision of services than men. Considering that large numbers of women living and working in rural and peri-urban areas have little access to social and other services, these questions are critical in addressing their needs. Moreover, it is necessary to understand the specific problems that women experience when accessing these services. Attempts to collect such information would contribute to better and more targeted service delivery. While it is necessary to collect quantitative statistical information about development needs, it is also necessary to attempt to understand the less visible forms of discrimination women experience. These may include walking very long distances to collect water and firewood, or not having access to a telephone in the case of a health emergency. While a national census might not be an appropriate instrument to collect such information, very few instruments that we have at present are equipped to do this. In this context, it might therefore be necessary to consider including the collection of such information in the national census.

The RDP<sup>7</sup> identifies service provision as a key strategic objective for the eradication of poverty and deprivation:

It is not merely the lack of income that determines poverty. An enormous proportion of very basic needs are presently unmet. In attacking poverty and deprivation, the RDP aims to set South Africa firmly on the road to eliminating hunger, providing land and housing to all our people, providing access to safe

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<sup>7</sup> Although the RDP socio-economic policy framework as been replaced by the GEAR, its objectives still hold

water and sanitation for all, ensuring the availability of affordable and sustainable energy sources, eliminating illiteracy, raising the quality of education and training for children and adults, protecting the environment and improving our health services and making them accessible to all (ANC, 1994: 14).

The delivery of services is therefore a critical benchmark to measure the success or failure of current policies and programmes aimed at poverty alleviation. Targeting services to those who are especially vulnerable is key to any poverty eradication exercise. But men and women have different experiences of poverty. On average, female-headed households in non-urban areas tend to be poorer than other households, with a lower annual income than rural households headed by men, or urban female-headed households (Budlender, 1996). It is therefore essential that women in rural areas benefit from such services and they rely more heavily on services provided by local government.

The next section of this chapter looks at the questions on services as they appeared in the questionnaire. I will argue that the questions fail to capture the different ways in which women and men access services, and what the lack of service provision means in the lives of women and men. Activities like collecting wood, fetching water, disposing of rubbish and other tasks associated with the home, do not impact significantly on men and their time because they do not perform these tasks. In most households women are primarily responsible for these and other household related activities. As a result, women and girls have less time for leisure, education and other activities that contribute to their development. In other words their life choices are limited precisely because of the sexual division of labour.

### 3.7.1 Questions on energy

Consider the following question:

What type of energy/fuel does this household MAINLY use for cooking, heating and lighting?

Access to energy and fuel for consumption is difficult in rural and peri-urban areas requiring people to walk far distances to obtain these essentials. Rural or non-urban households are far more likely to use wood for cooking, heating and lighting (CSS, 1998: 12). Due to the sexual division of labour, women and girls are often responsible for this task consuming a large proportion of their workday. Statistics from the SALDRU study show that on average women spend about 5,5 hours a week collecting wood, while men spend about 2,5 hours or just under half that time performing the same task (CSS, 1997: 12). In the chapter on energy in the *Second Women's Budget*, studies by Gandar (1982) and Eberhard (1986) show that South African rural women spend between 2,5 and 6,2 hours collecting one head-load of wood. Depending on the needs of a household women spend about 5.2 to 18. 6 hours a week collecting wood for fuel.

In its current phrasing, the question attempts to obtain information on energy sources used in the household for cooking, heating and lighting. This would provide statistics on the numbers of households that have access to electricity and those that do not. From this it would be possible to target areas for electrification, or where this is not possible in the short term, for the effective use of natural resources. The question is limiting however because it does not attempt to establish who is responsible for ensuring that the home has energy/fuel. For e.g. in rural areas the main sources of energy is wood. Women and girls are primarily responsible for collecting, sorting and ensuring that this source of energy for cooking, heating and lighting is available. As the question appears, the gender dimension is not immediately visible. One would think that all members of the family would be affected equally by the lack of electricity. But we know that it is women and girls who suffer most when there is no electricity. The information could have been improved if further probing questions such as the ones below were posed:

- Who is primarily responsible for providing energy/ fuel?
- Who performs this duty most often?

This would have provided some indication of the disproportionate burden of work on women and provide a better basis for developing policies on energy.

The draft White Paper on Energy also does not disaggregate the household. For e.g. the impact of air pollution is considered to be felt uniformly amongst household members. But such assumptions are incorrect as, most often, women suffer the health effects of pollution. The unequal impact is felt precisely because the gender division of labour locates women closer to fuels for cooking and heating than it does men. The gender division of labour also ensures that women's time and energy is absorbed into the family. The following extract from the case study in Molweni points to the problem:

I have to walk very far everyday pass those bushes (points to thick vegetation in the distance). It takes me about three hours a day to fetch wood and water for cooking and heating.

### 3.7.2 Questions on water supply

This analysis may also be applied to the question on water:

What is the household's main water supply?
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As it appears in the questionnaire there is no gender perspective. Many studies have shown that women walk long distances carrying heavy buckets of water for drinking, cooking and cleaning purposes. Access to water is a basic human right and is clearly articulated as such in the RDP. The Minister of Water Affairs Kader Asmal performed very well in ensuring access to marginalised communities. However, privatisation of services creates new challenges for women. In particular, privatisation of water supported by national governments, international financial institutions and bilateral donors is shown to have negative impacts on women. Privatisation couched in terms of efficiency and low cost puts provision of basic services beyond the reach of poor citizens.

Proponents of privatisation argue that once the private sector steps in efficiency and access will improve. In a country like South Africa where average incomes are between R1 000 and R 2 000 a month, it is unlikely that poor people will benefit from privatisation of essential services as they have little disposable income to pay user fees. Poor people cannot afford to pay for such services and there are no incentives for private companies to invest in rural areas. Further privatisation has not meant that services are cheaper. On the contrary increases in prices of services have consequently resulted in limited access to poor households.

For poor South Africa women who have high illiteracy rates, low education levels, low paid, low status job, limited access to the labour markets, unequal division of household labour, privatising basic services is a recipe for disaster. Increase in costs of services will demand longer and harder workdays for women. If privatisation goes through, it will have a profound impact on the lives of millions of poor women, men and undermining their basic human rights. Due to the sexual division of labour, poor women will be affected most negatively by privatisation. Having information about such impact is vital for meeting basic service needs and securing citizen's rights to such services.

The anti-privatisation forum is working on these issues. It demands more responsive resource allocation based on the needs and aspirations of poor people. Those concerned with women's right and gender issues have to engage more critically with the whole area of privatisation of services as it is often women who bear the burden of non-delivery. In order for the gender lobby to address such issues, accurate information on the extent of the problems is needed. Collecting such information through the national census and household surveys is therefore vital. Posing further questions to obtain this information would assist in getting a clearer picture of the problem, for example:

- Who is primarily responsible for collecting water?
- Who performs this chore most often?

Including such questions in the census would provide information on how dependant women are on provision of services by the government, as well as the possible negative effects of privatisation of services.

### 3.7.3 Questions on sanitation

The questions on sanitation and refuse removal also lack gender analysis. The analysis above could also be applied to the section on sanitation.

What type of toilet facility is available?

How is the refuse or rubbish of this household disposed of?

The above questions referring to sanitation provide information on toilets and refuse removal. These have important implications for rural areas where there is a lack of such facilities leading to health problems. Women are the primary users of basic services and are impacted the most when such services are not delivered regularly and efficiently. Clean water and access to sanitation is a basic human right.

According to the White Paper on Basic Household sanitation, nearly one million households in South Africa have no access to sanitation and a further two million have inadequate sanitation. Women should be targeted as key beneficiaries of proper sanitation because they are more likely to remain in communities because of household chores and lack of formal employment and, as primary care givers they are more able to communicate important hygiene messages. Also, they are more likely to dispose of refuse and have an understanding of recycling.

The questions in the census do not attempt to obtain information on the gender dimensions of sanitation. Posing further questions to obtain this information, as with water and energy, would assist in getting a clearer picture of the problem, for example:

- If pit or bucket latrines are used, who is primarily responsible for cleaning?

- Who performs this task most often?
- Who is primarily responsible for refuse disposal?
- Who performs this chore most often?

As argued above, including probing question in the census would provide more accurate information on the needs of poor women.

### **3.8 Why should this information be collected through the census**

Statistics South Africa is trying to grapple with gender issues in statistical surveys. They are in the process of developing a time use study. Time use measures the activities men and women perform in sequence over a fixed period of time (Hedman, 1996). Time use is also complex. It is a methodology while potentially very useful, requires high levels of literacy and commitment:

The compilation of a diary requires significant effort by the respondent who has to understand the methods and be literate. In interviews, respondents do not always have the right perception about time and cannot recall exactly what they did in the reference period. The fact that many of the activities performed are simultaneous or the limit between activities is not clear further complicates the process. Analysis and presentation of data are also difficult and require a developed statistical system and adequate software and hardware.

No wonder very few countries have managed to conduct time use. In a country like South Africa where 23% of all African women over the age of twenty-five have received no formal education (CSS, 1998:27), conducting time use is further complicated.

A bigger challenge to costing the value of reproductive labour is how women themselves perceive what they do in the home. Do they attach any value and financial worth to such activities? The group I talked to in Molweni were intrigued by the aim of my study but

expressed support for the idea. One respondent suggested that she was keen to ensure that housework was shared in her home:

We are brought up with the idea that girls have to help and boys have to sleep. Men cannot even wash their underwear. They are helpless. Men will not change now only in the coming generation. I teach my son to wipe the breadboard when he slices bread and to wash the dishes. (Focus group, 1998)

The group agreed that although they did the majority of household chores, they would like to see such work shared more equitably:

When I ask my husband to help with the housework like making the bed, he says: I've got a wife; I paid for her so she is responsible for the bed, even though we were sleeping in the same bed as equals. (Ibid.)

While statistical agencies are turning to time use to measure the value of unpaid labour (Hedman, 1996) the cultural diversity of South African society requires an approach that consider different cultural conceptions of work, income, production and so on. Time use requires commitment and co-operation from respondents, interviews and census officials alike. It includes working towards common objectives and goals.

The household surveys collect a great deal of information on the household and are the prime socio-economic instrument (May, 1998). Household surveys do not do a time budget but collect information on household structure, demographics, migration and household economics. It does not collect information on decision-making or reproductive labour at all (May, 1998).

So there appears to be a gap in our information, one that cannot be easily filled. In this chapter I have argued that definitions need to be sharpened and more probing questions needs to be asked. I think that the census is the place for collecting such information. The questions on services could all be improved by adding question on the following:

- Types of household chores performed by men and women
- Participation of female and male children in domestic chores
- Use of existing services: Who are the primary users

This would assist in obtaining a more accurate picture of how responsibilities are distributed in the household. Further challenging how we define households and work, how we conceive household production and reproduction is absolutely necessary. Gender statistics cannot be produced in a vacuum. Producers and users of gender statistics need to work together and should ideally have common goals and objectives. Collecting gender statistics and indicators is not an end in itself but rather a means to achieving the goals of gender equality and social justice.

## 4. Conclusion

This study set out to analyse the 1996 census from a feminist perspective by focusing on the questions pertaining to the household. It drew on international and national studies to challenge assumptions about the household and expressed the need for accurate statistics on gender inequalities within the household. The study also explored the policy implications of the questions as they currently stand and made suggestions for improved and sharper definitions, and more probing questions.

The investigation into the census is based on the premise that it is a national resource and provides critical data to all sectors of society. By reviewing the assumptions underlying the definitions of *household* and *work*, the study has shown that unpaid labour continues to be unrecognised and invisible. If producing adequate statistics and indicators on households is central to poverty eradication then our current instruments are failing to provide us with the information we need. Household surveys embody a particular understanding of how households operate as well as how resources are distributed among household members (Posel, 1997: 49). The literature review and case studies proved this and showed the need for new definitions and concepts that reflect the realities of women lives.

If we want to address gender inequality and understand the full impact of the sexual division of labour in the household, census takers need to apply gender analysis in all stages of information collection. Such an approach requires debunking traditional assumptions about the household and women's specific role within it whilst simultaneously recognising the following realities:

- Existence of distributional inequalities between men and women, boys and girls;
- Income retention among male members of the household;
- Women's productive, reproductive and community managing roles;
- Unequal access to and control over resources and decision making in the household and society at large.

The persistence of the altruistic household that continues to exert a powerful influence on development work needs to be interrogated. This should be replaced with the notion that households and domestic relations are fluid and dynamic. Issues of income retention and distributional inequalities should therefore inform our understanding of household functioning.

While the household surveys and census provide important and policy relevant socio-economic data, they do not cater for reproductive work at all. Modifications to the current data collection instruments will provide useful information for researchers and policy makers.

Fieldworkers and those involved in the statistical production process should undergo gender training in order to sensitise them to the differential impact of policy on the lives of women and men. This may also challenge the cultural perceptions that inform the understanding of concepts such as: *production, reproduction, work, income, family* and so on. In addition to adequate statistics, changes in attitudes and perceptions, as well as consciousness raising is necessary to alter the sexual division of labour with benefits for both men and women.

While our statistical base has transformed rapidly and positively over the past few years providing urgently needed socio-economic data, I argue that we need to promote a radical change in the type of information we collect and what value we attach to different forms of paid and unpaid work. We still have a long way to go in developing questionnaires that adequately reflect women's lives and their contribution to the national economy.

Producing gender statistics and tackling gender inequality is ultimately about re-balancing power relations between women and men at all levels. It is a political project aimed at transforming our social, economic and political structures so that all women, men and children can enjoy and exercise their full human rights. If the South African government is committed to achieving gender equality, as reflected in policy statements and legislation, it needs to ensure that accurate, reliable, accessible information is

available to all users. We are unlikely to achieve gender equality without the proper information.

## Annex 1: Relevant extract from the census questionnaire

### PLEASE ANSWER QUESTIONS PERTAINING TO THIS HOUSEHOLD

#### SECTION B:

- 1.1 **Think of any additional money that this household generates, and that has not been included in the previous section.** (For example, the sale of homegrown produce or home-brewed beer or cattle or the rental of property). **Please indicate this total amount, if anything during the as year.** (1 October 1995 – 30 September 1996). If none enter '0'.
- 1.2 **If this household receives any remittances or payments** (for example money sent back home by someone working or living elsewhere or alimony). **Please indicate that total received during the past year.** (1 October 1995 – 30 September 1996). If none enter '0'.

- 1.3 **Are there any persons who are usually members of this household but who are away for a month or more because they are migrant workers?** (A migrant worker is someone who is absent from home for more than a month each year to work or to seek work).

If yes, indicate the person's particulars. These include: age in years, gender, relationship to the head of the household, where the person is living).

- 1.4 **Which type of dwelling does this household occupy?** (If this household lives in MORE THAN ONE dwelling, circle the main type of dwelling)

House or brick structure on a separate stand or yard	1
Traditional dwelling/ hut/ structure made of traditional materials	2
Flat in a block of flats	3
Town/ cluster/ semi-detached house (simplex, duplex or triplex)	4
Unit in retirement village	5
House/ flat/ room in backyard	6
Informal dwelling/ shack, in backyard	7
Informal dwelling/ shack, NOT in backyard, e.g. in informal settlement	8
Room/ flatlet not in backyard but on shared property	9
Caravan/ tent	10
None/ homeless	11
Other, specify	

- 1.5 **How many rooms including kitchens are there for this household?** (Excluding bathrooms and toilets). For homeless write '0'.
- 1.5.1 (If 1 room for the whole household) **Do you share this room with any other households?**

1.5.2 (If yes) **How many households?**

1.6 **Is this dwelling owned by a member of the household?**

## **SERVICES USED BY THE HOUSEHOLD**

### **2. SERVICES**

2.1 **What type of energy/ fuel does this household mainly use for cooking, heating and lighting? (Circle only ONE code in each COLUMN)**

<b>Energy sources used in this dwelling</b>	<b>Cooking</b>	<b>Heating</b>	<b>Lighting</b>
Electricity direct from municipality/ local authority or Eskom	1	1	1
Electricity from other sources e.g. generator, solar cell	2	2	2
Gas	3	3	3
Paraffin	4	4	4
Wood	5	5	5
Coal	6	6	-
Candles	-	-	7
Animal dung	8	8	-
Other, specify			

2.2 **What is the household's main water supply?**  
(Circle only ONE code)

Piped (tap) water, in dwelling	1
Piped (tap) water, on site or in yard	2
Public tap	3
Water-carrier/ tanker	4
Borehole/ rain-water tank/ well	5
Dam/ river/ stream/ spring	6
Other (e.g. from shops, hospitals, schools etc).	7

2.3 **What type of toilet facility is available?**  
(Circle only ONE code)

Flush toilet or chemical toilet	1
Pit latrine	2
Bucket latrine	3
None of the above	4

2.4 **How is the refuse or rubbish of this household disposed of?**  
(Circle only ONE code)

Removed by local authority at least once a week	1
Removed by local authority less often	2
Communal refuse dump	3
Own refuse dump	4
No rubbish disposal	5
Other, specify	

- 2.5 **Where do members of this household mainly use a telephone?**  
(Circle only ONE code)

In this dwelling/ cellular phone	1
At a neighbour nearby	2
At a public telephone nearby	3
At a location nearby e.g. work	4
At another location not nearby	5
No access to a telephone	6

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