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Methodology Workshop on Household, Gender and Age

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BACKGROUND PAPER

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Background

1. Changes are taking place at the micro-and at the macro-level in a very special way in our time. Research and studies usually centre on one or other of these levels: trends and tensions at the world or regional level or changes at the individual level. It is important at this point in time to look and search for the link between the two levels.
2. Changes in the last twenty years have been seven more rapid and inter-related at the macro-level but the knowledge of the changes as a consequence of these at the micro-, individual or small group level seems to be slower, or at least we do not seem to capture them with enough rapidity or depth.
3. The macro trend of changes in women's roles and in their awareness, education, participation in work or in politics has had an important influence on the household. This can be considered more than a hypothesis in the present project but at the same time it needs to be seen at the empirical level through field research.
4. The cluster of relationships which constitute the household have to be seen in such terms to be able to capture the dynamic changes among such inter-relations and not at a given moment (as a photographic situation). It is the dychronic approach that is more important than the synchronic one in this case, as a basis for comparative research.

Approach

5. To be able to capture such changes in gender, the household is considered as the basic element in the social structure given the specific interest in women within the same household. This also brings the interest in correlations between age, historical time in the course of social change (birth year, entry into the social system) and index of historical location. Age and related behaviour may give a very useful indication of the future. It is believed that such an approach (largely considered as a life-course approach, both from the psychological and socio-anthropological point of view, and mainly used in developed countries up to now), could be very useful in the location which the project has chosen: developing countries. Specifically it should be useful both in Africa, where changes at both macro-and micro-level are taking place very rapidly, and in Latin America where women are crucial to the changes which are taking place within the household and within society. Economic elements will be considered but as they are better researched and more known, they will not be part of the field research. However, economic data will be incorporated in the analysis and findings.

6. At the same time cohorts are more strongly differentiated in the course of rapid change and also represent a vehicle of social change. The multidimensionality of the life course relationship emerges even more in the household. What, as a consequence, are the trends emerging in life patterns in the household in Africa and Latin America?
7. The other aspect of the temporal approach, not a static one, is the use of time by members of the household, especially women. The "when" and the "where" might indicate and contribute to a useful understanding of the life course approach.
8. Thus, the research on household, gender and age will focus on women and the interrelationship taking place in the household, with specific interest in what the life span approach and time budget approach can tell us.
9. The respect for cultural differences and the cultural norms is even more important in the consideration of households, as social culture is complementary to the cohort-historical perspective. In fact socio-cultural perspectives give emphasis to the social meaning of age and its contextual variations: birth, puberty and death are biological facts of the life course, but their meaning in society as social facts is different.
10. In conclusion, the project will focus on life time from birth to death, on social time as expressed by the age, on social roles, on historical time as location in a historical process, thus capturing social changes as much as this is possible.