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Methodology Workshop on Household, Gender and Age

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THE HOUSEHOLD, GENDER AND AGE  
RESEARCH PROJECT: AN INTRODUCTION

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Introduction

1. This research project is based on the United Nations University's meetings since 1979 in Tokyo, Oslo, Dartmouth and Rome on the role of gender and age in the development process. It is linked to all five themes of the UNU's Medium-Term Perspectives, although it relates primarily to the Theme IV: Human and Social Development and Co-existence of Peoples, Culture and Social Systems.

2. The exploratory meeting on the "state of the art" for the project on Household, Gender and Age was held in Rome on 23-25 April 1982. Thirteen scholars and researchers from different countries and several United Nations Organizations participated and various papers were presented. It was apparent that the basic unit of observation should be the household, but it also became clear that what was meant by household would have to be defined. At the same time, most of the participants believed that research on gender and age within the framework of the life cycle would be both original and valuable. From the discussion, it seemed that most of the participants considered research in this framework as the first priority.

3. The project proposal came out after the exploratory meeting in Rome. The focus is three-pronged, as the problematic of the research is complex and highly interrelated. It involves the following concepts:

(a) The household as a primary living unit in its different cultural connotations, encapsulating a cluster of activities of people living together over time and performing physical and psycho-social maintenance and development functions in the organizational environment of the community. This formulation is preliminary and points to the need for further conceptualization and theoretical building.

(b) Gender as an analytic device for looking at the world, considering both individuals per se and individuals in the household, with emphasis on the role of women. Visibility and invisibility of women in household and community are key themes.

(c) Age as a reconceptualization of traditional categories with particular reference to the socio-economic implications of age cohorts of social generations and the generation gap.

Objective

4. The objective of this research project is to analyse the changing relationship of the members of the household between themselves and with the rest of society during the life cycle. Issues such as the changing participation of the members of the household in the labour market; the monetary and non-monetary contribution of the members of the household to their joint welfare; how family laws and other legal aspects affect (on paper and in reality) the role of men; how religious aspects affect roles and relationships, changing aspirations, awareness and images of perceptions; and the changing structure and functions of a typology of households will be explored in various countries. The results of the research will be used to construct a typology of households and to develop a model of household development.

the results of similar studies carried out in industrialized nations.

### Background

5. Much research has been done on the labour force participation of men and women, on the relationship between household work and "productive work", education and productivity. Much less work exists on the rather complex way household units function and how social relations operate in it. Issues such as what monetary and non-monetary contributions are made by different members of the household; what is the decision-making process or the rationale for a young woman to switch from non-monetary activity to a market job; what is the function of elderly men and women in the household; what factors affect the change in those generation households (e.g. a sense of inutility of older women) are not sufficiently understood.

6. Even when some of the above issues have been researched, it was mainly in industrialized nations where the life cycle approach has provided interesting insights. It would be interesting to carry out research in developing nations from the same perspective.

### Methodology

7. Field research would start in Africa and in Latin America at the end of 1983, and in Asia in 1984. The data from the field work will be analysed and processed in 1984-1985, and the project results should be published after a workshop discussion in 1986. A follow-up survey of the same families would be carried out in 1993-1994.