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## Household fluidity and family networks, methodological challenges

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Ton Dietz and Claartje Mulder

Household fluidity and family networks

Methodological challenges

Household:

a micro-unit of care, authority, decision-making, income sharing, property, labour sharing

- Important for demographic census information gathering and interpretation;
- one of the basic tools of social, social-geographical and economic research;
- Important for micro-social and micro-economic analysis;
- Important in current livelihood, poverty, vulnerability and social security research.

## In development geography and international development studies: major methodological stumbling block

- **Corbett, J.** (In: Famine and household coping strategies. In World Development 1988, p 1101):  
“The definition of what constitutes a household, how decisions are reached within a household and by whom...are complex issues, which may vary from community to community and which are often not explicitly examined”
- **Kees van der Geest** (in: “We’re managing!” Climate change and livelihood vulnerability in Northwest Ghana 2004, p. 34-35):  
“It should be noted that the allocation of household labour, the pooling of resources and intra-household differences in consumption patterns vary greatly between households. There are no omni-valid ‘rules of the game’ anymore, if they ever did exist...Attention has to be given to individuals within households and the pooling of resources between households”.

Victoria Hosegood and Ian M. Timaeus: Household composition and dynamics in Kwazulu Natal, South Africa: mirroring social reality in longitudinal data ([www.pop.upenn/africahh/Hosegood\\_Timaeus.pdf](http://www.pop.upenn/africahh/Hosegood_Timaeus.pdf); ca 2002)

“Unlike many demographic phenomena, the household is a social construct with no biological base. Households are defined by their members and enumeration of them should be grounded in those self-definitions.. It requires data collection methods that capture the social reality of fluid household composition, high levels of individual and household mobility, non-resident household members, and multiple household memberships”

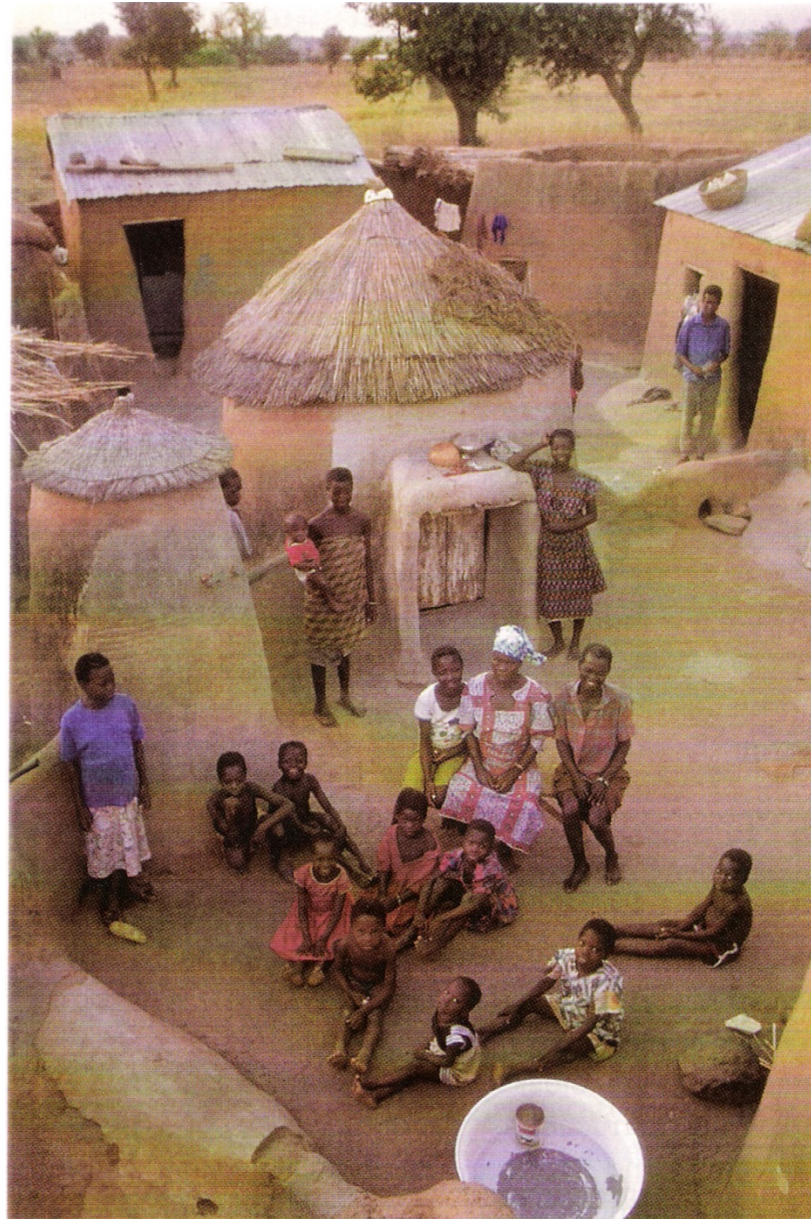
“Fuzziness and fluidity are part of the nature of social relationships”.

## **Household determination: not fast and easy**

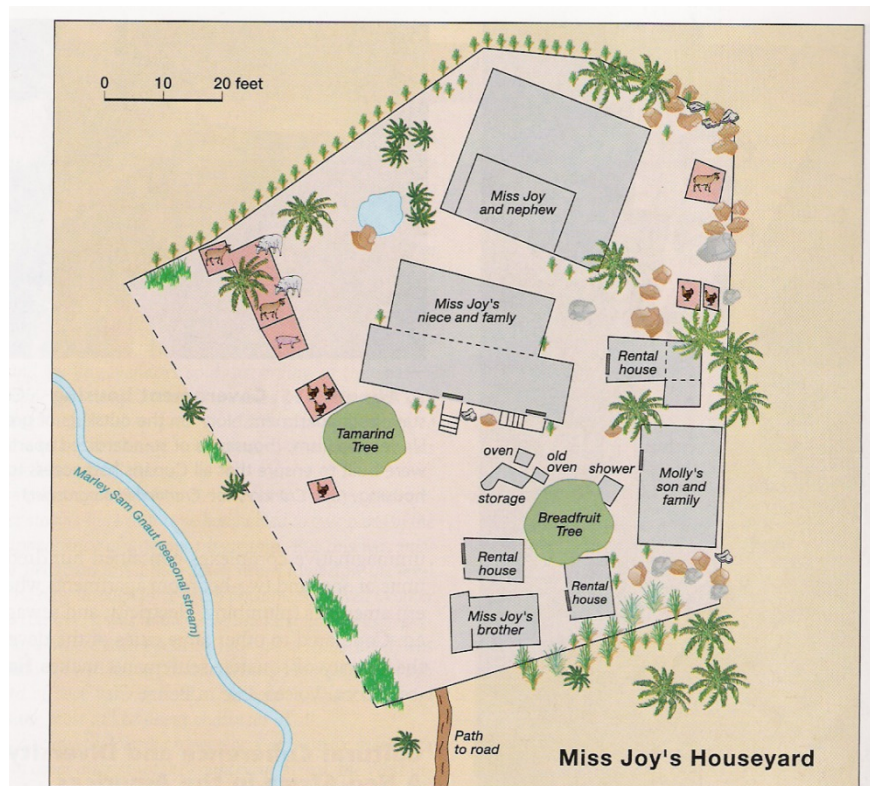
### **KvdG (p. 37) Excerpt from questionnaire: household determination**

- 1) How many people are living in this house/compound?
- 2) Do you farm together?
- 3) Do you all use the same granary(ies) or store room?
- 4) Do you cook together? Is the house/compound divided into several sections ('households')? If yes, how many?
- 5) Are there any absent household members?
- 6) Why are they absent (seasonal labour migration, education, staying with family elsewhere, starting own household)?
- 7) Will they be absent for a period longer than 6 months?
- 8) Are they part of a household in the place where they stay?
- 9) Do some present HH-members stay in the house for less than 6 months a year?
- 10) Why do they leave the house?
- 11) Are they part of a household in the place where they usually go?
- 12) How many people are part of this 'household'?

Africa:  
household  
or  
compound  
  
Or fluid  
individuals?



And not only in Africa:  
Caribbean, example from 1st year textbook geography Rowntree et al,  
p. 183



▲ **Figure 5.13 Miss Joy's Houseyard** Caribbean houseyards are an adaption to conditions of land scarcity, poverty, out-migration and matriarchal family structures. Compound life offers a social network, some subsistence, and a relatively safe and inexpensive way to live. (Source: Lydia Pulsipher. 1993. "Changing Roles in the Life Cycles of Women in Traditional West Indian Houseyards," pp. 50–64, in *Women and Change in the Caribbean*, Janet Momsen, editor)

## Who makes decisions about what?

Example: northern Ghana, Bongo, PhD research Richard Yeboah:

**decision making during a (drought) crisis** (n=283; of which 102 generation of grandparents **GP**, 120 parents **P**, and 61 grandchildren **GC**)

<b>Generation:</b>	Percentages		
	<b>GP</b>	<b>P</b>	<b>GC</b>
We have family meetings	51	48	54
Compound head decides with the men	22	26	34
Compound head decides with elders	7	8	5
Head consults men and older women	4	1	1
Compound head decides alone	4	5	1
Head consults soothsayer	4	4	1
I decide with my wife/husband	4	1	1
Other	4	7	3

Africa: Moving towards nuclear families as standard household type?

Example from Zimbabwe: Marleen Dekker: Risk , resettlement and relations: social security in rural Zimbabwe. PhD 2004

Resettlement villages in early 1980s started with 'modern' household types of (large) monogamous, nuclear families (n=7.4)

In 2000 even larger (n=9.4) but much more heterogeneous

Zimbabwe: continued (Marleen Dekker, p. 96)

Household types in resettlement areas, 2000

Nuclear hh, monogamous:	16%
Nuclear hh, polygamous:	7%
Vertically extended hh:	50%
Horizontally extended hh:	7%
Vert. & horiz. Extended hh:	13%
Person living alone:	1%
Non-related hh members:	5%

Zimbabwe continued. Marleen Dekker p. 94

## Composition of households in resettlement areas, 2000

Male head	76%
Female head	24%
Children	92%
Daughters or sons in law	31%
Grandchildren	59%
Parents	8%
Grandparents	1%
Siblings	9%
Children of siblings	15%
Unrelated persons	4%

## Fostering

Fostering in and forstering out of children 'normal practice': for education purposes, and during (food) crises. In Africa: probably increasing.

AIDS pandemic results in very many orphans (estimates now: 10 million in Africa), taken care of by uncles, aunts, and increasingly by grandparents: reversed care arrangements

South Africa: increasing fluidity of household compositions, (grand)children moving around, and young adults become floating casual labourers

And what about unrelated additional?

Adano Wario Roba and Karen Witsenburg, in “Surviving pastoral decline...Northern Kenya”, PhD 2004, p. 46

“A household is a production and consumption unit of people who live together in one compound or homestead, who eat from the same granary, who have a bond of kinship together *or some other form of social ties (such as herd boy or employee)*, and who share arable land, livestock and other resources” ...

“If a person feeds and sleeps with the family, we consider him or her to be part of the household”.

Another problem: Non-resident household membership,  
South African example from Kwazulu Natal  
(Hosegood and Timaeus, p. 17)

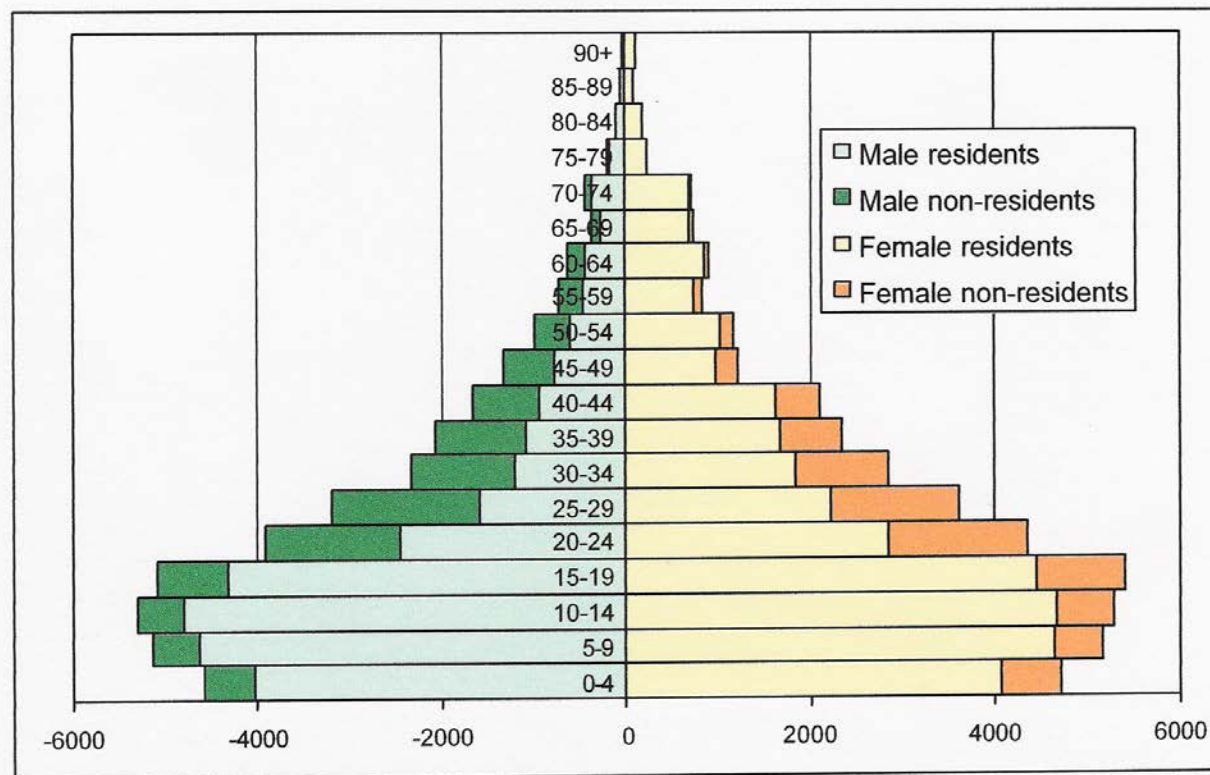


Figure 2. Age and sex profile of the household members according to residency, 1<sup>st</sup> Jan 2001  
(n=80,098 members)

## Multi-spatial livelihoods

In many micro-units in Africa: diversification of sources of income, and diversification of places from where one gets sustenance:

Agricultural-rural: at home and where one finds seasonal and casual farm labour opportunities

Handicraft and services: at home (rural non-agricultural income opportunities, on-farm and off-farm) and in one or various urban centres.

Strongly increased opportunity-driven, crisis-driven and poverty-driven mobility.

Continuous need to find temporary places for shelter, food, security: lot of 'pseudo-fostering', and micro-units of 'non-related' members (clan-based, home village-based, school mates-based, age-mate-based, 'gang'-based)

Increasing transnational elements of mobility and fluidity

## Multi-spatial households

Probably: growing number of households with more than one place they can use for shelter and as a livelihood basis,

Both the rich (second and third own houses), and the poor (shelter arrangements, house-sharing arrangements)

Often: rural and urban

Multi-spatial livelihoods = multiple household membership, again from Kwazulu Natal (idem p. 19)

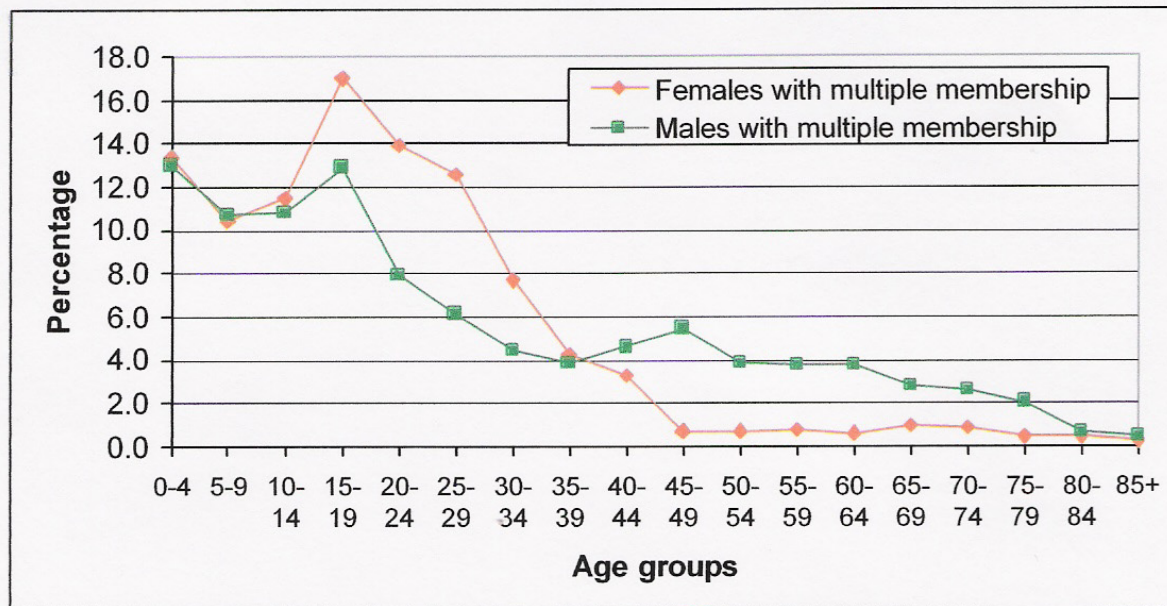


Figure 4. Proportion of individuals that are multiple household members by age group and sex

Multispatial livelihoods and households: evidence from Nakuru, Kenya.  
PhD research Sam Ouma Owuor

In 2001 (n=344 urban-based Nakuru households):

84% of all urban households had access to a rural plot or home that actually was a source of food and/or income; particularly during the cropping season people travel (“straddle”) between the urban home and the rural plot

11% of all urban-based households had at least one wife and often also children actually living in the rural home, and the ‘urban male head’ moves to and fro his urban house (sometimes where his other wife is) and his rural home.

We need Hägerstrand's approaches again!

To understand livelihood behaviour in fluid household situations:

- Take individuals as starting point, not households
- Reconstruct daily mobility (and shelter, and care-share patterns) of these individuals over a long period

But also:

- Reconstruct livelihood pathways of selected individuals, during their lifetime
- Don't forget to take 'dynasty dynamics' into consideration: inter-generational flows of support (both ways!), bridewealth arrangements, inheritance practices, and cost sharing arrangements for educational, business, marriage, disease and funeral purposes.

## Relevance for Europe?

Are non-nuclear family and fluid household trends visible and increasing?

Of course among immigrants, esp. from Africa and Caribbean

And of course among students and other young starters

And among the homeless

But also among

- Transnational corporate workers
- Older, rich people with second houses/homes
- others?

Geographers: reconstruct geographical aspects of networks of care and livelihoods, and do that dynamically, and with an eye for social-geographical differentiation and for (statistical) outliers/specific groups.