Households, gender and rural-urban migration: reflections on linkages and considerations for policy

Sylvia Chant

SUMMARY: *This paper highlights the interrelatedness of gender and household organization in a central aspect of developmental change: rural-urban migration. It demonstrates the significance of intra-household dynamics for understanding the gender selectivity of population movement and shows in turn how this contributes to household diversity among low-income groups in both rural and urban areas. It also shows that although most women have little choice in determining decisions over their own or others' migration (or household arrangements), the "feminization" of household headship which so often results from demographic mobility is not necessarily negative for women. The paper concludes that governments and agencies could do more for gender equality by acknowledging the potentially transformative role of interventions aimed not only at, but inside, households, and by adopting more flexible positions towards household diversity.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Sylvia Chant is Reader in Geography at the London School of Economics where she teaches on development, and gender and development. Her area interests are in Costa Rica, Mexico and the Philippines where she has carried out research on gender, migration, employment, household survival strategies and women headed households. She has recently undertaken a pilot study of men, households and poverty in north-west Costa Rica.

Address: Dr Sylvia Chant, Department of Geography, London School of Economics

GENDER HAS COME to occupy an increasingly prominent place in discourses on development in the late twentieth century and is recognized by growing sections of the international academic and policy community as a varied (and mutable) social construct. In feminist academic writings, this has carried with it greater acknowledgement of "the household" as a geographically and historically dynamic social institution in which gender is embedded and negotiated. Leading from this, researchers and activists working from a GAD (gender and development) perspective have emphasized the need to take on board issues of households, families and kinship groups in planning for gender aware development.[1] By the same token, there seems to have been less readiness, at least on the part of governments and international agencies, to broach gender interventions at the domestic level, to embrace more flexible notions of household form and,

Houghton Street, London WC2A 2AE, UK; tel: (44) 171 955 7606; fax: (44) 171 955 7412

1. Young, K. (1997), "Gender and development" in Visvanathan, N, L.Duggan, L.Nisonoff and N.Wiegersma (editors) (1977), *The Women, Gender and Development Reader*, Zed Books, London, pages 51-4; also Corrêa, S. and R. Reichmann (1994), *Population and Reproductive Rights: Feminist Perspectives from the South*, Zed Books, London, page 3.

2. Baylies, C. (1996), "Diversity in patterns of parenting and household formation" in Bortolaia Silva, E. (editor) (1996), *Good Enough Mothering? Feminist Perspectives on Lone Motherhood*, Routledge, London, pages 76-96.

3. See reference 2, page 76; also Moore, H. (1994a), *Is there a Crisis in the Family?*, UNRISD, World Summit for Social Development, Geneva, Occasional Paper No.3.

4. See reference 2, page 87.

6. Harris, O. (1981) "Households as natural units" in Young, K., C.

in particular, to accept the idea that, in certain instances, female headed households may represent "enabling environments" for women (and their children).

Despite huge diversity in household composition and headship across time and space, male headed nuclear households are widely construed as a "...characteristic of modernity, at the very pinnacle of the development process."[2] Coupled with the apparently equally widespread belief that households consisting of a (married) couple and their children represent the "natural" order of things, this has led to glib pronouncements that growing numbers of women headed units (now around one-fifth of households worldwide) are symptomatic of "family breakdown" or "family crisis". Although women headed households are a heterogenous group, those consisting of lone mothers and children form the majority and have attracted greatest concern among the national and international establishment. Indeed, the association between lone motherhood and social dissolution is so powerful that, in its 1994 *Human Development Report*, the UNDP included figures on single-parent families alongside data on intentional homicides and juvenile prisoners in a table entitled "Weakening Social Fabric".[3]

Yet, "family breakdown" assumes a norm that may not be applicable in a range of social and cultural settings, and its implied negativity may well be inappropriate in light of the realities of life **within** different types of household unit. Beyond this, there seems to be little recognition of the way in which households (and household diversity) are intrinsically imbricated in the structuring and outcomes of development processes. Carolyn Baylies, for example, points to the contradictory situation whereby, although capitalist development may foster the nuclear family, it simultaneously "creates conditions for its dissolution" through labour displacements, structural adjustment programmes and so on.[4] Bearing these observations in mind, the aim of this paper is to argue the importance of considering "the household" in analyses of gender and rural-urban migration, both in respect of how it shapes the gender selectivity of migrant flows and how, in turn, the latter contributes to household diversity across rural and urban areas. This paper also contends that reluctance to endorse multiple forms of household and family life by states and international agencies may be an inappropriate response to a situation in which development often contributes to household differentiation, and where some women may find a route to wider roles and power through "alternative" household forms.

The paper is organized into three main sections. The first introduces conceptual perspectives on households from the feminist literature and pinpoints how consideration of household organization and strategies is critical in the analysis and theorization of gender-selective migration. The second part examines the impacts of gender differentiated demographic mobility on contemporary household forms in rural and urban areas including reference to case study evidence from my own research in Mexico, Costa Rica and the Philippines.[5] The third and final section of the paper identifies a range of issues concerning house-

Wolkowitz and R. McCullagh (editors) (1981), *Of Marriage and the Market*, CSE Books, London, pages 48-67; also Roberts, P. (1991), "Anthropological perspectives on the household", *IDS Bulletin* Vol.22, No.1, pages 60-4.

7. Thorner, A. and J. Ranadive (1992), "Working class women in an Indian metropolis: a household approach" in Saradamoni, K. (editor) (1992), *Finding the Household: Methodological and Empirical Issues* Sage, pages 143-62.

8. Gardner, K. (1995), *Global Migrants, Local Lives: Travel and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh*, Clarendon Press, Oxford; also Lloyd, C. and A. Gage-Brandon (1993), "Women's role in maintaining households: family welfare and sexual inequality in Ghana", *Population Studies* No.47, pages 115-31; Nelson, N. (1992), "The women who have left and those who have stayed behind" in Chant, S. (editor) (1995), *Gender and Migration in Developing Countries*, Belhaven, London, pages 109-38; Peterson, J.T. (1993), "Generalised extended family exchange: a case from the Philippines", *Journal of Marriage and the Family* No.55, pages 570-84; and Schmink, M. (1986), "Women and urban industrial development in Brazil" in Nash, J. and H.Safa (editors), *Women and Change in Latin America*, Bergin and Garvey, Massachusetts, pages 134-64.

9. Masini, E.B. (1991), "The household, gender and age project" in Masini, E.B. and S. Stratigos (editors) (1991), *Women, Households and Change*, United Nations University Press, Tokyo, pages 3-17.

10. Chant, S. (1991), "Gender, households and seasonal migration in Guanacaste, Costa Rica", *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* No.50, pages 51-85; also Fonseca, C. (1991), "Spouses, siblings and sex-linked bonding: a look at kinship organisation in

holds that might be useful in policy and planning for gender aware development.

II. CONCEPTUALIZING HOUSEHOLDS

FEMINIST CONCERNS WITH women's disadvantage in developing societies have long emphasized the importance of the household as an institutional arena in which gender roles, relations and identities are shaped and influenced in fundamental ways. Among the most important theoretical contributions from this literature are first, that households are not "natural" units with fixed forms and meanings across space and through time but are socially constructed and inherently variable. On the subject of meanings, such research has raised the question as to whether the search for any universal definition of household is feasible or desirable.[6] For example, although most national and international data sources classify households as spatial units characterized by shared residence and daily reproduction (primarily cooking and eating), in countries such as India, households might just as readily be understood as kinship units or economic units as housing units.[7] Moreover, in many parts of the developing world, including Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, the Philippines and Brazil, studies have shown that inputs to household reproduction may be greater from people who live beyond the physical boundaries of the household than those who reside within it.[8] Challenging the idea that households are unidimensional, bounded entities, an international group of scholars involved in the United Nations University "Households, Gender and Age" project in the 1980s offered the following summary:

> "The household, in all its different cultural connotations, is the primary social living unit. In it are encapsulated a cluster of activities of people who live together most of the time and provide mutual physical, socio-psychological, and developmental support and functions within the broader organization and environment of the community."[9]

On the question of household form, feminist researchers have also played a major part in exposing the fact that household headship and composition may be extremely diverse and dynamic. Household configuration may change several times within a single year, as in low-income urban communities in Costa Rica and Brazil,[10] as well as over longer time periods. Many of these transformations owe in one form or another to migration activity. Beyond this, whilst most households are based on ties of blood or marriage, this does not preclude the existence of households comprising friends, co-workers, apprentices and so on, whose frequency seems to have increased during the rural-urban transition.[11]

Despite variations in membership, however, a second major contribution from feminist researchers has been to identify the ways in which households more often than not act as a practi-

a Brazilian slum" in Jelin, E. (editor) (1991), *Family, Household and Gender Relations in Latin America*, Kegan Paul International, London/UNESCO,Paris, pages 133-60.

11. Brydon, L. and S. Chant (1989), *Women in the Third World,* Edward Elgar, Aldershot, Chapter 6.

12. Barrett, M. (1986), *Women's Oppression Today*, 5th impression, Verso, London; also Kuznesof, E. (1989), "The history of the family in Latin America: a critique of recent work", *Latin American Research Review* Vol.24, No.2, pages, 168-86.

13. Roberts, B. (1994), "Informal economy and family strategies", *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* Vol.18, No.1, pages 6-23.

14. Buvinic, M. (1990), "The vulnerability of women-headed households: policy questions and options for Latin America and the Caribbean", paper prepared for ECLAC, International Center for Research on Women, Washington DC; also Folbre, N. (1991), "Women on their own: global Patterns of female headship" in Gallin, R. and A. Ferguson (editors) (1990), *The Women and International Development Annual* Vol.2, Westview Press, Boulder, pages 69-126; see reference 6, Harris (1981); Illo, J. (1992), "Who heads the household? Women in households in the Philippines" in Saradamoni, K. (editor) (1992), *Finding the Household: Methodological and Empirical Issues*, Sage, New Delhi, pages 185-201; and Stolcke, V. (1992), "The slavery period and its influence on household structure and the family in Jamaica" in Berquó, E. and P. Xenos (editors) (1992), *Family Systems and Cultural Change*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, pages 125-42.

15. Kabeer, N. and S. Joekes (1991), "Editorial", *IDS Bulletin* Vol.22, No.1, pages 1-4; also see reference 6, Harris (1981);

cal/material setting, not to mention conduit, for wider ideologies and institutions of family and kinship within which gender occupies a central role.[12] Accepting the point that "...household refers to the basic unit of co-residence and family to a set of normative relationships"[13], considerable socialization occurs within domestic units where meanings and messages about gender are transmitted inter-generationally through actual and idealized familial roles of parenting, conjugality and household headship. Although "household headship" is a highly imprecise and problematic concept, imbued with assumptions about one person in a residential unit being "responsible" for other members and/or being "in charge" of household organization and so on, fathers or senior adult males are generally assigned this role both by household members themselves as well as by external parties such as the state and international agencies. The remarkably widespread association between masculinity and household headship in developing societies has been attributed to varying combinations of the following: the common primacy of men in kinship networks; the export of Eurocentric ideals of family organization during the colonization process; and men's usual positions as major breadwinners and/or principal arbiters of decision-making within households. Indeed, although censuses vary widely in terms of the criteria by which they define headship, ranging from self or proxy reporting to instrumental factors such as financial provision or authority, most censuses only record women as heads of household where they lack a male partner or other "significant" man in the household such as a father or brother.[14] While male household heads may be constrained by expectations that they should fulfil the functions of primary (or exclusive) financial provision, especially in situations of scarce employment and income opportunities, their position at the apex of the household unit tends to confer power to negotiate varying degrees of obligation to their households. Men commonly also have opportunities to gratify their personal interests and/or legitimize their masculinity in a wide range of extra-domestic spheres. Adult women, by contrast, are often subject to the dictate of male household heads, are more confined to the domestic arena, and have less power and personal freedom than their male counterparts. These patterns extend to younger generations, with daughters generally being subject to tighter parental control and less eligibility for economic and social privileges. For these reasons "the (male-headed) household" has often been described as a "primary site of women's oppression".[15]

Leading on from this, a third critical contribution from feminist researchers has been the call to reject the idealized notion that households are unified entities in which members collaborate on an equitable basis for common interests. Instead, deconstructing the household and investigating its internal workings reveals that households may be more accurately depicted as an "uneasy aggregate of individual survival strategies",[16] or a "locus of competing interests, rights, obligations and resources".[17] As suggested above, gender, age and relationship to the household head are often critical factors affect-

Townsend, J. and J. Momsen (1987), "Towards a geography of gender in the Third World" in Momsen, J. and J.Townsend (editors) (1987), *Geography of Gender in the Third World*, Hutchinson, London, pages 27-81.

16. Bruce, J. and D. Dwyer (1988), "Introduction" in Dwyer, D. and J.Bruce (editors) (1988), *A Home Divided: Women and Income in the Third World*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, pages 1-19; also Schmink, M. (1984), "Household economic strategies", *Latin American Research Review* Vol.19, No.3, pages 87-101.

17. Moore, H. (1994b) *A Passion for Difference* Polity, Cambridge, page 87.

18. Chant, S. (1997a), *Women-headed Households: Diversity and Dynamics in the Developing World*, Macmillan, Basingstoke.

19. Radcliffe, S. (1986), "Gender relations, peasant livelihood strategies and migration: a case study from Cuzco, Peru", *Bulletin of Latin American Research* Vol.5, No.2, pages 29-47; also Radcliffe, S. (1991), "The role of gender in peasant migration: conceptual issues from the Peruvian Andes", *Review of Radical Political Economy* Vol.23, Nos.3-4, pages 148-73.

20. See reference 19.

ing powers of negotiation and entitlement and, more often than not, women (and children) are more vulnerable, harder worked and less able to determine their own lives. For example, the time and labour dedicated by women to household survival strategies may be far greater than men's, leaving them less time for rest, recreation and outside pursuits. Women's and children's frequent dependence on the income of "male breadwinners" may place them in a position where they have only limited access to finance in their own right and are subject to "secondary poverty". Over and above material vulnerability, women and children may also suffer greater degrees of intra-household physical violence than men.[18]

Acknowledging the household as the most immediate institution affecting men's and women's power, behaviour and identities, it is not surprising that research undertaken from a gender and/or feminist perspective has begun to consider the analysis of this institution, in all its diverse guises, as fundamental to gaining a more nuanced theoretical grasp of gender-selective migration, most notably under the auspices of an "household strategies approach" to population mobility.

a. The "Household Strategies" Approach to Gendered Migration

The "household strategies" approach to gendered migration, first articulated in the work of Sarah Radcliffe[19], was born from a dissatisfaction with the way in which social relations within households were glossed over in conventional neo-classical and Marxist theories of rural-urban mobility, and drew instead on insights arising from behavioural analyses that considered the ideological and cultural constructs which influenced men's and women's responses to changing socio-economic and environmental conditions. One of the main concerns of the "household strategies" approach is the problematization of divisions of labour and power within households, and how these affect the propensity and freedom of different individuals, according to gender, age and their relationships to other household members, to engage in cityward migration.

Such considerations would appear to be vital when women and men are clearly not disembodied constituencies whose movement across space dovetails neatly or uniformly with simple differentials in labour opportunities and/or wage rates between countryside and town. Although it is possible to discern a broad correspondence between inter-regional variations in gender-selective migration and gender differentiated access to economic resources (land, tools, employment, income and so on), the appeal of blanket association should not blind us to three crucial and interrelated issues: first, that gender differentiated access to resources is socially determined; second, that household circumstances and organization have a critical role to play in the process of negotiating resources and migration decisions; and third, that within the household domain, gender intersects with other axes of difference and identity such as age and marital status to create conditions which directly and indirectly influence movement.[20]

b. Exploring Household Influences on Gender-selective Migration

In terms of regional patterns, rural-urban migration in the post-war period has been broadly female dominated in Latin America, the Caribbean and South-East Asia, whereas in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia men have been the majority of migrants. Although some narrowing in the gaps between male and female migration in these regions has been noted over time (partly due to the diminishing pool of potential migrants in rural areas), data from the 1990s continue to show quite marked tendencies towards masculine urban sex ratios in the regions with male selective mobility, and feminized urban sex ratios in Latin America, the Caribbean and South-East Asia (see Table 1). One of the main reasons given for inter-regional differences is the relative employment and income opportunities of men and women in rural and urban economies. For example, in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, women are a large presence in the rural labour force, sometimes constituting up to 50 per cent of agricultural workers. The fact that African women are often entitled to land in their own right means that incentives for migration may not be particularly pronounced, especially given that they usually have fewer opportunities than men in urban labour markets. In Latin America, by contrast, women's participation in farming tends to be low, at less than 20 per cent in most of the continent. Women's comparative advantage in moving to towns and cities in Latin America is overlaid by the fact that urban areas tend to offer women a greater range of jobs, in domestic service, factories and so on.[21] Making more meaningful sense of macro-level patterns, however, requires taking into account detailed micro-level research which examines more closely who moves, where they migrate to, for how long and, most critically, the basis of their migration decisions. Here, a "household strategies" approach may be particularly illuminating, as exemplified by Radcliffe's research on Kallayaran in the southern Peruvian Andes.

The village of Kallayaran is a peasant community dependent on the cultivation of highland crops such as potatoes, native tubers and barley. Whereas the former two crops are mainly grown for subsistence, barley, along with green fodder and vegetables, is grown for sale. The need for additional income to sustain household livelihood means there is considerable temporary and longer-term migration to external labour markets, with around one-tenth of the population being absent from the village on a permanent or semi-permanent basis (defined here as two years or more). Yet, whilst most people undertake migration at some point in their lives, adult married women's migration from peasant households tends to be low compared with husbands, sons and single daughters. This is attributed to the fact that the primary function assigned to women through marriage is to manage the daily reproduction of the household unit. Even if women have some involvement in agriculture, this is usually in a secondary capacity to men and tends to be confined to tasks closely associated with household reproduction.

21. See Chant, S. (1996), *Gender, Urban Development and Housing*, UNDP, Publication Series for Habitat II, New York, page 2 for discussion and references.

Table 1: Urban Sex Ratios, Selected Developing Countries, 1990s*

	Men per 100 women	Percentage of all men in urban areas	Percentage of all women in urban areas
AFRICA			
Burkina Faso (1991)	99	24.2	20.8
Chad (1993)	104	23.2	20.4
Côte d'Ivoire (1993)	104	45.6	45.6
Egypt (1991)	104	43.2	43.3
Equatorial Guinea (1991)	102	38.4	35.7
Morocco (1993)	101	51.7	49.2
Namibia (1991)	103	28.3	26.0
Uganda (1991)	94	11.2	11.5
Zambia (1990)	100	40.2	38.5
LATIN AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN			
Bolivia (1992)	94	56.6	58.5
Brazil (1991)	94	74.3	76.9
Chile (1995)	95	83.1	85.8
Costa Rica (1994)	96	42.9	45.2
Cuba (1993)	97	73.0	75.8
Dominican Republic (1995)	98	59.9	63.5
Ecuador (1993)	97	57.9	60.4
El Salvador (1992)	90	49.1	51.7
Paraguay (1992)	93	48.3	52.4
Panama (1995)	95	52.9	56.9
Peru (1993)	97	69.4	70.8
Puerto Rico (1990)	91	70.2	72.1
Uruguay (1995)	91	88.1	92.0
Venezuela (1990)	99	83.0	85.0
ASIA **West**			
Iran (1991)	107	57.1	56.9
Iraq (1990)	101	70.0	69.9
Syria (1994)	109	52.4	50.3
South			
India (1991)	112	26.2	25.2
East/South-East			
Cambodia (1990)	83	12.4	12.8
Indonesia (1990)	100	31.0	30.9
Korea (1993)	91	57.6	60.2
Malaysia (1991)	100	50.4	50.9
Philippines (1990)	98	47.8	49.5
Thailand (1990)	94	18.3	19.1

SOURCE: United Nations (1997) *Demographic Yearbook 1995* New York, UN, Table 6.

* Data given for latest available year.

22. See reference 19, Radcliffe (1986).

23. See reference 19, Radcliffe (1986), pages 31-2.

24. Tacoli, C. (1996a), "Migrating 'for the sake of the family': gender, life course and intra-household relations among Filipino migrants in Rome", *Philippine Sociological Review* Vol.44, Nos.1-4, pages 13-32; also Trager, L. (1988), *The City Connection: Migration and Family Interdependence,* Ann Arbor, Michigan

25. Chant, S. and C. McIlwaine (1995), *Women of a Lesser Cost: Female Labour, Foreign Exchange and Philippine Development*, Pluto, London; also Mather, C. (1988), "Subordination of women and lack of industrial strife in West Java" in Taylor, J. and A. Turton (editors) (1988), *Sociology of 'Developing Societies': Southeast Asia*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, pages 147-57; also Salaff, J. (1990), "Women, family and the state: Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore -- newly industrialised countries in Asia" in Stichter, S. and J. Parpart (editors) (1990), *Women, Employment and the Family in the International Division of Labour*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, pages 98-136; Wolf, Diane (1990), "Daughters, decisions and domination: an empirical and conceptual critique of household strategies", *Development and Change* Vol.21, pages 43-74.

26. Singhanetra Renard A. and N. Prabhudhanitisarn (1992), "Changing socio-economic roles of Thai women and their migration" in Chant, S. (editor) (1992), *Gender and Migration in Developing Countries*, Belhaven, London, pages 154-73.

Whilst young single women could conceivably provide assistance to their mothers in farming or domestic work, because the latter is linked with consumption rather than production and tends to be undervalued by males, young women may be regarded as "surplus" household labour.[22] Depending on resources and the balance of consumers and producers in individual households, therefore, daughters may be sent to towns to work as a means of reducing household outgoings. Furthermore, even in instances where women ostensibly make their own decisions to migrate, it is hard to abstract household conditions from the process especially when, as unskilled female peasant labour, they have rather limited employment options in towns (primarily in low-paid domestic service). Given that migration may not vastly increase young women's personal socio-economic mobility, Radcliffe concludes:

"There are (perhaps surprisingly) few cases in which women explain their migration in terms which are not reducible to household livelihood strategies but which are more clearly understood in terms of women's efforts to act against (and within) the constraints set by gender roles and the position of women in regional labour markets."[23]

Case studies from other countries of the South corroborate the role of households not only in creating the material conditions for gender-selective migration but also in acting as filters for familial gender ideologies which impact upon motives for migration and the relative autonomy of migrant decision-making. Although in many parts of South-East Asia, for example, men and women alike may ostensibly migrate "for the sake of the family"[24], young women are a particularly mobile group for whom the resonance of this statement seems to apply especially. Although high demand for young female labour in South-East Asian cities, in export manufacturing, domestic work and personal services, provides a strong economic rationale for women's migration, many women may not move to towns of their own volition but at the behest of, or through pressure from, their rural families. In the Philippines, Taiwan, Indonesia and Thailand, for example, there is often considerable onus on single teenage and adult daughters to "repay" their parents for bringing them up. Although similar notions of duty and filial piety may be instilled in sons, parents usually prefer their daughters to become labour migrants because they are more likely to send remittances and to devote higher levels of their earnings to the needs of households back home.[25] These patterns may reflect stronger parental control over daughters, a greater emphasis placed on duty in young women's than in young men's gender socialization and greater personal privileges among males. In northern Thailand, for example, where poor rural households tend to dedicate their scant resources to educating sons rather than daughters, and where women's opportunities for low-skilled agricultural work have declined in the wake of rural modernization, women often have to move to cities in order not only to support their parents but also their brothers' education.[26]

27. Kabeer, N. (1991), "Gender dimensions of rural poverty: analysis from Bangladesh", *Journal of Peasant Studies* Vol.18, No.2, pages 241-62.

28.Oberai, A.S. and H.K.M. Singh (1983), *Causes and Consequences of Internal Migration: A Study of the Indian Punjab*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi; also Thadani, V. and M. Todaro (1984), "Female migration: a conceptual framework" in Fawcett, J., S.Khoo and P.C. Smith (editors), *Women in the Cities of Asia: Migration and Urban Adaptation*,Westview, Boulder, pages 36-59.

29. See reference 18, Chapter 6.

30. Tacoli, Cecilia (1996), "Gender, life course and international migration: the case of Filipino labour migrants in Rome", unpublished PhD dissertation, Department of Geography, London School of Economics.

31. McIlwaine, Cathy (1997), "Vulnerable or poor? A study of ethnic and gender disadvantage among Afro-Caribbeans in Limón, Costa Rica", *European Journal of Development Research* Vol.9, No.2, pages 35-61; also Trotz, Alissa (1996), "Gender, ethnicity and familial ideology in Georgetown, Guyana: household structure and female labour force participation reconsidered", *European Journal of Development Research* Vol.8, No.1.

32. See reference 8, Gardner (1995); also Kennedy, E. (1994), "Development policy, gender of head of household and nutrition" in Kennedy, E. and M. González de la Rocha (1994), *Poverty and Well-Being in the Household: Case Studies of the Developing World*, Center for Iberian and Latin American Studies, University of California San Diego, pages 25-42; and Kumari, R. (1989), *Women-headed Households in Rural India*, Radiant Publishers, New Delhi.

Remembering that gender and households are socially constructed in different ways in different places, it is important to recognize that even if in most countries young women are likely to be subject to greater parental control than their male counterparts, different aspects of gender may be prioritized and, in some instances, act to limit women's mobility, as noted in South Asia. Although in countries such as Bangladesh, the expansion in female factory jobs in urban areas is now encouraging city-bound streams of lone female migrants,[27] here, and elsewhere in the region, women's movement has been mainly confined to migration for marriage or to join husbands already established in towns or cities.[28] The constraints on young single women's migration for employment have traditionally hinged upon concerns for their moral and sexual propriety. Given that independent female mobility can imply lack of surveillance or control by their households, this may not only damage the status and marriageability of daughters themselves but also impugn the reputations of their siblings and wider family.

Having highlighted ways in which households may directly influence the incidence of migration among women, it is also important to emphasize that, in some instances, women's migration may also be initiated by a bid to extricate themselves from particular household circumstances or to sever ties with specific relatives. For example, case study evidence from Mexico and Costa Rica suggests that some women undertake migration in order to escape marriages in which relations with spouses are violent or exploitative, or to wrest themselves from the close scrutiny and contol of natal kin.[29] Similarly, international female migrants from the Philippines may also migrate in order to effect a socially legitimate *de facto* separation from husbands in a situation where divorce is illegal and broken marriages are cause for severe family and community opprobrium.[30]

c. Household Structure and Gender-selective Migration

If the above examples present a glimpse of the various ways in which household circumstances and intra-household dynamics may influence gender-selective migration, it is also important to note that the latter plays an important part in contributing to diversity in household form in rural areas, with different types of household exerting important influences on migration in their own right. Accepting the impossibility of generalizing the effects of household structure on gender across age, "race", cultural divisions and so on [31], at one end of the spectrum it is worth noting that some types of female headed household, particularly those which owe their origins to male migration (*de facto* female headed households), may be in a very different situation to those whose routes into female household headship have occurred through widowhood, conjugal separation or non-marriage (*de jure* female headed households). Many female headed households in rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, for example, are *de facto* units whose male "heads" have migrated to urban areas or overseas.[32] Although male out-migration can enhance the economic situation of households

33. Lewis, D. (1993), "Going it alone: female-headed households, rights and resources in rural Bangladesh", *Development and Change* Vol.5, No.2, pages 23-42; also Parnwell, M. (1993), *Population Movements and the Third World*, Routledge, London, page 107; and Rahat, N. (1986), "Meharabad, a Punjabi village: male out-migration and women's changing roles" in Selier, F. and M. Karim (editors) (1986), *Migration in Pakistan: Themes and Facts*, Vanguard, Lahore, pages 139-60.

34. See for example, Bradshaw, S. (1996), "Female-headed households in Honduras: a study of their formation and survival in low-income communities", unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Geography, London School of Economics; also Drèze, J. (1990), *Widows in Rural India*, Suntory-Toyota International Centre for Economics and Related Disciplines, London School of Economics, Development Economics Research Programme No.26;

35. See Beall, J. (1996a), *Urban Governance: Why Gender Matters*, UNDP, Gender in Development Monograph Series No.1, New York; also Brydon, L. and S. Chant (1989), *Women in the Third World: Gender Issues in Rural and Urban Areas*, Edward Elgar, Aldershot, Chapter 6; and see reference 3, Moore (1994).

36. See reference 25, Chant and McIlwaine (1995), Chapter 3.

left behind, it can also lead to greater impoverishment, especially where remittances are small and variable. The fragile resource base of some *de facto* female headed units may be compounded by low reserves of labour or the inability to mobilize labour on account of social taboos regarding women's access to machinery and participation in certain agricultural tasks. In these situations, women may well consider their own migration as a means of escaping poverty yet, because their husbands intend eventually to return home, they are bound to stay put. Moreover, even when husbands are away for extended periods, women may not be able to take major decisions over household production or livelihood in the home village itself without first obaining permission from their absent partners or his natal kin, as noted for both Bangladesh and Pakistan.[33] The strength of normative gender roles within households, even in the absence of men, is arguably one reason why censuses are wont to record *de facto* female headed units as male headed unless men have been continuously away from the household for a substantial length of time, such as a year.

At the other end of the spectrum, *de jure* female headed households which are the result of widowhood, divorce or conjugal breakdown may be in a stronger position to make their own choices over migration insofar as they do not have to make reference to a male partner. At the same time, the dominance of male household headship in ideological and, in practical terms, means that many women are unlikely to be in a position where they have sufficient resources in their own right to sustain livelihood in the countryside, whether through absence of title to land or through shortages of labour and finance. As such, these women may have little choice but to migrate to urban areas if they seek to maintain economic and residential independence.[34]

III. HOUSEHOLD DIVERSITY IN RURAL AND URBAN AREAS

IN LIGHT OF the gender differentiated nature of rural-urban migration, it is hardly surprising that an increasing body of empirical research shows that households in both rural and urban areas in developing regions are by no means dominated by the male headed nuclear family stereotype.[35] We have already seen, for example, that *de facto* female headed households may form in rural areas as a result of male migration, and that *de jure* female headed households may move to cities because of their inability to survive in rural areas. Beyond this, the composition of households in towns and cities may be highly variable. For example, up to half the households in detailed surveys in low-income communities in urban and urbanizing localities of the Philippine Visayas (Cebu City, Lapu-Lapu City and Boracay Island) consist of complex extended units comprising kin, domestic helpers or apprentices, people living alone, people residing with friends, and households headed by grandparents.[36] In Costa Rica, too, the composition of households in low-income settlements in towns in the north-west of the coun-

37. See reference 10, Chant (1991).

38. See reference 2, page 92; also Brydon, L. (1987), "Who moves? Women and migration in West Africa in the 1980s" in Eades, J. (editor) (1987), *Migrants, Workers and the Social Order*, Tavistock, Association of Social Anthropologists, Monograph No.26, London pages 165-80; see reference 25, Chant and McIlwaine (1995), Chapter 3; Peil, M. and P. Sada (1984), *African Urban Society*, John Wiley, Chichester; Stivens, M. (1987), "Family and state in Malaysian industrialisation: the case of Rembau, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia" in H.Afshar (editor) (1987), *Women, State and Ideology: Studies from Africa and Asia*, Macmillan, Basingstoke, pages 89-110; and Varley, A. (1993), "Gender and housing: the provision of accommodation for young adults in three Mexican cities", *Habitat International* Vol.17, No.4, pages 169-82.

39. See reference 18, Chapter 4; also see reference 3, Moore (1994a).

try (Liberia, Cañas and Santa Cruz) is equally heterogeneous. Given the prevalence of seasonal out-migration in this area, household size, composition and headship can also change significantly at different times of the year.[37] The widespread existence of short and long-term extended households in urban areas of developing countries owes in part to migration, with urban households often taking in rural relatives who move to cities to study or work. However, other factors with an important bearing on household membership include housing shortages, economic considerations and strategies of organizing reproductive labour, not to mention traditional social and kinship obligations.[38]

In a similar vein, having suggested that gender-selective migration may be responsible for increased frequencies of female headed households, it is important to recognize that female household heads are a heterogenous group who may enter this state not only as a result of their own or their spouses' migration but also through widowhood, divorce, separation and/or out-of-wedlock childbirth. In turn, the importance of these routes into female headship (and the relative incidence of female headed households in different contexts) is mediated by the interplay of a wide range of demographic, economic, legal-institutional and socio-cultural factors. These include age differences between men and women at marriage, gender differentiated life expectancy, land and property ownership, family and divorce legislation, social welfare programmes, kinship systems, and codes of morality and sexuality.[39] Thus, although households headed by women tend to be more an urban than a rural phenomenon in South-East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, reflecting the female bias in migration flows and feminized urban sex ratios in these areas (see Table 1), the relative proportions of female headed households **between** countries may vary widely. For example, in the Philippines, although female-selective migration and high levels of female labour force participation in towns and cities has led to a greater proportions of female headed households in urban than in rural areas, the national incidence of women headed households is low compared with other parts of South-East Asia (see Table 2). Although this could, in part, reflect lower levels of urbanization in the Philippines than in some other countries in the region (Hong Kong and Singapore, for example), case study evidence from low-income urban communities in the Philippine Visayas suggests that constraints upon the formation of female headed households are preponderantly social. Aside from the illegality of divorce, key constraints include the importance of family coherence and interpersonal harmony in Philippine society, the child-centredness of Philippine culture and an emphasis on the moral propriety of women. These factors tend to dissuade women from splitting-up with their spouses and establishing their own households. Moreover, where women have children out-of-wedlock, the stigmatization attached to this state (together with the gossip women attract by living without a male partner) means that this group often opts not to live alone but to reside instead as "sub-families" within larger, extended households. For example, whilst a

40. See Chant, S. (1997c), "Marginalised (m)others: lone parents and female household headship in the Philippines", *European Journal of Development Research* Vol.9, No.2, pages 1-34.

41. See Beall, J. (1996b), "Social security and social networks among the urban poor in Pakistan", *Habitat International* Vol.19, No.4, pages 427-45; also see reference 3, Moore (1994a).

42. Cleves Mosse, J. (1993), *Half the World: Half a Chance*, Oxfam, Oxford.

little over two-thirds of lone mothers in my case study communities in Mexico and Costa Rica head their own households, this applies to less than one-half of their counterparts in the Philippine Visayas. Living with kin helps to disguise their situation, to minimize gossip and to lessen embarrassment for their families.[40] Although some women who end up as "embedded" female heads are supported by their relatives, others make a major, if not the principal, economic contribution to the household. This also seems to be increasingly the case in male headed households in different parts of the developing world and has given rise to the importance of recognizing "women maintained" households.[41] Despite tenacious adherence to '..the myth that the male breadwinner and the female housewife is the normal and best arrangement for human beings",[42] detailed case study research has frequently drawn attention to departures from normative divisions of labour **within** male headed households and how differentiated patterns might (or indeed ought to) affect the structuring of social welfare interventions. In short, although male household headship and the concomitant association of men with breadwinning and decision-making seems to remain something of a popular and publically endorsed ideal, the realities of inter- and intra-household heterogeneity tell a different story. They also beg the question of how "non-standard" households fare in situations in which their own brand of domestic life does not fit prevailing stereotypes.

In this respect, detailed case study research on households has again been extremely illuminating. Aside from revealing the range of circumstances characterizing women headed households, for example, a number of studies suggest that even if most women do not choose female headship, they may find (or

Table 2: Female Headed Households as Percentage of all Households, South-East Asia (1980 and 1990*)

Country	Women-headed households as a proportion of total households (%)	
	1980	1990
Philippines	--**	11.3
Indonesia	14.2	13.0
South Korea	14.7	15.7
Thailand	16.5	--
Myanmar	16.0	--
Malaysia	17.7	--
Singapore	18.2	--
Hong Kong	--	25.7
Viet Nam	--	31.9

SOURCE: United Nations Development Programme (1995) *Human Development Report 1995* New York, UNDP, Table A2:5.

* Figures are given for 1980 and 1990 due to missing data for most countries for one or other of these years.

**-- = no data

43. See reference 34, Bradshaw (1996); also Chant, S. (1997b), "Women-headed households: poorest of the poor? Perspectives from Mexico, Costa Rica and the Philippines", *IDS Bulletin* Vol.28, No.3, pages 26-48; see reference 25, Chant and McIlwaine (1995); Pulsipher, L. (1993), "'He won't let she stretch she foot': gender relations in traditional West Indian houseyards" in Katz, C. and J.Monk (editors) (1993), *Full Circles: Geographies of Women over the Life Course*, Routledge, London, pages 107-21; and Safa, H. (1995), *The Myth of the Male Breadwinner: Women and Industrialisation in the Caribbean*, Westview Press, Boulder.

44. See reference 14, Folbre (1991), page 108.

45. Bradshaw, S. (1995), "Female-headed households in Honduras: perspectives on rural-urban differences", *Third World Planning Review* Vol.17, No.2, pages 117-31; also Chant, S. (1985), "Single-parent families: choice or constraint? The formation of female-headed households in Mexican shanty towns", *Development and Change* Vol.16, No.4, pages 635-56; and see reference 25, Chant and McIlwaine (1995), Chapter 7.

46. Jackson, C. (1996), "Rescuing gender from the poverty trap", *World Development* Vol.24, No.3, pages 489-504.

47. See reference 14, Buvinic (1990), page 10; also Moore (1996) "Mothering and social responsibilities in a cross-cultural perspective" in Bortolaia-Silva, E. (editor) *Good Enough Mothering? Feminist Perspectives on Lone Motherhood* Routledge, London, pages 61-2; and see reference 32, Kennedy (1994).

48. See reference 18, Chapter 8.

49. See reference 18; also see reference 25, Chant and McIlwaine (1995), Chapter 7.

50. See reference 2, Baylies (1996) page 77.

feel) that they are better off without a male partner.[43] Although men commonly earn more than women, for instance, as suggested previously, there is no guarantee that men will necessarily release the bulk of their wages for household expenditure. In addition, in cases where men claim the earnings of wives, women might find that they have more disposable income once men have gone.[44] The absence of a male may also give women freedom to enter a wider range of employment, not only through allowing them to make their own decisions but also through reducing their domestic labour loads. Beyond this, female headed households may provide a space in which women suffer less physical and emotional abuse.[45] On balance, therefore, while women may sometimes be better off in material terms "...in conventional marriages and under the wing of a male household head", the price to be paid may be less "...personal autonomy, independence and personhood."[46] Furthermore, although there is by no means incontrovertible evidence on the intergenerational effects of long-term female household headship, there are indications from a number of contexts that children may benefit from better nutrition when income is under the exclusive control of women,[47] and also that daughters may be in a position to gain more education than in households where fathers are present.[48] Nonetheless, although there may be various personal gains for women and their offspring from female household headship, wider gender inequalities together with societal discrimination against women headed households can inhibit these gains, extending beyond the domestic domain.[49]

IV. HOUSEHOLD DYNAMICS AND HOUSEHOLD DIVERSITY: CONSIDERATIONS FOR POLICY

THE AIM OF this paper is to draw attention to the importance of taking into account "the household" in understanding gender-selective migration and, in turn, to show how gender-selective migration is important in contributing to household diversity and, especially, the formation of female headed units. In light of the ways in which the above are imbricated in contemporary patterns of development, it seems strange that the "stronghold on the collective imagination" of links between the nuclear household and modernization has been so pervasive.[50] Beyond this, the seemingly widespread notion that male household headship is symptomatic of societal "health" is potentially misplaced when, at one extreme, male absence as a result of labour migration may bolster resources for households left behind and, at the other, intra-household research indicates that residence in male headed units may not always be a desirable option for women. There are clearly numerous issues arising out of the discussion but the most important general one is that households (and household research) need to be given greater attention in planning and policy-making in developing countries. Households are not only "...the intermediary sphere through which top down economic and environmental programmes are processed and acted upon"[51] but also, without

51. Pugh, C. (1996), "The changing roles of self-help housing and urban policies, 1950-1996", *Third World Planning Review* Vol.19, No.1, pages 91-109.

52. Kabeer, N. (1994b), "Gender-aware policy and planning: a social relations perspective" in MacDonald, M. (editor) (1994), *Gender Planning in Development Agencies: Meeting the Challenge*, Oxfam, Oxford, pages 80-97.

53. Rathgeber, E. (1995), "Gender and development in action" in Marchand, M. and J. Parpart (editors), *Feminism/Postmodernism/Development*, Routledge, London, pages 204-20.

54. Baden, S. and A.M. Goetz (1997), "Who needs [sex] when you can have [gender]", *Feminist Review* No.53, pages 3-25; also see reference 1, Corrêa and Reichmann (1994), page 3.

due attention to how household circumstances affect men and women, there is little likelihood that gender inequalities can be tackled in an effective manner.

Perhaps one of the most fundamental starting points in this process is to generate greater acceptance of the concept that households are social institutions rather than "naturalized" entities whose forms and functions obey some kind of an historical biologically driven logic. This could have major implications for gender since, as Naila Kabeer notes:

"Because naturalistic ideologies have served to conceal the social basis of gender relations more than most forms of inequality, and because the implications of gender based forms of inequality are experienced within the most intimate and personalized domains of our existence, it is often difficult to appreciate that gender relations are a social product with a history."[52]

Although tampering with the social relations of gender could well be regarded as unwarranted "cultural interference",[53] it should be recognized that governments and development agencies already play their part in supporting an idealized male headed household structure (and its attendant intra-household gender divisions) in a range of ways - through "family codes" specifying men's primary responsibility for breadwinning and/or decision-making, through labour legislation which provides maternity leave but not paternity leave entitlements or which excludes women from certain jobs, and through development projects which target resources such as land, housing and credit to male household heads. Although many interventions of this nature may be well-intentioned, it is also possible to discern how they can inhibit greater power, independence and role diversity on the part of women. Moreover, given that for reasons of demographic mobility alone, stable residence in male headed nuclear households is increasingly unlikely and that, in this context, rigid gendered divisions of labour and power are possibly not in the best interests of women, men and children, a number of adjustments might be made. Two tentative "ways forward" might be first, to initiate more positive attempts to address inequalities within households and, second, to make a more dedicated commitment to supporting the rights, resources and legitimacy of households which do not fit the putative "standard" male headed model.

Recognizing that some governments and agencies have already made efforts along these lines, translating the spirit of such recommendations into practice is by no means easy. One major stumbling block is presented by religious, political and popular resistance to the idea that gender and households are socially constructed and that "the family" might be reconceptualized and transformed as evidenced in debates which have surrounded a variety of recent global conventions such as the 1994 Population Conference in Cairo and the 1995 Fourth Women's World Conference in Beijing.[54] The fear among policy makers that supporting lone motherhood may exacerbate the syndrome is

also indicative of the desire to uphold marriage and male household headship. This constitutes an important reason why so few developing countries have instituted programmes which target resources at female headed households or which recognize lone mother units as a "variant" rather than a "deviant" family type.[55] As for the question of intra-household interventions, problems here include the difficulties of penetrating what is widely seen as a "private" as well as a "natural" domain and the fact that initiatives may be very difficult to monitor and enforce. For example, although some governments have advocated greater sharing of domestic and childcare responsibilities between men and women, as in Cuba under Castro, it has been hard to convert this rhetoric into reality. More significant still, perhaps, is that even where state prescriptions of intra-household duties accord with those established by prevailing family and kinship systems, such as financial provision by men for their dependents, there seem to be few guarantees for women and children.[56] Yet although the "challenge" of "the household" may appear to be an immensely difficult one, viewing this challenge as insurmountable is likely to consign women to a situation where they will suffer the brunt of gender inequalities for generations to come. Moreover, just because changes may need to be instituted at a variety of levels and may take considerable time to take effect does not preclude a variety of interventions that may set certain processes in motion or, more importantly perhaps, provide support to women (and their children) here and now.

Although space precludes any comprehensive or detailed review of specific initiatives, on the basis of this paper's discussion of gender, households and rural-urban migration, it is possible to identify a number of areas where attention might usefully be focused. For example, given that household differentiation is a fairly common outcome of development induced demographic mobility, at the very least, normative rhetoric and interventions premised on an idealized male headed family unit could be substituted by initiatives which reflect current household realities. At a legislative level, this might include redefinitions of "the family" in national civil codes which encompass heterogeneity and diversity, as recommended in Mexico's background paper on families to the Fourth World Women's Conference at Beijing.[57] Such an initiative might go a long way towards supporting women who, through whatever route and for whichever reasons, find themselves residing independently of men but who commonly face societal hostility or discrimination as a result of their household status. Moreover, given that female household headship may present certain advantages for women, analysis of the experiences of female household headship might provide insights that could help to make male headed households more egalitarian spaces.

Another potential way of minimizing the disadvantages experienced by women in a range of household units might be for legal codes to place greater emphasis on defining families with respect to their responsibilities rather than residence, and for governments to find means of enforcing these responsibilities.

55. See reference 35, Beall (1996a); also see reference 18.

56. See reference 43, Chant (1997b).

57. de Oliveira, O. with M. Eternod and A. Monroy, A. (1995), *Las Familias Mexicanas*, México DF, CONAPO, Comité Nacional Coordinador para la IV Conferencia Mundial de la Mujer, page 27.

58. See for example, Bruce, J. and C. Lloyd (1992), *Finding the Ties that Bind: Beyond Headship and the Household*, Population Council/Washington DC, International Center for Research on Women, New York; also Folbre, N. (1994), *Who Pays for the Kids? Gender and the Structures of Constraint*, Routledge, London.

59. See reference 14, Buvinic (1990).

Even if this were limited, in the first instance, to obliging men to uphold traditional provisions for economic maintenance both as co-resident and absent husbands, this could strengthen women's entitlements within marriage and reduce the financial vulnerability of *de facto* and *de jure* female household heads (and their children).[58] In the case of *de facto* female headed households, for example, this could assume the form of monitoring remittance levels from migrant spouses and taking steps to help women use assets left behind when financial receipts are insufficient or too sporadic to guarantee basic subsistence.

Leading on from this, more could conceivably be done at legislative, programme and project levels to ensure that resources *reach* women and children by recognizing that (male headed) households are not necessarily harmonious and unified entities. Although male household heads are often targeted as beneficiaries in development projects in the belief that gains will "trickle through" to other household members,[59] there is considerable evidence to suggest that resources in women's hands are more likely to benefit children and that mothers are usually the more stable parental presence in the homes in which children live. Directing resources to women, therefore, might not only provide a means of increasing women's personal bargaining power but also allow them (and their children) to make smoother transitions between different household circumstances which a range of development processes (including gender-selective migration) so often entails. Examples here could include initiatives to enhance women's access to land and livelihood in rural and urban areas, and to improve their entitlements to housing. Aside from the fact that these measures would help migrant women and those left behind by their spouses, they might have positive ideological and material effects on younger women. Recognizing that the latter often have least power within household units, measures might also be taken to strengthen daughters' potential to resist parental pressure to undertake migration, ranging from compulsory education to the same age as their brothers to schemes designed to promote gender equality among youth.

While the above-mentioned suggestions may have clearly different degrees of applicability and feasibility in different contexts and in accordance with different types of intervention, it is worth bearing in mind that attempts to enlarge women's choices at the domestic level cannot be broached without reference to how these might affect men and male-female relationships. In Costa Rica, for example, where the state has introduced a variety of initiatives to strengthen women's economic and social position in and outside of male headed households, it appears that more could be done to sensitize men to the rationale behind these changes and to include them in programmes which aim simultaneously to increase women's power and resources and to alleviate household poverty. As it is, preliminary research with low-income men in the province of Guanacaste in the northwest of the country suggests that the increasingly precarious basis of male livelihood, coupled with programmes directed at improving women's capacity to maintain their households, have

60. Chant, S. (1997d), "Men, households and poverty in Costa Rica: a pilot study", final report to the Economic and Social Research Council, UK (Award No.R000222205).

contributed to a crisis of male identity in which men's roles as husbands and fathers have become somewhat uncertain. This is exacerbated by the fact that so many men in Guanacaste have to migrate on a seasonal basis to find work and have to leave their homes behind. For some men, the pressures of these uncertainties, together with a perceived loss of power, are so acute that instead of residing with wives and children during their periods in Guanacaste, they remain in, or retreat to, their natal households. In this context, women's parenting responsibilities not only increase but potentially extend over a longer timespan, neither of which seems to be particularly conducive to gender transformations.[60] In line with the precepts of a GAD approach, therefore, that genuine and sustainable changes in gender relations require inclusion of, and commitment from, both genders, household oriented policies should be based on the participatory involvement of men as well as women. By working in this way, and from the bottom-up, there may be greater scope to get men and women working collaboratively for a fairer deal for themselves, each other and their children in the context of contemporary household diversities.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cityscape

In future issues, *Environment and Urbanization* will be reproducing cartoons on city problems in the South and sometimes also short articles on urban issues from local and national newspapers in the South. To start this off, we reproduce a cartoon by Polyp.