

## **PART I**

# Chapter 1

## The Household, Work, and Livelihood Literature

### 1.1 Introduction

The central aim of this research is to examine the changing livelihood activities of individuals, households and communities in post-apartheid South Africa. Such a study inevitably overlaps with and builds on various literatures. Three main literatures are outlined and critically discussed, and this is reflected in the chapter structure. The first set of literature is specifically about the changing structure, nature and character of households. A critical approach to inter-household relations is adopted to further understand the context in which household members are responding to their crisis of poverty. The study adopts Amartya Sen's (1992) co-operative model, which acknowledges the presence of more than one decision maker within the household, the reality of the potential for conflicting objectives and activities and the certainty of unequal power relations during the process of decision-making between men and women, the young, and the old.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the livelihoods approach as both an analytical framework and an operational framework informing practical policy options for the poor. Many scholars have used the livelihoods approach, and specifically the capital assets framework; to explore how people survive and what livelihood activities they pursue to alleviate their poverty. The study rejects an uncritical understanding and simple adoption of the livelihoods approach in the context of South Africa and the two studied communities. Instead, it seeks to adapt the livelihoods approach to achieve a holistic and critical understanding of

intra- and inter-household and community livelihood activities in Mpumalanga and Enhlalakahle Townships, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

The third and final section of the chapter introduces and emphasises a broader definition of work – from paid work to other forms of work – which are not based on monetary exchange or the law of value. The study identifies several activities that take place in households, which are not necessarily based on monetary exchange but on principles of reciprocity and/or obligation. These include social reproduction, subsistence production, petty commodity production, and capitalist commodity production (Wield & Chataway, 2001). These activities, it is argued, are often gendered, influenced and affected by the socio-economic and cultural context.

## **1.2 Defining the Household**

### ***1.2.1 A sociological definition***

Everyone comes from, belongs to and lives in a household. However, the definition of the household is never simple, and there is no all-encompassing definition. Hammel (1984:30) defines the household as “the next biggest thing on a social map after the individual”. Naila Kabeer (1994:108) defines it as a distinct institution given its “close intertwining of economic and personal intra-household relationships”. McC. Netting, Wilk and Arnould (1984) define the household as a unit of production, distribution, transmission, reproduction and core residence. As economic units, resources are allocated and their value increased, consumed and exchanged within the household, based on age, gender and seniority. However, households are also a social core of socialisation, emotional support, caring, and feeding of household members. They mediate part of the economy because of social reproduction, facilitate labour-force participation (that is, who becomes part of the labour market), and produce consumption patterns (based on age, gender, seniority and marital status).

Smith and Wallerstein (1992:21) emphasise the flexibility of households. They observe that the household is “an entity whose boundaries and composition are subject to continuing change and its structures influenced by cycles and trends of the world economy”. The household is seen as a social and economic institution of the world economy, influenced, moulded and remoulded by it. This is in contrast to the concept of family, which recognises social relations such as marriage and kinship but is less likely to capture the social relations and dynamics that take place within it.

Where traditional families (co-residential kinship groups) do not exist, people often establish reciprocal relationships with “fictive kin” who serve similar functions of support and specialisation of household maintenance tasks (Nieves, 1979). However, households often recruit through familial ties, and hence the concepts of household and family are linked. Therefore, while the family can be described as an institution as it comprises norms, values and even “the ideology of the family”, households are less so and are perhaps best described as nodes of socialisation as they are units of both socio-economic organisation and of sociological analysis.

In the South African context, where migrant labour has historically been used to secure or accumulate income for many families<sup>1</sup>, the idea of core residence is fragile. In many cases, male household members are absent from their rural households. Yet, through remittances, their presence is felt and their contribution to the household becomes important for its survival. Women who stay behind take major decisions for the household (given the absent “head” of the household), such as how money will be spent and children raised (Bozzoli, 1991; Murray, 1981).

South African scholars also argue that households in South Africa are fluid and continually respond to social, political and economic changes (Sharp & Speigel,

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<sup>1</sup> Wilson (1972) identifies widespread, oscillating migration, a process in which men’s homes are very far from work. They cannot commute daily and can see their families only weekly, monthly, yearly or even less frequently.

1985; May, 1987; Murray, 1987). How sustainable and effective is this institution in protecting the vulnerable and poor in the absence of other developmental institutions, when institutions such as the state are failing or deliberately transferring the burden of survival to the household?

Socio-cultural rules and norms that govern households and broader social relations determine activities of survival and coping for households and communities. Hence, households are formed to respond and adapt to external socio-economic changes. They are often observed as cushions and are historically constructed in response to uncertainty and sudden shocks (Kabeer, 1991; Hart 1997; Pearson 1997). Shocks, unlike stresses, are often “short-term incidents that push a previously self-sufficient household over the edge” (Amis, 1995:150). Indeed, in a context such as South Africa where there is high unemployment and the devastating effects of HIV and AIDS, the structure of households changes significantly. The prevalence of child-headed households and the increase of AIDS orphans are significant features of today’s households in many communities, including the two studied.

As nodes of socialisation, households come in all shapes and sizes, with multiple roles and tasks. Their structure and the relations within them are determined by the wider social, economic and political relations and institutions (market or non-market) in which they are embedded. Hence, in defining them, it is always important to establish local definitions that embrace such peculiarities. In the context of South Africa, where there is a prevalence of extended families,<sup>2</sup> one needs to go beyond the Western concept of the household.

The focus of this research is on urban rather than rural households. Yet, there are specific urban-rural linkages that need to be considered when trying to understand how urban households respond to crises. As evidence will show, the purpose and role of urban-rural linkages in South Africa have shifted from the time Murray (1981) and Bozzoli (1991) were writing. The link is not necessarily based on

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<sup>2</sup> Discussed in Chapters 4 and 5.

remittances from urban to rural locales. The relationship is often more complex, with the rural areas often sending money to urban areas because of unemployment in the latter and the possibility of income derived from state transfers in rural areas. This signals not just a linear or one-way process of linkage but rather a complex two-way interaction. As evidence will also confirm, the movement by household members is no longer limited to that from rural to urban areas in search of wage work; there are also movements from urban to rural areas for reasons explored in later chapters. Moreover, a focus on monetary exchanges between rural and urban households misses other, non-monetary exchanges that also take place, based on reciprocity, obligation and voluntarism.

It is the purpose of this research to go beyond what is assumed as “natural” – household members working for the benefit of all – to interrogate these assumptions and to look at the internal and external dynamics of households. Therefore, it is not the intention to aggregate urban household livelihood activities but to examine livelihood activities of different household members by looking at how resources are distributed, allocated and shared by household members. The research shows how these allocative rules and obligations are shaped by the broader context of liberalisation of the economy in which households find themselves and which are often a source of conflict within and between households. The thesis will show, in two research sites, how the history of political violence, macro-economic changes and community organisation has affected household members, especially women’s livelihoods.

### ***1.2.2 Intra-household dynamics***

Because households are sites in which social relations between members take place, it becomes necessary to explore the nature of such relations through the concept of intra-household dynamics. It also becomes central to theoretically examine localised struggles and decision-making within the household. Such struggles are gendered, often hidden from outsiders, and very much governed by the broader societal norms and values in which households are embedded. Chapter

6 provides empirical evidence of these arguments with reference to the two case study areas.

Reference to intra-household dynamics concerns both changes in household structure and relations, and the reasons for these changes. These intra-household changes cannot be viewed in isolation, but are understood as forming part of the livelihood activities available to urban households. The aim, then, is to examine both gender and inter-generational relations within the household and the power relations to which these give rise, as well as the responsibilities, entitlements and choices that different household members have as a result.

According to Pahl (1989), households have specific allocative systems. These range from a “whole-wage” system to “independent management” of separate incomes. These systems vary in terms of who manages and who has ultimate control over decisions on expenditure. However, these allocative systems have been criticised for assigning couples to pre-defined categorisation, failing to recognise that these systems might be flexible over time; they do not take into consideration extended or inter-household allocation patterns, and focus only on one resource – financial. Households can and do have more than one resource, some of which are not financial but are social as well.

Specific variables such as gender, generation, marital status and seniority become important in understanding these relations and dynamics, with specific reference to consumption, production and distributional patterns within the household. These gender-age effects determine how tasks are shared and resources allocated within the household. They shape the opportunities and rights available to individuals. Such variables also reveal often-overlooked inequalities and negotiations over household assets and resources. Drawing on the examples of Brazil (Thomas, 1990), the Philippines (Senauer, 1990) and Kenya (Kennedy, 1989), Kabeer (1994:103) concludes, “The gender of the person owning wealth or earning income appears to have a systematic effect on patterns of resource allocation within the household”.

The research adopts a single theory, but a complex analytical framework for understanding the household, informed by Hart's (1995:61) advice that a focus on gender should entail a reconceptualisation of "the household: in relational terms and an analytical as well as empirical focus on the gendered micro politics of negotiation, cooperation and contestation in different but intersecting institutional arenas."

How then are resources allocated, spent and exchanged among household members? Neoclassical theory asserts that households comprise of individuals either as consumers or as workers, and it rejects the notion of household collectivity. However, the "new-household economics" led by Becker (1965, 1974, 1981) introduced the idea of "altruistic collectivity" and "welfare maximisation" in households. For Beckerian households, welfare maximisation can be achieved through "benevolent dictatorship" by the household head.

Such approaches have been criticised for treating household relations and dynamics as a "black box" (Kabeer, 1994). In addition, Galbraith (1974) contends that neoclassical theory subordinates household individuals such as women and disguises the exercise of male authority. Folbre (1994) also rejects this notion of a unitary household. She argues that it is not consistent to argue that individuals who are wholly selfish in the market place, as argued by economists, would be selfless within a household. In fact, she asserts, "family life is shifting and is a somewhat unpredictable mixture of selfishness and altruism" (Folbre, 1994:23).

In an attempt to open the black box, Kabeer (1994:101) states that control and allocation within the household is, "a complex process which has to be seen in relation to a web of rights and obligations". There are widespread intra-household "distributional inequalities and failures", especially when looking at the allocation of labour time between household production and wage employment. Women tend to allocate longer hours to the household than men, and fewer hours to wage labour, hence their low wages. For Folbre (1994:22), much as there is a possibility for solidarity at work between men and women, there is a "new recognition of the



possibilities for conflict at home”.

In a bargaining framework, the household is composed of self-interested individuals who engage in both conflict and co-operation. This is a notion that Sen (1984) calls “co-operative conflict.” As opposed to altruistic models, bargaining models of the household accommodate diversity in decision-making behaviour, do not rule out altruism as the basis of decisions, and accommodate the idea of gender asymmetry as a product of structural rather than purely individual inequalities in power, privilege and resources (Kabeer, 1994:111-2).

Nevertheless, Sen (1992) argues that the word “bargaining” (as used by Folbre, 1994) does not really capture some of these internal household dynamics. He argues that individuals within households “contend” rather than bargain, given that their utilities may overlap and that their perception of self and self-worth are most often defined by others as well, more so for women. This is also the case for poor communities whose aim is survival rather than satisfaction. In addition, households can also be seen as a collection of individuals of the same or different generations, or of matrimonial partners or non-pairs. It is through this collection of individuals that risk and uncertainty in the external environment is minimised.

According to Folbre (1994), bargaining power within households also has to be taken into consideration when talking about household inequalities. She highlights the following advantages of Sen’s (1984) formulation of the intra-household bargaining process:

- It recognises the existence of more than one decision maker within the household, and the potential for conflicting objectives and activities.
- The “co-operative conflict” model introduces the idea of unequal power into the process of decision-making.
- While referring to adult men and women, it can accommodate co-operation and conflict in the context of pluralistic household forms.

Folbre (1994:23) also states that inequality within the family reflects “inequality in individual power related to age and gender”. This is because household

bargaining also takes place between parents and children. Children's bargaining powers are increased by their economic independence or decreased by their dependence. This argument will be taken up later, where evidence reveals strained household relations between young mothers who receive state child grants and their elders who disagree with how these young mothers use the child grants.

Gender as a socially defined role, plays a significant function in our understanding of intra-household dynamics and bargaining. Hence, the argument that how a household allocates and distributes resources has a lot to do with the gendered division of labour (Moore, 1988; Sullivan, 1997). In his book, *Division of Labour*, Ray Pahl (1984) argues that the livelihood activities that households adopt are linked in complex ways to a gendered division of labour between household members, their plan for allocating time to work within and outside of the household, and all sources of labour used by a household.

Judith Bruce (1989:980) contends that, men's and women's access to and control over resources differ systematically in the wider world. She then argues that these differences between men and women are clearly reflected in their economic contributions, fertility decision-making, and time use. For example, even though both men and women in a household can have equal power with regard to fertility, they may still have different experiences of it. These differences include pregnancy, birth, breast-feeding, and the social and economic costs of child rearing. Brought together, women's reproduction and production causes them to become less substantial economic contributors. The inequalities of the labour market also tend to reward men more than women. In a context where workplace and industrial restructuring of key industries affects mainly women, restructuring will inevitably have gendered consequences.

### 1.3 The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, Principles and Framework<sup>3</sup>

The second set of literature that this thesis explores is the livelihoods literature. This section discusses the broad definition of the livelihoods approach, the principles of the livelihoods approach, the livelihoods or capital assets framework and the critique of the framework.

#### 1.3.1 *The sustainable livelihoods approach*

The livelihoods approach is referred to as:

. . . the mix of individual and household survival strategies, developed over a given period of time that seeks to mobilize available resources and opportunities. Resources can be physical assets such as property, human assets such as time and skills, social assets, and collective assets. Opportunities include kin and friendship networks, institutional mechanisms, organizational and group membership, and partnership relations. The mix of livelihood strategies thus includes labour market involvement, savings, accumulation and investments; borrowing; innovation and adaptation of different technologies for production; social networking; changes in consumption patterns; and income, labour and asset pooling (Grown & Sebstad, 1989:941).

The livelihood approach has also been defined as the means of gaining a living, including livelihood capabilities, tangible assets (such as food stocks, stores of jewellery, gold and cash savings) and intangible assets (such as “claims which can be made for material, moral or other practical support, and access” [Chambers, 1995:194]). In addition, a livelihood is considered sustainable when it can “cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain its capabilities and assets both now and in future, while not undermining the natural resource base” (Carney, 1998:4).

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<sup>3</sup> The thesis acknowledges that there are several livelihoods frameworks, including the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DIFD), Oxfam, Care, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the Policy Guidelines for Integrating Environmental Planning into Land Reform (PGIEP). These frameworks are similar, with different emphases but all guided by the livelihood approach. However, the thesis engages with the dominant, DFID framework.

The livelihoods approach emphasises the differences between rural and urban livelihoods. However, according Meikle (2002), the difference between the urban and rural are complex and their economic, environmental, social, and political context are both “dynamic and multifaceted”. However, the urban context is “more complex” given its differing asset pool and common vulnerabilities. The specific vulnerabilities common among the urban poor include, lack of legal status for men and women, limited access to basic social services, poor living environments, and dependence on the cash economy for basic goods and services (Meikle 2001, 2002).

For Meikle (2002), urban contexts, as opposed to rural context, depend largely on,

- financial assets such as savings, access to credit,
- human assets such as labour, health, education,
- natural assets such as land for agricultural purposes,
- physical assets such as housing, livestock, and production equipment, and
- social assets such as social support mechanisms and information

Farming becomes an important survival strategy for the rural poor. It is not only a direct source of employment and income for the rural poor but can be used for subsistence. Farming can additionally generate demand for a range of consumer goods and services (Bernstein, Crow & Johnston, 1992). However, farming is also linked to other assets and resources that are important for securing livelihoods for the rural poor. Some of these include land ownership, locality and climate. Yet farming can be an insecure strategy for survival, and it is necessary to question the notion that rural people are “tied to the land.” Rural people deploy other livelihoods, such as seasonal migration, non-agricultural wage employment and self-employment in urban areas, thus diversifying their rural livelihoods. Thence, according to Bebbington (1999:2021), there is a need to build a livelihoods framework that “approaches rural livelihoods and poverty without automatically linking their analysis to agriculture or natural assets.” As such Bebbington (1999) argues that agrarian livelihoods are different from rural livelihoods. Rural people have diverse assets that they draw upon not necessarily according to income

criteria but on for example “the maintenance of rural and social practices that accompany rural residence” (Bebbington, 1999:2040). Therefore rural livelihoods should be understood in terms of:

- (a) People’s access to five types of human, natural, produced, social and cultural capital assets
- (b) The ways in which they combine and transform those assets in the building of livelihoods that as far as possible meet their material and their experiential needs;
- (c) the ways in which people are able to expand their asset bases through engaging with other actors through relationships governed by the logics of the state, market and civil society; and
- (d) The ways in which they are able to deploy and enhance their capabilities both to make living more meaningful and to change the dominant rules and relationships governing the ways in which resources are controlled, distributed and transformed in society (Bebbington (1999:2021)).

### ***1.3.2 The principles of the sustainable livelihood approach***

The livelihoods approach is premised on both normative and operational principles. On the one hand, normative principles include:

- People-centred – prioritizing people rather than resources, facilities or services
- Sustainable- balancing all four dimensions (economic, institutional, social and environmental)
- Empowering- improving the voice, opportunities and well-being of the poor
- Responsive and participatory- processes that enable outsiders to listen and respond to the poor

On the other hand, operational principles include:

- Multi-level and holistic- micro-level should inform development of policy. Macro- and meso-level structures and processes should support people to build upon their strengths.

- Conducted in partnership- partnerships are to be formed with poor people together with the public and private sector.
- Long-term and flexible- a flexible approach and long-term commitment to provide support
- Importance of stakeholder and gender analysis (Carney, 2002: 14-5).

The operationalisation of these principles has been questioned. First, Toner (2003:775) laments, “such principles focus heavily on the bottom-up empowerment of the poor through broad partnerships of stakeholders. Design, implementation and evaluation are to be as participatory and responsive as possible.” Second, these principles lack the gendered analysis based on power and control. The power relations between men and women are important to consider for any approach that seeks to address the issue of poverty. Lastly, while it is important to put people at the centre not resources, there is an equal need to focus on the human rights of the poor. Highlighted in some literature, therefore, is the necessity to consider the rights based approach to complement the shortcomings of the livelihoods approach.

Thus, according to Moser and Norton (2001) such a human rights based approach would support the livelihoods approach and its founding principles. At a normative level, the human rights based approach supports the principles of the livelihoods approach; namely, equality, participation, accountability, and sustainability. At an analytical level, focus on power relations between men and women can yield desirable outcomes for the poor. At the operational level, “all agencies seeking to strengthen poor people’s livelihoods need to analyse different contexts with sufficient rigour if they are to identify the best opportunities, partners, and strategies” (Moser and Norton, 2001: ix).

According to Moser and Norton (2001), there are several added advantages of incorporating the human rights based approach to the livelihoods approach. Firstly, a human rights livelihoods approach provides a set of tools “for those seeking to operationally integrate empowerment into initiatives designed to promote poor people’s sustainable livelihoods” (Moser and Norton, 2001:40).

Secondly, the importance of analysing rights is that the operation and impact of power relations on the livelihoods of poor people. Lastly, the possibilities of social change, particularly around gender relations, are also initiated. However, it is concluded that these advantages can only be realised if,

- A number of complementary strategies are put in place for poor people to effectively make claims. These include access to information, group solidarity, and development of skills and capabilities
- An active civil society is committed to empowerment of particular social groups, has capacity to listen to their views, adapt to their priorities, able to work at multiple legal and institutional levels, utilise solidarity networks, gather information, and form networks
- The state acts as an enabler by promoting the social arrangements and policies that promote access to rights
- International development organization to facilitate the introduction of rights perspectives through partnerships with both government bureaucracies and civil society (Moser and Norton, 2001:42).

Linked to the livelihoods approach and its principles, is the livelihoods framework. Moser (1998), Carney (1998) and Rakodi (1999) argue for an all-inclusive sustainable livelihoods framework to understand fully rural and urban livelihoods – what they call the capital assets framework.

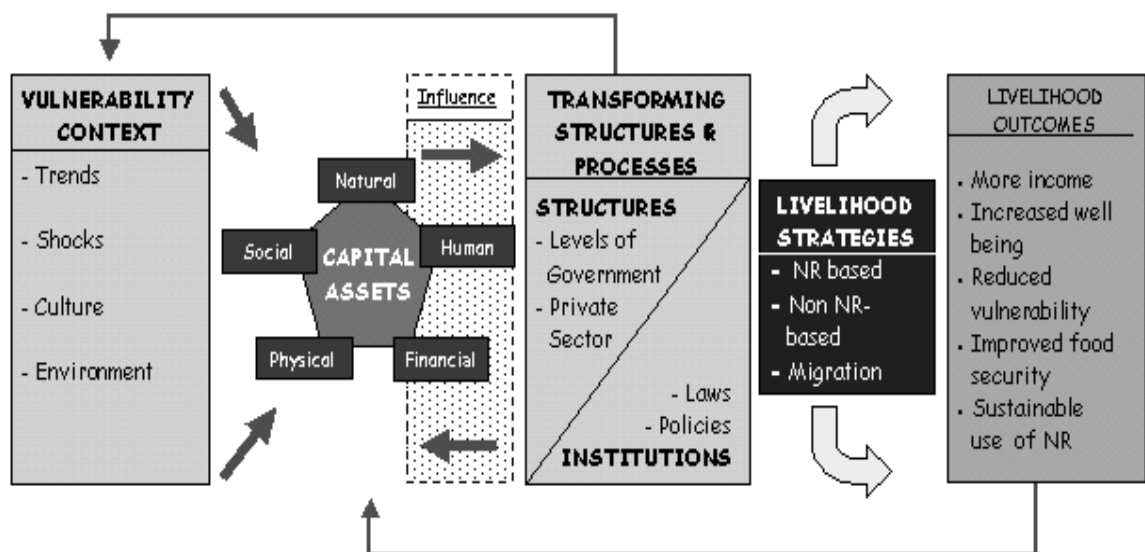
### ***1.3.3 The capital assets framework***

The sustainable livelihood framework was built as a holistic analytical approach in which capital assets are placed at the centre. Moser's (1998) asset vulnerability framework includes labour, social capital, human capital, physical capital, productive assets, and household relations. Drawing on the work done by Scoones (1998), Carney's (1998) capital assets framework includes natural, social, human, physical, and financial capital. Excluding natural assets, which are largely confined to rural livelihoods, it is the aim of this research to examine the framework and the possible contribution that it can make, if at all, to

understanding urban livelihoods in South Africa.

These capital assets are then understood in the various contexts and areas. First, the vulnerability context that involves shocks, trends and season movements that affect people. Second, the structures and processes such as organizational and institutional policies, culture, and laws influence the context in which capital assets operate. Third, the livelihood strategies that people adopt to manage their capital assets and achieve particular livelihood outcomes. Finally, put together, these livelihood strategies and context, which influence them, yield specific livelihood outcomes. (See figure 1.1)

**Figure 1.1 The sustainable livelihoods framework**



Source: DFID, 2000; Ashley and Carney, 1999.

### **1.3.4 Assets: from labour to household relations**

*Labour* as an asset for the urban poor is vital, but also very fragile given the insecure, segmented and gendered nature of the labour market, not only in South Africa but also worldwide. Drawing on research on urban household responses to economic crisis in four communities – namely Cisne Dos in Guayaquil, Ecuador; Commonwealth in Metro Manila, the Philippines; Chawama in Lusaka, Zambia;



and Angyafold in Budapest, Hungary – Moser (1998:8) argues that households can adopt various activities in relation to labour. They can increase the number of women working, mainly in the informal economy,<sup>4</sup> allocating a disproportionate share of women’s time to meet increasing responsibilities, allocating more time to obtaining services in response to the declining quality of infrastructure, and increasing reliance on child labour. This argument is also made by Carole Rakodi (1995) in her study of household activities in Gweru, Zimbabwe.

*Social capital* is another form of capital that is central to the livelihood framework. There are many definitions of social capital, often depending on how it will be applied as policy for “poor communities.” The concept has lost its original meaning over the years. Using the original definition, Bourdieu (1986:248-9) defines social capital as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources” that lies in membership in a group, which provides its members with a “credential, which entitles them to credit.” Therefore, social capital includes networks, membership in groups, relationships of trust, and access to wider institutions of society upon which people draw in pursuit of livelihoods (Carney, 1998; Foley & Edwards, 1999).

In turn, Coleman (1990:302) understands social capital as a “variety of entities” which include, among others, “obligations and expectations”. His argument, later taken up by Robert Putman (1993) and the World Bank, was that social capital as an idea had been eroded by the dependency on welfare states; hence his analysis leads to quite conservative policy conclusions. The term was then taken up and popularised by Robert Putman’s *Making Democracy Work*. Putman (1993:664-5) defined the concept as a “feature of social life – networks, norms, and trust”. The concept was then appropriated by the World Bank as the “missing link” for “the poor”.

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<sup>4</sup> This is a shift from defining the informal economy as a “sector”, given that it includes such a diversity of activities.

*Human capital* refers to skills, knowledge, ability to earn, education, and good health. All of this determines the survival of households, for example, in getting secure and stable employment. However, access to these is also linked directly to intra-household dynamics, gender, age and marital status, which vary from context to context. In what Whitehead (1981) called “ideologies of maternal altruism”, women are often led to deny themselves the resources to satisfy their own needs and preferences in favour of other members of the family.

This altruistic behaviour by women may reflect strategic considerations in terms of long-term security and life options. Kandiyoti (1988) suggests that different forms of patriarchy present women with distinct “rules of the game” and these, in turn, shape the terms of the “conjugal contract” or what Kandiyoti terms a “patriarchal bargain”. Moser (1998:11) identifies *household relations* as assets that play an “important part in households’ ability to adjust to changes in the external environment”. They relate to household composition and structure. There can be either one or both of the following – an increased reliance on extended family support networks and/or an increase in labour migration and remittances.

*Physical capital* includes basic infrastructure such as transport, shelter, water, energy and communications (Moser, 1998). These resources are also shaped by their context – for example, whether they are commodified through state policies such as privatisation or provided free for all citizens. However, the key question is whether every individual has equal access to these services, regardless of their socio-economic and political standing, and the effect access has on the livelihood of different household members.

In South Africa, basic resources such as water and electricity are being privatised, and many households are often left without these resources because they are unable to pay for them. As McDonald and Pape (2002:4) put it, “from 1996 [with the adoption of the new Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) macro-economic policy], local government development paradigms shifted steadily from redistributive state to the neo-liberal ‘enabling’ or ‘facilitating’ state”. While

government social spending has increased in post-apartheid South Africa, the state has also reduced its spending on basic households services such as water and electricity through privatisation. Households that cannot afford these services have often been left without these resources. For example, in 2003, services for 275 000 households in South Africa were disconnected because of non-payment (HSRC, 2004).<sup>5</sup>

Because of this, many communities in South Africa have formed community organisations to oppose the privatisation process-taking place in their communities. For non-payment, local municipalities responded by cutting off electricity and water.<sup>6</sup> To save costs and encourage a culture of payment for services, local municipalities, often without the approval and support of the communities concerned, have installed prepaid meters. Residents have responded with illegal connections and vandalism (Deedat, 2002; Khunou, 2002; Ruiters, 2002). They have also organised marches and community campaigns protesting against electricity and water cut-offs (*The Mercury*, 11 April 2001). These confrontations over access to resources have become common in post-apartheid South Africa.

The privatisation of waste management in South Africa has also had adverse consequences, specifically for women. In her recent study on the privatisation of waste management, Samson (2003) argues that women as the majority workforce have had their contract of employment undermined by various cost-cutting measures and privatisation. This has reduced the cost of waste management for municipalities, government departments, and private companies. The responsibility of government social delivery has been shifted to households and to communities through various volunteer campaigns where the unpaid volunteers are mainly women.

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<sup>5</sup> This figure is argued by some to be insignificant.

<sup>6</sup> Both resulting in dire consequences such as the cholera outbreaks in Madlebe rural area in KwaZulu-Natal (Deedat & Cottle, 2002).

Linked to physical capital are productive assets and *financial capital*. These assets have the potential to increase households' income. They range from diversifying income through small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs), home-based enterprises and renting out, to adopting inter-generational plot identification strategies to accommodate children's households (Moser, 1998). In the absence of wage labour, other resources and assets become crucial for many poor urban households. These financial resources include credit and savings facilities, regular state remittances such as pension funds, disability grants and child grants. These are linked to state welfare policies, hence the argument earlier that households are context-bound and that their survival depends on state policies. For example, in South Africa, there is a comprehensive pension system as well as state transfers such as disability and child grants. However, other key economic policies such as privatisation of water and electricity have meant the retrenchment of many workers in sectors such as waste management, clothing, textiles and footwear, where the majority of workers are women. Left with no option, many retrenched and unemployed women have sought refuge in the informal economy. Their activities have mainly been selling curios as street traders (Lund, Nicholson & Skinner, 2000), garage-type manufacturing and/or home-work (Benton, 1989; Theron, 1996; Baxter & Western, 1998; Mosoetsa, 2001b).<sup>7</sup>

Financial resources are also linked to informal forms of money-saving and money-lending schemes, which take many forms and functions to earn and or augment the few resources that people have. *Stokvels* have become a popular way of saving money in South Africa, but they have also played a significant social role for those involved (Buijs & Atherfold, 1995; Gwagwa, 1998). However, many poor households augment their low total household income through micro-lending institutions or individuals (*mashonisa*). This is a wide-spread phenomenon in South Africa today. It is not sustainable and is often risky, especially for those who are unable to make repayments.

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<sup>7</sup> In Chapter 4, I explore some of these activities as alternatives for the many women interviewed for this research.

According to Moser (1998), the way in which these assets and resources are managed directly affects household poverty and vulnerability levels. There are, however, different determinants and indicators of urban vulnerability for individuals, households and community (see Table 1.1).

**Table 1: 1 Determinants and associated indicators of urban vulnerability at household and community level**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Determinants and Associated indicators</b>
Individual	Access to adequate nutrition and health care, education and income. Personal safety from domestic violence. Access to credit.
Household	Household type and structure (members in productive, reproductive and community work). Stages in the life cycle. Access to housing.
Community	Access to, reliability of and quality of basic needs of water, electricity, sanitation, roads, education and health care. Personal safety from robbery and violence. Capability and capacity of community-based organisations.

*Source: Moser (1995:167).*

Julian May (1998:1) states that poverty can be defined “as the inability to attain a minimal standard of living, measured in terms of basic consumption needs or income required to satisfy them”. Notably, “it includes alienation from community, food insecurity, crowded homes, usage of unsafe and inefficient forms of energy, lack of adequately paid and secure jobs, and fragmentation of the family”. This multi-faceted nature of poverty is captured by the concept of social exclusion.

Social exclusion is defined as, “the process by which certain individuals and groups are systematically barred from access to positions that would enable them to an autonomous livelihood,” a process that “is usually associated with the possibility of access to relatively regular, paid labour, for at least one member of a stable household” (Castells, 1998:73). Social exclusion is understood, therefore, as the failure of the democratic and legal system, the labour market, the welfare state system, and the family and community system (Olivier, 2000:7). However,

even though poverty and social exclusion are related concepts, “the presence of one does not automatically imply the presence of the other. One can be poor in the traditional sense of the word, but not necessarily deprived (in the sense of socially excluded)” (Olivier, 2000:7).

The thesis seeks to embrace a much broader definition of poverty, a definition that acknowledges that people “move in and out of poverty” (Lipton & Maxwell, 1992:10). The concept of “vulnerability” is used to capture this process. Vulnerability refers to “the insecurity of the well-being of individuals, households, or communities in the face of a changing environment” (Moser, 1996c:2) (see Table 1.1). However, “not all vulnerable people are poor” (Moser, 1998:3). Vulnerability is also defined as “any threat to survival or livelihood” (Dershem & Gzirishvili, 1998:1827). According to Moser (1998:3), analysing vulnerability involves identifying both the threat and resilience in resisting or recovering from the negative effects of a changing environment. The means of resistance are identified as all the above-mentioned assets and capitals. Therefore, “the more assets [and capital] people have, the less vulnerable they are...” (Moser, 1998:3). For Chambers (1995:189), vulnerability does not mean lack or want, but rather exposure and defencelessness. He identifies two sides to vulnerability – first, the external side of exposure to shocks, stresses and risks; and second, the internal side of defencelessness, “meaning a lack of means to cope without damaging loss”. In fact, as vulnerability increases, livelihoods become “less securely sustainable” (Chambers, 1995:189).

Therefore, in understanding urban households and their livelihood activities, it becomes essential to identify not only their poverty status (what they “lack or want”) but also their vulnerability status (“threat and resilience”). This argument enables this study to achieve its central aim, that is, to understand urban household’s responses to a changing socio-economic environment. The nature of the relationships between household members, neighbours and the community has been reconfigured to respond to new challenges. Social cohesion may be either strengthened or undermined. The nature of social support has shifted from simple

economic exchanges to complex social exchanges based on the principle of reciprocity. Although women are seen as both “care givers” and “receivers” as they continue to endure the brunt of these crises especially that of HIV/AIDS, they remain the most active in the community through various initiatives.

According to Murray (2001:7), there are several strengths of the sustainable livelihoods approach and framework, namely,

- It seeks to understand changing combinations of modes of livelihoods in a dynamic and historical context
- It explicitly advocates a creative tension between levels of analysis
- It acknowledges the need to transcend the boundaries between discrete sectors (rural/urban, industrial/agricultural, formal/informal, etc.)
- It implicitly recognises the necessity to investigate the relationships between different activities that constitute household livelihoods, which in turn require attention, both to intra-household and extra-household social relations.

Furthermore, the livelihoods framework focus on poverty is welcomed as a positive step towards understanding disadvantage as located in society and social change. More importantly, the framework is able to focus on work in the context of households and inter-household relations, and on both as embedded in communities and society. However, the framework falls short in a number of areas. The next section critiques the livelihoods approach, specifically, the capital assets framework.

### ***1.3.5 Critique of the livelihoods approach and capital assets framework***

The livelihoods literature, specifically, the capital/assets framework, highlights a number of assets including labour, social, human, financial, physical and productive assets, as well as household relations (Carney, 1998; Moser, 1998; Scoones, 1998; Rakodi, 1999). However, there are a number of limitations to the approach and the framework. First, the livelihoods framework, and indeed Moser’s taxonomy, fails to differentiate between social, economic and political

institutions. As Beall (1997a) and Guyer (1981) point out, political and social resources are central and should thus be incorporated in any framework that seeks to understand urban livelihoods. Social and political resources are defined as formal and informal associations, networks and organisations, into which households tap to alleviate their poverty.

These resources vary in terms of membership, focus and benefits. They inevitably vary in their success in reducing poverty in communities. In Chapter 7, this notion of social and political resource is applied in the context of South Africa in the two research sites, by exploring the different organisations that households and individuals utilise to alleviate their insecurities, vulnerability and despair.

Second, while this livelihoods taxonomy is useful in identifying those who are vulnerable, it is nevertheless limited in its critical and theoretical engagement concerning issues of inequality and power relations within and without households (Murray, 2000; Whitehead, 2002). These relations shape individual, household and community access to key resources that will enable them to escape their poverty and prevent them from becoming socially excluded. The framework also neglects the institutions that assist or inhibit people, households and communities from accessing key resources.

Third, arguing against the concept of social capital, Ben Fine (1999), states that social capital ignores questions of power, conflict, the ruling elite and the systematic imperatives of contemporary capitalism. He argues that the problem with all encompassing concepts, such as social capital, and how they are defined is that they embrace everything and therefore end up explaining nothing. Thus, they should not be adopted but rejected.

Others have also expressed concerns about the depoliticisation of the term, referring to the often-misguided usage of the term and the resulting practical implications for policy makers, poor households and their communities (Beall, 1997, 2000, 2001a; Harriss, 1997; Putzel, 1997; Fine, 1999). The concept has



been criticised for not accommodating issues of power, representation and exclusionary forms of association, hence the use of the notion of “anti-social capital” (Beall, 1997, 2000, 2001b). Nonetheless, the concept of social capital is central to most livelihoods frameworks and has become convenient shorthand for the norms and networks of reciprocity and social organisation on which people have or create a claim.

Drawing on research in nine cities of Africa, Asia and Latin America, Beall (2001b) draws the following rather sceptical conclusions about the developmental potential of social capital: Although public action is important to ensure local democracy, social capital does not guarantee pro-poor governance. Instead, preferring to use the concept “social resources,” referring to “the micro-level social relationships and networks that go to make up social life beyond the family or household” (Beall, 2001b:359). She argues that “social resources of the urban poor are as much an asset for urban development institutions and processes as they are for poor people themselves”.

In addition, political and social resources through networks and associations, formal and informal, become central for sustainable livelihoods. This flows from Guyer’s (1981:121) argument that “one needs social and political resources to get material resources”. A distinction is made between “defensive associations” based on women’s exclusion from male networks and “active” associations boasting clear economic roots and purpose. How important are these “social resources” in assisting households to better their welfare? To what extent are the social resources on which people rely confined to households, family and kinship networks, and to what extent do they extend to wider social networks?

Fourth, concepts such as “assets”, “capitals” and “strategies” used in the framework are equally problematic (Rakodi, 1991; Whitehead, 2000). It is indeed difficult to compare poor households to “managers” of assets and/or capitals as the livelihoods framework would have us believe. Rather, the thesis proposes that there are **rules of access** governing individual, household and community

struggles for social, economic and political resources. These rules are either overt or covert, and are context-specific. They shape and are shaped by gender and generational norms that govern relationships. Resource allocation and distribution should be seen as a complex process that is context-specific.

Rakodi (1991:42) argues that, “strategy implies deliberate planning ahead, with daily decisions taken on a tactical basis in the light of longer-term aims”. She questions the appropriateness of such conceptualisation of the decisions and actions of households, but stresses the varying nature of housing decisions over time. This thesis moves from the premise that households often make long-term plans but that these decisions are often not deliberate since household members do not all sit together and “strategise”. These plans or decisions could, therefore, be seen as **activities** rather than strategies. Furthermore, evidence will show how sometimes “household strategies” are in fact “individuals’ strategies” imposed on households. This critique is also linked to a reconceptualisation of homogeneous households working for the benefit of all. In addition, not all poor households live “from hand to mouth” and not all poor households have long-term aims.

Fifth, that the livelihoods approach fails to disaggregate the poor, rather treating them as a homogeneous group, lends itself to further critique. This research will provide evidence of the heterogeneity of poor households given the diverse livelihood activities pursued. In Chapter 5, the evidence and the argument presented provide examples of struggling, coping and thriving households by examining the varied livelihood activities they pursue and what the livelihoods literature would call “physical and human capitals”.

Indeed, these individual and household activities go beyond the household into the community. Therefore, it is important never to isolate household livelihood activities from community activities, which households are a part of. It will be argued that a household’s survival is intrinsically linked to its context, its community and state policies that affect it. Therefore, on their own, households are not able to survive. The tendency of most livelihood literature to separate

household and community livelihoods is questioned and challenged in this study.

Furthermore, while there are significant differences between the urban and rural in terms of levels of commoditisation, it is a false assumption that there is only one asset, resource or commodity that is particularly important in each context. In fact, it is important to look at the urban-rural linkages to get a holistic understanding of people's livelihoods systems (Wratten, 1995; Beall, 1997a, 2002; Beall & Kanji, 1999; Ferguson, 1999). The importance of wage employment is not only confined to the urban poor. The rural poor depend largely or exclusively on remittances from wage employment (Francis, 2000).

These glaring differences between the rural and urban context, should not be taken as fact, as these differences also change given the historical context of both the rural and urban context. Furthermore, a crude separation between the rural and urban context tends to overlook the linkages that exists between the two contexts. The possible transformative and policy outcomes of such an approach are often conservative and anti-poor.

Sixth, while there are indeed benefits for the livelihoods approach to incorporate the human rights based approach; this does not necessarily eliminate the shortcomings of the livelihoods approach. The human rights based approach assumes that there are endless but core rights to be claimed by poor people. Similarly, the livelihoods approach also assumes that poor people have assets that they can readily dispose. As such, both these approaches, fail to recognise the complexity of acquiring assets and claiming rights from those who possess them. It is assumed that those who have a stash of core rights would readily give them away and that equal power exists, in this case between claimants of rights and those who control rights. In fact, the process of acquiring assets and claiming rights is often fraught with tension and conflict.

Seventh, as outlined in the previous section on defining the household, household relations have the potential of being an anti-asset. The unequal power relations

based on gender and age are indicative of many households. This thesis adopts a critical approach to inter-household relations and Sen's (1984) and Folbre's (1994) argument of co-operative conflict. As argued in later chapters, the unequal bargaining power<sup>8</sup> that often surround the allocation and distribution of income in many households have undermined the potential benefits that family and kinship networks have in reducing individual and household insecurities such as income, housing and food.<sup>9</sup> The thesis shows that, with the enormous burden placed on family networks and unequal power relations within households, the stability of family networks is becoming fragile. A crisis of reproduction surface as incidence of alcohol and drug abuse and domestic violence become a common feature of most households. Hence Moser and Norton (2001:7) correctly argue that the framework could not be a holistic analytical approach precisely because it places less emphasis on "ways in which power relations produce and reproduce deprivation."

Eighth, while the sustainable livelihoods approach correctly puts individuals and households at the centre, the socio-economic and political context of these individuals and households is often overlooked. The micro-macro context links are relatively absent in such an approach. As Meikle (2002:37) asserts, "the relationships between the poor, local governments and other actors in the political context are critical to their well-being." Furthermore, "the influences of context on household livelihoods and livelihoods in turn on their context are mediated by policies, institutional or organizational structures and a variety of processes, which are themselves products of the context." It is therefore the aim of this thesis to understand the macro context in which the micro (individuals and households) is embedded and the dynamic processes which shape the relationship between the micro and macro.

Lastly, the concept of "labour" as defined in the framework is very limited. It refers to what will later be defined as petty, capitalist production and social

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<sup>8</sup> Sen, 1984; Folbre, 1994; Kabeer, 1994

<sup>9</sup> Rosenzweig (1986) makes a similar conclusion in research study conducted in India and the Philippines.

reproduction. While there is an attempt to include unpaid work done mostly by women, the framework does not capture the complexity of such an activity. As argued, a broader definition of “work” captures many other activities that may or may not be remunerated, often based on principles of obligation or reciprocity. A distinction between work and employment is thus made, where the latter is paid and specific industrial relations occur.<sup>10</sup>

More importantly, neglected are key household dynamics that shape how work is allocated. The sexual division of labour (Pahl, 1984 and Mackintosh, 1988) and allocation of work time within households is guided by the gender-age effect. Rosenzweig’s (1986, cited in Kabeer 1994) research conducted in India and the Philippines by shows a closer substitutability between the labour of women and children, particularly girls, in domestic chores. Women, especially in poorer households such as those in Africa and India, have to balance their time so that they are able to perform both their wage labour and their domestic work – their “invisible” labour.

The questions raised in the study are: Does women’s access to income-earning opportunities has any implications for gender relations within the household? Is economic dependency a major factor in structuring bargaining inequalities between women and men (Kabeer, 1997)? The thesis explores ways in which lack of income by men and income access by women through state transfers lead to serious tensions in households, not only between men and women, but also between young women and elders. Therefore, gender as well as inter-relational relations shapes inter-household dynamics.

The framework also fails to problematise specific livelihood activities such as the informal economy. Many theorists have discussed the role of the informal economy in society.<sup>11</sup> A few have argued that this economy can go a long way in

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<sup>10</sup> Discussed further in the next section of this chapter.

<sup>11</sup>The informal economy has been growing in many parts of Southern Africa, and South Africa is not an exception. In South Africa, only 20 per cent of the working population work in the formal economy (Torres *et al.*, 2001). Portes and Sassen-Koob (1987:31) define the informal economy as

reducing poverty, and indeed be a vehicle for resisting state oppression (Shanin, 1988; De Soto, 1989). However, the informal economy does not give rise to a sustainable livelihood given the absence of a labour force that has a regular wage and whose conditions of work and pay are not legally regulated. It “simultaneously encompasses flexibility and exploitation and abuse, aggressive entrepreneurs and defenceless workers, libertarianism and greediness”; above all, “there is disfranchisement of the institutionalised power conquered by labour” (Castells & Portes, 1996:11).<sup>12</sup>

The informal economy is thus very often survivalist, offering insecure work and increasing the number of “working poor” in society. As shown later, the informal economy is often the only livelihood activity for many retrenched and unemployed South Africans.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, it becomes impossible to argue for the sustainability of such precarious livelihood activities where the alleviation of poverty is not in sight for those working in the informal economy. However, this illustrates the problematic nature of the term “sustainable” when applied to an urban context and to precarious livelihood activities. Therefore, it is dangerous to encourage the informal economy as a panacea for development, eradication of poverty and reduction of inequality.

Furthermore, Murray (2001:7) also identifies the following weaknesses of the

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“all work situations characterised by the absence of (1) a clear separation between capital and labour; (2) a contractual relationship between both; and (3) a labour force that is paid wages and whose conditions of work and pay are legally regulated”. They also argue that the informal economy is structurally heterogeneous and comprises such activities as “direct subsistence, small scale production and trade, subcontracting to semi-clandestine enterprises and homework” (Portes & Sassen-Koob 1987:31).

<sup>12</sup> The link between the formal and the informal economy has often become artificial given the increase of workplace and industrial restructuring. The link is not necessarily confined to the growth of one and the decline of another. There is a more complex relationship between the two. In fact, the informal economy often entirely depends on the success of the formal economy through subcontracted and outsourced work. A more symbiotic relationship between the formal and informal economy is established and promoted.

<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon is particularly applicable in developing countries, where there are limited employment opportunities for the retrenched and unemployed. There is generally no safety net for the retrenched workers. In advanced countries, retrenchment does not necessarily mean unemployment as the possibility of finding another job is much greater and a safety net is provided by the state (Milkman, 1997).

sustainable livelihoods approach and framework:

- Elements of the ‘vulnerability context,’ such as rampant inflation and extreme uncivil conflict and ripples of mass redundancy, are surely much more important than would appear to be allowed for.
- The language of ‘multiplier effects’ predominates, as does the presumption that is it possible to expand people’s ‘assets pentagons’ in a generalised and incremental fashion. Inequalities of power and conflict of interest are not, perhaps, sufficiently acknowledged, either within local ‘communities’ themselves or between ‘communities’ and, for example, regional elites and government agencies
- The notion of ‘participation’ that dominates the discourse of intervention- with typically unresolved tension between two words- presupposes heavy investment in ‘community’ on the part of donor agencies and thence a rhetorical tendency to disguise or weaken the probability that, in one way or another, enhancement of the livelihoods of one group or stratum or class will undermine the livelihoods of another group or stratum or class
- The qualifier ‘sustainable’ begs many questions which are not resolved even by positive ‘livelihood outcomes’ of the kind indicated in the framework. ‘Sustainable’ for whom? By what criteria? In the short term or long term?

Therefore, this thesis argues that even though the livelihoods approach and framework are useful as a general starting point, they are nonetheless limited in understanding the livelihood activities pursued by urban households.

## **1.4 Reconceptualising Work**

This section of the chapter take further the discussion on the livelihoods approach by arguing for a broader and context-specific definition of work that includes all household activities done by both men and women. Furthermore, the discussion on work builds on the earlier discussion of households as social units of production and reproduction. It is argued that the work that takes place in the household is not only deemed important for the livelihood of household members,

but also for the broader economy. Hence households are often referred to as the “real hidden abode” of production.

How, then, is work defined? How does it contribute to the well being of the household and community? This research seeks to expand the definition of work from an exclusive focus on productive activities for direct monetary gain – that is, wage labour – to putting primacy on social reproduction and the unpaid work done at home typically by women. The argument here is that formal wage labour or formal and informal entrepreneurship are but two among many diverse livelihood activities utilised by urban households. As a result, the household will be viewed as a complex economic and social unit. This signals a shift away from just focusing on a generalised understanding of employment (paid work) and social reproduction (unpaid work) to a range of livelihood activities pursued in South Africa (Elson, 1991; Moser, 1992).

Work is defined in this thesis as “a social activity where an individual or group puts in effort during a specific time and space, sometimes with the expectation of monetary – or other kinds of – rewards, or with no expectation of reward, but with a sense of obligation to others” (Webster, Buhlungu & Bezuidenhout, 2003:7). Grown and Sebstad (1989:939) also argue that work includes “different degrees and levels of participation in economic activity” such as “employment, the exchange of labour services for payment in cash or in kind; non-market or subsistence production; and unpaid domestic maintenance activities in women’s homes and on family farms”. A distinction is thus drawn between the production of goods and services and the reproduction of labour itself in which both social relations of work are structured by patterns of domination or subordination.

The kind of work that takes place in the household is often premised on the social principles of reciprocity, obligation and specific social relations based on patriarchy (Pahl, 1984). This includes housework that produces goods and services for immediate consumption, and is not subject to the law of value. Hence, simple economic data that focuses on employment and labour force participation



neglects the range of economic activities mostly done by women. It is inadequate as an indicator of how people spend their time and the social value of what they do, and obscures relationships underlying women's participation (Grown & Sebstad, 1989:939).

It thus becomes clear that it is necessary to expand the definition of work from an exclusive focus on productive activities for direct pecuniary returns to include putting primacy on reproductive work – the unpaid work done at home, typically by young women. However, this changes in a context where the majority of young women are estimated to be infected and or affected by HIV/AIDS and thus unable to work. In such circumstances, it is older women who take up much of the household work – the burden of social reproduction.

According to Gabriele Dietrich (1996:344), primacy should be placed on the **production of life itself**, which is “the basic production process” and without which **extended production** is impossible. Emphasis is placed on understanding work in the specific social relations and localities in which it is embedded, taking into consideration all work that all household members do. The household is looked at as a collective rather than focusing on one household member who happens to be a wage earner and “head of the household”.

This thesis will attempt to provide data from the two research sites on households' work, but specifically women's work time, their means of production, their output, their labour power and the proceeds of their output (Standing, 1989). This is done to understand women's economic and social contribution to their households and communities, within the social context that shapes and defines the nature and potential of these economic and social contributions. This thesis will suggest a departure from simple econometrics data that do not take into account the social and power dynamics that are embedded in economic activities.

In addition, the simple dichotomy between employment and unemployment is questioned since it obscures the number of social and economic activities that take

place in households, especially in the informal economy. There are a number of individuals who are not necessarily employed but who contribute to household income. The simple dichotomy misses the process of “income diversification” by individuals and households. It also misses other activities within the household that are not necessarily remunerated but that make significant contributions to the survival of households and communities. So it questions the simple classification of work between paid and unpaid, given that in each category there are many diverse activities such as a voluntary home-based HIV/AIDS worker and a woman who takes care of the children, cooks and cleans the house for her family. Seeking to gain a holistic understanding of household economies, this thesis explores these various activities.

Various economic activities take place in households. These include social reproduction, subsistence production, petty commodity production and capitalist commodity production (Wield & Chataway, 2001). As mentioned earlier, these are often gendered activities, influenced and affected by their socio-economic and cultural contexts (see Table 1.2).

**Table 1.2: Work and Production**

<b>Form of Work</b>	<b>Remuneration</b>	<b>Principles/Relations</b>	<b>Examples</b>
Social Reproduction Production	Unpaid and unremunerated	Obligation and reciprocity	Domestic work and child care
Subsistence Production	Unpaid and unremunerated	Obligation and reciprocity	Agricultural production, dress making
Petty Commodity Production	Unpaid and remunerated	Market principles Self-employment and employer-employee relations	Informal economy (legal and illegal), homework
Capitalist Commodity Production	Remunerated	Market principles Employer-employee relations	Full-time employment, casual labour

*Source: adapted from Wield and Chataway (2001).*

First, *social reproduction* is unpaid and unremunerated work based on the principles of obligation and/or reciprocity. It includes work that women often do in households, such as childcare, domestic work and voluntary work. It will be

argued later that older women often do this kind of work at home since they are unemployed and younger women are often out searching for work. Work done in the household differs from wage labour since it is unpaid. While it is not subject to the law of value, it is nevertheless affected by its operation. This issue was the subject of extensive debate in the 1970s on whether housework was “labour or love” and what economic function it fulfilled within capitalism. A key question raised by the “domestic labour debate” was whether men’s wives and partners should be paid for household work. Many feminists felt that paying women wages for doing housework would institutionalise, rather than challenge, patriarchy (Beechey, 1987).

Social reproduction can also include voluntary work that is based mainly on the principle of reciprocity between households.<sup>14</sup> Such work has indeed increased over the years in the two communities studied, especially given the decrease in disposable income from wage labour because of unemployment and the high prevalence of HIV and AIDS. In both research sites, this work is mainly initiated through various community organisations, mainly church organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Second, *subsistence production* is also unpaid and unremunerated based on principles of obligation. An example is agricultural production for own use. The research data shows that, contrary to many beliefs, this kind of economic activity is not confined only to rural households but increasingly urban households engage in this activity for their livelihood. In many households, subsistence production becomes the only livelihood activity that ensures food security. Therefore, the burden is often placed on those whose responsibility is to mend and maintain agricultural production, and the majority of those are again older women.

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<sup>14</sup> For example, in his study of Mpondo social life in South Africa, Kuckertz (1990) identifies four different types of organised labour and their distinctive principles in the village. First, there is household production based on familial obligation; second, there is organised labour such as work parties from different homesteads based on the principle of request; third, there is a type of labour based on special agreement between homestead and reciprocal co-operation; finally, there are very limited wage labour and self-employment opportunities. The distribution of work in the village is also based on the sexual division of labour, and on age or seniority. The most common type of work parties in the village is a cultivation group (*ukulima* in the local language).

Food security is an intrinsic part of households' livelihoods. The definition of food security has changed over the years. It has shifted from the global, the national to the household, the community and the individual. For example, in 1975 the United Nations defined food security as the "availability at all times of adequate world supplies of basic food-stuffs ... to sustain a steady expansion of food consumption ... and to offset fluctuations in production and prices" (cited in Maxwell, 2001).

In 1981, Amartya Sen argued for a much broader definition that emphasises access to food rather than availability of food. He argues that access to food security depends largely on people's entitlements through production, trade, own labour, inheritance, and transfers. The disintegration of entitlements to food is associated with food starvation. Therefore, not everyone experiences starvation; it depends on individual and household entitlements. Sen's entitlement approach has been criticised for failing to understand African famine is often associated with conflict rather than drought (Devereux, 2001).

Sen (1981) also points out the weaknesses of the entitlement approach. First, property rights in Africa are more complex and as such it becomes difficult to aggregate an individual's or household's entitlement to food. In most parts of Africa, the state owns the land, and community leaders often control it. Second, the approach says little about situations where an individual's ownership rights are violated through looting and cattle raids. Lastly, the approach excludes situations of voluntary starvation for a number of reasons (Sen, 1981; Devereux, 2001).

Access to food has been a major source of concern and conflict in many households, urban and rural. Over the years, households and individuals have varied their activities to access food. The argument is that urban households tend to be more vulnerable, given that they depend mostly on income to access food while rural households rely on subsistence agricultural production. However, the trend is slowly changing, with more and more urban households engaging in

subsistence agricultural production. Sustainable food security also depends on a number of resources to which households, communities and individuals have access or entitled, especially in the long term. Hence, arguments to move from a “food-first approach” to a “sustainable food security approach” have evolved (Maxwell, 1991, 2001).

At national and global level, there have been a number of initiatives over the years, especially in Africa.<sup>15</sup> While these initiatives have made significant progress, especially on placing food security on the agenda, the number of vulnerable communities, households and individuals has been on the rise throughout Africa (Devereux, 2001).

Third, there is *petty commodity production*, which is unpaid but remunerated through the market. A number of activities are included: the informal economy, homework, self-employment and agricultural production. As argued earlier, in a context of industrial and workplace restructuring, with specific reference to outsourcing and subcontracting, industrial homework<sup>16</sup> is increasing. Because of unemployment due to downsizing and factory closures, many have found refuge in the informal economy as entrepreneurs but also as manufacturers.<sup>17</sup> The diversity and heterogeneity of the informal economy often means that its activities are diverse, with varying degrees of exploitation. Evidence indicates that the informal economy is also a gendered economy, with more women taking up informal economy work. This research shows how these petty commodity production activities are often survivalist in nature and that those who engage in them often remain in poverty.

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<sup>15</sup> See Maxwell (2001) for details.

<sup>16</sup> Homework is defined as “a form of wage work undertaken by families at home for large or small firms, usually on a piece-rate basis. Its domestic location, coupled with the fact that there is usually something illegal about homework, means that it represents an almost clandestine employment” (Peck, 1996:161).

<sup>17</sup> It is estimated that 15-20 per cent of informal-economy work involves some form of manufacturing enterprise throughout the region, and it seems as if subcontracting is less common in South Africa than elsewhere (Castells, 1998). Refer to the conclusions made by Mosoetsa (2000).

Lastly, there is *capitalist commodity production* where the relations of production are significantly different. It involves a specific set of relations between the employed (those who do not own the means of production) and the employers (those who own the means of production). The aims are different as well – that is, either wage or profit. Within this relationship, there are various forms of contract entered into by employers and employees, which inevitably shape the nature of employer-employee relations. Casualisation and the subcontracting of labour make such relations even more complex.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, capitalist commodity production (full-time permanent work) has significantly declined in two specific sectors in South Africa, the clothing and textile industry and the footwear industry.<sup>19</sup> Instead, homework and casualisation of labour have increased. As Standing (1989, 1997) points out, in this era of market deregulation, there is more income insecurity given the nature of employment available and the shift in government policies.

Income security is defined in a workplace as the protection of income through minimum wage, wage indexation, comprehensive social security and progressive taxation (Standing, 1997). Women are often vulnerable to income and employment insecurity given the sectors in which they work. Their vulnerability increases when they become home-based workers earning on piecemeal rates, as invisible workers in the informal economy, and as casual or “flexible” workers. According to Standing (1989), since the 1980s the type of work, labour relations, income and insecurity associated with women’s work have been spreading.

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<sup>18</sup>This phenomenon is growing rapidly in South Africa, as documented by Bezuidenhout and Kenny (1999), who argue that in South Africa between 1987 and 1997 part-time and casual employment has increased from 11,8 per cent of total employment, to over 19 per cent. See also Theron (1996) and Rees (1997). In manufacturing (textile, clothing and leather goods) part-time employment has increased from 3 023 workers in 1998 to 9 822 in 1999 (Bezuidenhout & Kenny, 1999). Most common in both the clothing and textile sector and the footwear industry is the use of independent contractors from organisations like the Confederation of Employers of Southern Africa (COFESA) to increase the flexibility of a number of workers by turning workers into independent contractors and thereby evading labour legislation.

<sup>19</sup> These were the two dominant sectors and main source of wage work in the two research sites.

Under serious economic changes, such as the ones experienced in South Africa in the two chosen locales (Durban and Greytown), formal employment is decreasing and social reproduction, subsistence production and petty commodity production become central to the survival of many households and indeed many communities. The household becomes the first means of survival for many poor and unemployed people.

## 1.5 Conclusion

Central to this chapter is a departure from the simple livelihoods approach towards a more complex understanding of how households and communities are surviving. Adopted is a complex version of the livelihoods approach that focuses on the material, social and political survival activities of the poor. Such a **socio-political and economic approach** will offer a holistic conceptual framework for understanding how urban poor households and communities survive.

The aim of this thesis is to move beyond the livelihood framework (Chambers, 1997; Carney, 1998; Moser, 1998; Scoones, 1998; Rakodi, 1999), specifically the concept of “social capital” or assets. Drawing on Beall (2001b), the intention is to embrace arguments that focus on the social and political resources of people that seek to explain more dynamic and holistic societal relations both within and without households that afford household members agency without this being understood in overly economic terms. Hence, central to this thesis is an argument towards a **relational approach**, paying particular attention to how people employ their resources and to the power dynamics both inside and outside the household that serve to facilitate or constrain the exercise of agency. The research findings, for example, confirm that norms and relationships recently understood as social capital have been in existence in many parts of the world for a long time, including South Africa (see Beall, 2001b; Maluccio, Haddad & May, 1999).

Such a considered livelihoods approach will enable not only a holistic understanding of households' livelihoods but also of community livelihoods, and therefore link these livelihoods to a broader social, political and economic context at local, provincial, national and international levels. This approach is a shift away from consensual and apolitical views of households, communities and the world of work and how it is embedded.

As the case of Mpumalanga and Enhlalakahle Townships in KwaZulu-Natal will show, social, economic and political resources are an integral part of daily and long-term livelihood activities in households and communities. Such social alliances and networks, formal or informal, are formed and renegotiated to respond to the new context and crisis of poverty, lack of service delivery, unemployment and HIV/AIDS. These are expressed through newly formed and old community organisations such as church organisations, political parties, burial societies and various social movement groups that have emerged in the post-apartheid era.

The thesis acknowledges that communities, like households, are not homogeneous units working for the benefit of all. Indeed, social and political dynamics within communities have serious implications for households' access to resources. It is important, therefore, to take cognisance of the power and social relations that take place in communities through their various social, economic and political networks and organisations. The years of political violence led to fragmentation and lack of social cohesion, undermining a sense of community in the two research sites. More recently, relationships have been forged again to demand access to key resources such as water and electricity.

The next chapter deals specifically with South Africa's social security framework and begins to contextualise the two research sites. The question grappled with is whether South Africa's social security framework is a move away from the limitations of the livelihood framework. It offers progressive and innovative ways of understanding and dealing with broader issues of poverty.