The policy implications of time use surveys: Lessons from South Africa

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Introduction: Where our South African work fits in

I am attending this seminar wearing two hats. My first hat is as a member of the time use team at Statistics South Africa, our government statistical agency. I have been on a part-time, but long-term, secondment to Stats SA for the past eighteen months, and will remain on secondment until the completion of the time use survey. My second hat is as an employee of the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE), a non-governmental research organisation which has been a key player in the South African Women’s Budget Initiative. In this talk I hope to show how the work I do wearing these hats fits together.

The objectives of this seminar, as outlined in the background documentation, can be summarised as follows:

- Discussion of concepts, methodologies and operationalisation of time use studies in developing countries;
- Discussion of policy implications of findings of time use studies, in particular in relation to gender equity; and
- Assessment of the implications of the survey for labour and employment measures and policies and the development of satellite accounts.

These points match very closely with the objectives of the first national South African time use survey, which is currently being coordinated by Statistics South Africa, our official statistical agency, with financial and technical assistance from Statistics Norway. We have formulated the rationale for our study as follows:

> The time use study will measure and analyse the time spent from day-to-day by different individuals - women and men, girls and boys, rural and urban, rich and poor - on all major activities. The study will provide greater understanding to policy-makers on the economic and social well-being of different groups. It will provide new information on the division of both paid and unpaid labour between women and men and other groupings. It will provide greater insight into reproductive and leisure activities of household members, as well as into less well-understood productive activities such as subsistence work, casual work and work in the informal sector.

As can be seen, this formulation echoes the intention of this workshop in relation to improvement of concepts, methodology and measurement of all types of work and activity, the feeding of the resultant information into better policy-making, and the focus on gender equity.

At the outset, however, I must state that we are relative novices in the field of time use. Last month, November, we conducted the pilot for the first South African national time use survey. The first tranche of the survey proper will only go into field in February, next year. That tranche will be followed by a further two tranches in June and October, so that we can catch seasonal variations in time use. We will therefore only start having our first results in the middle of next year, with full results in 2001.

Thus today, instead of talking about how we have used time use results for policy purposes, I will talk about how we plan to use them. I will talk about some of the ways in which we think that time use can strengthen policy-making. I will talk about how time use can contribute to making
government policy more equitable - between women and men, black and white people, and people from different geographical regions. I will talk about how time use can help in making the invisible visible - and thus something to be taken into account by policy-makers. I will talk about how the policy orientation of our time use study has influenced the way in which we are designing it.

In talking about the uses we hope to make of the time use study, I will draw on our experience in South Africa of what we call the Women's Budget Initiative. This Initiative, which is also an attempt to influence government policy, looks at how government allocates its resources, and how that allocation affects women and men, girls and boys, rich and poor, young and old. It is different from the Phillippines Gender and Development Budget Policy, which some of you might be aware of. That Policy states that all government agencies must allocate at least 5% of their budgets to programs and projects addressing women or gender concerns. The South African Initiative asks, rather, what is happening to the whole cake i.e. what is the effect of each and every expenditure on different groups.

There are many overlaps between the type of analysis and arguments we use in the Women’s Budget and those that we will use in our time use analysis. In South Africa both, I think, will be strengthened by each other. I hope that some of what we have learned in the budget initiative may also be useful to people in other countries.

I know that the people attending this workshop will have different levels of knowledge about South Africa. Those of us who have lived through the troubles of the country over the past decades are often so involved in them that we assume that everyone else must be as involved and knowledgeable about them. I will try to avoid assuming background knowledge but also try to avoid overloading you with unnecessary facts and figures. Both the time use and Women’s Budget initiatives are, however, children of the history of the country. That history can be seen in the fact that we focus so strongly on race, class and geography at the same time as gender. I would argue that in all countries gender will need to be looked at in combination with other variables. Which of these are most important will, however, depend on the history and politics of a particular country.

**History of the initiatives**

As I said, we are still in the early stages of our time use study. The first time I thought seriously about time use, and became excited by its broad-ranging implications, was in 1993, the year before our first democratic elections. That was an exciting time in the country, with everyone’s attentions focused on what we wanted the “new” country to look like.

Gender, alongside race, was a key issue in the discussions. Women inside the country had played an important and acknowledged role in the liberation struggle, in leadership and other roles. They had played this role despite our isolation from international conferences and other happenings associated with the international decades of women. Meanwhile the women who had been in exile outside the country, and who returned after the liberation movements were unbanned in 1991, had been exposed to the international developments and brought back that experience with them.

One of the returned exiles was Frene Ginwala, who later became the first speaker the national parliament of the new, democratic South Africa. In 1993 Frene was overall head of the Women’s National Coalition (WNC). This coalition brought together women from across the political spectrum in a campaign to ensure that the constitution of the new country would be gender-sensitive. As a start, the WNC ensured that each party participating in the constitutional talks had women representatives. Further, one of the main activities of the WNC was an extended research and mobilisation campaign which attempted to hear, from as many women as possible across the
country, what they wanted to see in the new South Africa. The output of that campaign was a
Charter for Effective Equality which was presented to the constitution-making process. As I will
show below, this Charter fed into our later Women’s Budget initiative.

While this very public process was happening, Frene organised a small workshop on unpaid
labour which, in my mind, laid the seeds for our time use study. The workshop was attended by
under 20 people, of whom close on half were from outside the country. The international experts
included leading feminist economists such as Diane Elson, and Lourdes Beneria, an expert on
integrating unpaid labour into national accounts. For me and for others who attended, the
workshop was a complete eye-opener. Suddenly I began seeing unpaid labour all over, and
recognising the difference this made to the way one understood the world. At university I had
studied economics. Now I at last understood why so many of the economic theories I had been
taught were elegant, but bore little relation to how the world actually worked.

The workshop opened some of our eyes but, as noted above, we have only recently started
working seriously on the time use study. What happened meanwhile was that in 1995, one year
after the first elections, a small group of parliamentarians and representatives of non-governmental
organisations (NGOs) came together to discuss how we could analyse the impact of the national
budget in gender terms.

The parliamentarians were women who had come into parliament determined to take forward the
struggle for equality in which they had been involved during the apartheid years. They wanted to
see how, as parliamentarians, they could help to address the plight of those disadvantaged in terms
of race, gender and class. The collaboration with the NGOs reflected two important points –
firstly, a belief in the importance of solid information if lobbying and advocacy is to be effective
and, secondly, a belief in the importance of public participation in politics and decision-making.

The MPs and NGOs all supported the new African National Congress (ANC) government. They
had a firm foundation from which to fight in that the constitution entrenched gender equality
alongside race equality (and many other equalities) at the top of the bill of rights. Everyone was
talking then, and still talks, about the need to move towards a non-racist and non-sexist South
Africa.

At the same time, those who had gained power were becoming increasingly aware that there were
limited resources to meet needs that sometimes seemed limitless. During apartheid it was easy to
put forward all our demands without worrying about how they could be met. Closer to power,
those who had entered government and the new parliamentarians soon realised that not all the
needs could be met at once. In particular, the women parliamentarians realised that all the items
on the Charter for Effective Equality could not be achieved immediately. There would need to be
prioritisation, both between the “women’s” items and others, and among the “women’s” items.
One of the most important ways in which governments give effect to their priorities is through
budgets – through how much they allocate to one service or sector as opposed to another.

It’s politics!
The Women’s Budget Initiative started small. In the first year we analysed the budgets of six
different ministries. We also analysed public sector employment. This was important because of
the need to make the public service – and particularly the decision-making levels – more
representative of the population in terms of race and gender. In addition, we analysed taxation,
thus recognising that a budget comprises two sides, both of which can affect women and men
differently. In the subsequent two years we completed comprehensive analyses of all 27 national
ministries and a less comprehensive analysis of what was happening with provincial budgets. In
the fourth year we moved on to look at local government budgets and donor funding to government.
We think that our work has by now proved fairly conclusively that there are gender issues to be addressed in all sectors of government activity.

When we distributed our research findings after the first year, we found a receptive audience ranging from people in NGOs through government employees to cabinet ministers. We got a lot of praise for our work, but also some negative responses and some confusion. One of the most interesting responses came from a senior budget official in the Department of Finance. He said that what we were doing was not budget analysis, it was politics!

Our response was that any discussion of budgets must be political, because budgets reflect political decisions. The budget is, arguably, the most important policy statement of any government. A government can make the best policies in the world. The first years of the new government saw a flurry of white papers, as each ministry developed its statement of how it would move from the apartheid past. However, unless a government allocates the resources to implement those policies, they are simply paper promises.

As we worked further in the Women’s Budget exercise, we realised that there are four stages to a meaningful analysis of the budget of a particular sector (ministry):

- The first step is to describe the situation of women, men, girls, boys and other groupings in relation to that sector. For example, with education, we would want to look at disaggregated literacy rates, enrolment rates at different levels, returns to education, and so on;
- The second step is to describe the government’s policy in relation to the sector. And then to see whether that policy matches the situation described in the first step in addressing different needs and inequities;
- The third step, if the policy has been found to be gender-sensitive, is to see whether sufficient resources (budgets) have been allocated to implement these policies. In many countries - including post-apartheid South Africa - we have been very good at writing good policy, but have sometimes done so without considering resource constraints. The question then becomes which aspects of policies receive the limited resources available;
- The fourth step is monitoring, to measure whether the money reaches the people it was intended to reach, and produces the planned services. Many countries have started including this step in their budget process, in the form of programme or performance budgeting. For gender analysis, we are also interested in how many of the beneficiaries are men and women, what their income levels are, which area they come from, and so on. In short, we want disaggregation of what budget people call output and outcome measures.

Where does time use fit in?
The four steps above point to the fact that budget analysis requires facts and figures. It is not only money figures that are required. We also need figures that describe the situation, and figures that measure outputs and outcomes. Figures are important for government so that it can measure if its policies are having an effect over time. Figures are also important for lobbyists, as - especially when talking to technocrats - they help in your being taken seriously.

When we started doing budget analysis, we soon realised that we did not have many of the figures we needed. South Africa has relatively good basic demographic and administrative figures. They are not perfect, but they are not wildly incorrect. What we did not - and still do not - have are figures to measure the things that are often less visible. The most important of these was unpaid labour.
In the first workshop with researchers for the Women’s Budget Initiative, one of our first exercises was to brainstorm the different roles which women and men usually play in society. The divisions we came up with were predictable. They are not identical across all societies, but show similar patterns. In particular, we found that women were far more likely than men to be involved in unpaid and underpaid work. They were more likely than men to be doing the reproductive work in the economy - bearing, rearing and caring for children, caring for other household members, cooking, cleaning, fetching water and fuel. Men, meanwhile, were more likely to be doing “productive” work, producing goods and services exchanged in the market. Further, where women were doing productive work, they were more likely than men to be producing intangibles – services – while men were more likely to be producing tangible goods.

When we thought and read more about this, we realised that the bulk of the work that men do is built into economic theory, while much of the work done by women is invisible. The classic flow of goods and services taught in economics classes has two basic sectors - the private sector and the public (government) sector. These two sectors produce and exchange goods and services. Households are missing from this picture. Or, if they are there, they are seen simply as consumers.

In truth, households produce something without which the rest of the structure would not exist. Households produce the people who make the other two sectors work, and for whom the other two sectors work. In order to produce these people, households produce a wide range of goods and services. Many of these services have their equivalents in the market economy. For example, one can pay for a domestic worker to clean, for a cook to prepare your meals, for a nursemaid to look after your child. But, as everyone in this room will know, far more of these caring services are provided on an unpaid basis. And they are left out of both economic models and the reckoning of the GDP which is meant to measure the wealth and productivity of a country. Yet it is this measure which the World Bank, IMF and investors use to rate a country’s progress.

In one of the chapters of our second book, we discussed what an alternative economic theory might be, arguing that “empowering people to understand economics and budgets is … of limited use unless economics itself changes.” Quoting Diane Elson, we said that new theories were important because “the first stage in changing priorities is to change understandings” (Budlender, 1997b:53).

Traditional macro-economic theory sees only two productive sectors – the state sector and the private sector. To the extent that it acknowledges households, it sees them simply as consumption units. Elson’s model adds households as a third productive sector, which she terms the “care economy”. To quote her again, the model “recognises that resources - including time - are ‘scarce’, or at least limited, in the care economy as well as in the other two.” (Budlender, 1997b:53). Secondly, the goods and services produced by any one of the three sectors will impact upon those produced by another. For example, provision of public services such as water, electricity and housing contribute towards improved productivity in the care sector.

We also drew on the work of Ingrid Palmer, a German economist. Palmer suggests that women’s unpaid domestic and childrearing work should be understood as a tax they pay before engaging in economic activity [Quoted in Bakker, 1994: 5]. Thus, while men will usually contribute more than women in monetary taxes (because they are more likely to be employed, more likely to work in the formal sector, and more likely to earn higher pay), women contribute heavily to the general good in the form of sweat equity.

Palmer goes further than this and argues that, contrary to popular economic belief, there is no conflict between gender equity and economic efficiency if one considers the full range of social and economic costs. She defines the labour force as an externality or public good, in the sense that it is produced largely for free in the sense that there are no charges to the user other than wages.
However, as with other public goods, there can be other very real costs. The government contributes on one hand, to the extent that its budget provides for health and education services. However, the main cost “is borne through the double-day of women and through goods and services found by women. This occurs through the social constructions, predominantly marriage.” (Palmer, 197:3-4).

**Does it matter if we don’t count unpaid work?**

The glossary to the 1999 South African Budget Review defines GDP as “a measure of total national output, income and expenditure in the economy. GDP per head is the simplest overall measure of welfare, although it does not take account of the distribution of income, nor of goods and services that are produced outside the economy, such as work within the household.” (Department of Finance, 1999)

Unquestioning use of GDP suggests that it is not really important if GDP does not measure, or take account, of the unpaid labour that happens within the household and elsewhere. In our budget analysis, we felt strongly that it did matter.

- In our analysis of the budget of the Department\(^1\) of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF), we pointed to the long hours that women and girls spent collecting water where there was not a tap on their dwelling site. DWAF “saves” costs by not providing water schemes to these households but, in so doing, imposes costs on individuals, households, and ultimately the society. The women and girls involved are not able to use the time spent fetching water for other more productive purposes or on leisure. Where they are pushed for time and the water is too far or contaminated, it could well result in ill-health within the household. This in turn imposes the costs of accessing health care - costs which are borne both by the household and the society. And so on.

In some of the first tests for our time use survey, we became aware of an additional time burden borne by members of households which do not have water and electricity. We found that, after fetching the water and fuel, people would then spend additional time lighting fires to heat the water to use for bathing, washing and other purposes. We have made a special new code for this for our time use survey.

- In looking at the Department of Minerals and Energy, we found that apartheid policy focused on providing cheap electricity to the mines and industry, rather than assisting with cooking, heating and other needs in the home. Here again we have added to the trial international classification, by specifying a sub-code for collecting fuel.

- In analysing the policy and budget of the Welfare Ministry, Francie Lund commented on the government’s policy of promoting community care of vulnerable groups rather than direct provision by government. The government pointed to the high cost of keeping old people, the disabled, or orphans in institutions. It noted that these services were usually available mainly to white people under apartheid, and it was not possible, financially, to extend them to everyone.

Lund acknowledged that extension of the same facilities that had always been available to white people to the full population would be very expensive. However, she noted that a “double equation” was at work, in which community care is equivalent to care by families which is equivalent to unpaid care performed primarily by women. She stated that the policy

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\(^1\) In South Africa the term “department” is used where “ministry” would be used in many other countries. The term “ministry” is reserved for the office of the minister.
of community care “rests on the assumption that there is an endless supply of women’s unpaid work, and that this is not an economic variable. It shifts the costs of caring from the formal to the informal sector. It is much more difficult to ‘do the accounting’ when this happens.” (Lund, 1996:115).

Lund’s view can be compared to that expressed in the government’s Budget Review of 1998. That publication stated that “communities themselves are often able to provide more appropriate social services than institutions. In these instances community care is also usually a more cost efficient alternative to institutionalisation.” (Department of Finance, 1998:6.60). Time use studies enable us to do some kind of accounting. They also allow us to question concepts such as “cost efficient”, by asking about costs beyond the monetary expenses borne by government.

In the Women’s Budget Initiative we asked whether the government could not provide some small contribution to those who would care for vulnerable people. This would serve both as an incentive to provide care, and as an acknowledgement of the time that the carers - usually women - would devote to the job. This question is becoming ever more pertinent and urgent with the high levels of HIV/AIDS in the country, and the increasing numbers of AIDS orphans who will need people to care for them.

- In our analysis of many sectors - including Health, Welfare and Transport - we learnt of the long hours which people spent reaching services and waiting to be served. A recent South African health survey found that approximately one-sixth of those who had visited a primary care facility or hospital in the previous year said they travelled for at least an hour to reach the facilities. African people in rural areas were worst place – close on a third travelled an hour or more. The survey did find some improvement in this respect compared to the results of a 1994 survey, reflecting the achievement of the government’s clinic-building programme.

Once they had arrived at the facility, more than a third of the survey respondents who had attended a primary care facility waited more than an hour, while over half waited this long when attending hospitals (Smith et al, 1999:15-6). In our time use survey we are attempting to capture this waiting element by adding an “8” as the third digit of the activity code. We know that we will not capture all waiting, as many informants will see the waiting time as part of the activity for which they are waiting. But we are interested to see how often informants - and which informants - specifically mention waiting. We are particularly interested in where they are waiting for government services because, if this is excessive, it again becomes a direct policy issue.

In the examples above we were sometimes able to draw on sources which provides some indications of the time people were spending on different activities. The sources were, however, extremely limited and suggestive rather than providing conclusive evidence for what we were trying to do. The time use study should provide us with much more solid evidence of what lengths of time we are talking about, and how these are distributed among different categories of people. This will both strengthen our arguments, and allow policy-makers to target their interventions

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2 In the apartheid era, all South Africans were classified in one of four population (race) groups – African, coloured, Indian and white. The current government rejects these racist classifications, but is committed to continue collecting statistics on a racial basis so as to measure how far we have moved in countering the historical effects of apartheid. The order in which the groups are named above reflects the relative levels of disadvantage and discrimination under apartheid. African people were most discriminated and white people most privileged.
more accurately. The new statistics will provide the empirical support for gender equitable
demands which can otherwise, too often, be seen as simply ideological and emotive.

There are also other policy implications from time use, beyond unpaid labour. We can look, for
example, at the timing of services.

- In one of the focus groups conducted alongside the recent health survey, a middle-aged women
  from a rural area noted that the clinic would only attend to those who arrived early in the
  morning. This was a problem for her and others with responsibility for children: “Sometimes
  you can only go in the afternoon because in the morning you are preparing your children for
  school.” (Smith et al, 1999:16). Opening hours of clinics can also affect gender roles. In
  Barbados a policy of extending opening hours beyond normal work hours has seen an increase
  in the number of men who take their children for health care.

- In the Women’s Budget analysis of local governments, we learnt that all municipalities were
  complaining that many households were not paying for services such as electricity, water and
  refuse removal. Some of these households said they were too poor to pay. But others who did
  have money nevertheless did not pay. Some municipalities have realised that one of the
  important factors is where you place paypoints. If you only have paypoints in the centre of the
  town, while many of the poor (black) people live far from the centre, where must they find the
  travel money and time to go and pay for services?

- In our analysis of the Department of Health, we learnt that some clinics were providing one
  service - say contraception - on Mondays, services in respect of sexually transmitted diseases
  (STDs) on Tuesday, services for tuberculosis (TB) on Wednesday and so on. The Department
  has now realised the importance of integrated services, where all services are available every
  day. Again, it is women who will benefit most from this. Firstly, women have greater need to
  visit health services because of the extra reproductive health needs which they have in
  comparison to men. Secondly, it is often women who will take other household members to the
  clinic when they are unable to go alone.

- In our analysis of the Department of Transport, we realised that public transport was planned
  around the needs of the “typical” worker - a man who leaves the residential area to go to work
  in the city centre or industrial area early each morning and returns late afternoon. Public
  transport does not cater for typical women workers. For example, in South Africa we have
  approximately a million women who work as domestic workers. They will be going in the
  opposite direction to the typical male at the beginning and end of each day.

These examples are also instances where the time use study should provide us with a much more
detailed understanding of patterns of activity and needs which will allow government agencies to
plan for more user-friendly services.

**Time poverty**

To emphasise the analogy and linkages between time and money as resources, we introduced the
notion of “time poverty”. Sometimes in thinking about time and their own stressed lives, top
policy makers may forget that people – and particularly women – at the other end of the social
spectrum may be equally or more pushed for time. And that the poor person’s time poverty has far
more distressing effects, and far fewer rewards, than their own pressured existence.

Again we can draw on the work of Diane Elson (1996). She points out that the person with a “time
deficit” in the sense of more tasks to do in 24 hours than the period allows, has two alternatives.
The time-poor person can “choose” to spend less time caring for themselves, with possible illness
as a result. Alternatively, the person can spend less time on income-earning, with obvious
deleterious results for their welfare. As with income-poverty, time poverty thus results in a lowering in the quality of life, unless the person can transfer some of their duties to another person. Where women are concerned, often they are unable to transfer duties, or transfer them to other less powerful women – their daughter, daughter-in-law or domestic worker.

I have just said that each person has only 24 hours in any day. This formulation is in some ways simplistic, in that some people use those 24 hours more intensively than others. In particular, it has been found that women, more often than men, tend to engage in simultaneous activities. By combining activities, people can perform more activities in a given time and so avoid a time deficit. But performing simultaneous activities is not without costs.

Robert Pollak distinguishes between two types of simultaneous activities. The first type – he gives examples such as walking and chewing gum, or driving a car and listening to the radio – he calls parallel activities. The second type – which usually involve bearing responsibility for the care of another person at the same time as doing something else – he calls on-call activities. Pollak notes that a person doing one of these on-call activities can do something else at the same time “but the range of activities that are compatible with being on call is constrained in terms of location and is limited to activities that must be interrupted” (1999:8). These activities thus limit what the (usually women) actors who perform them can do with their lives.

Time use and time poverty should be of direct interest to policy makers. Gender analysts sometimes distinguish between strategic and practical needs. Strategic needs are those which relate to the changing of gender roles. Practical needs are those which are a result of current gender roles, but soften the effects. In terms of gender strategic needs, policy must try to minimise the role inflexibility which so overburdens time budgets. In terms of gender practical needs, policy must try to minimise the time burdens imposed by role stereotypes which allocate the bulk of unpaid labour to women and girls.

Unpaid and underpaid, uncounted and undercounted

I have spoken about unpaid work, and how it is often uncounted. There is also a range of underpaid work, which is often undercounted. I am talking here about work in the informal sector, or the work which family members do in household enterprises for no pay beyond board and lodging.

Most statistical offices will acknowledge that they are weak at capturing statistics about these areas of work. One problem is the assumptions behind traditional labour force methods and concepts, which assume a formal sector wage relationship. Even in developed countries, this is increasingly not the norm. In developing countries, it never was the norm.

The background paper for this workshop notes that one of the major objectives of the Asian time use studies, and of this workshop, is to provide better measures of labour and employment. That has also been a strong motivation in South Africa. We know that up to now our surveys have performed poorly in terms of capturing work outside the formal economy. In February we will be doing the first in a new series of labour force studies which will ask the labour force questions in a new way. But we are not sure that, even then, we will capture all work activity. We know that we will still be fighting against the strong perceptions and assumptions of both interviewers and respondents as to what constitutes work.

We see our time use study as an alternative way of approaching the issue of work and hope it can serve as a check on the results of our other surveys. In the demographic part of our survey we will be asking the basic employment questions in the same way as they will be asked in the new labour force survey. What we will then be examining is how these self-descriptions match with how people then describe what they did in the previous day.
In the pre-tests we talked to a small handful of people, but their responses support our suspicion that the time use survey will give us a new picture of the labour force. For example, in the past our surveys have suggested that women predominate in the informal sector but that once one excludes domestic workers, it is men who are in the majority. Our surveys also suggest that there is only a small proportion of people who are working part-time hours, in the sense of working under 35 hours a week.

One part of our pre-test consisted of administering a time use diary to ten women, men or children in a particular area and then bringing them together in a focus group to discuss the experience. Our first group consisted of a group of women from an informal (squatter) settlement in Cape Town. Unfortunately we did not administer the demographic questionnaire, so cannot compare the responses. We suspect, though, that most of the women would have said they were housewives (our classification is “homemakers”). Yet when asked what they did during the day, all but one had engaged in some economic activity. Most were selling something - sweets, chickens, clothes. One was a hairdresser from home. The one who was not working spent most of the day caring for her grandchild. All the women also did significant amounts of housework.

When we did a similar exercise with men from the same area, we found a different picture. A few of the men were working, but in informal rather than formal jobs. One, for example, was an apprentice traditional healer. The majority of the men spent a lot of the day looking for work. A few did some housework - one lived alone, one was a young and dutiful son to his mother, the traditional healer provided his wife’s coffee and breakfast before she went off to her formal sector job.

**How will we interpret the improved labour force information?**

The questions around labour force statistics extend beyond an undercount of the informal and subsistence sectors. Further, these definitions are not simply of academic interest. How they are reported, understood and interpreted has important policy implications.

At this stage it is too early to talk in any detail about how we will interpret information from the time use study. I will instead use Statistics SA’s recent work on employment and unemployment as an example of the sorts of issues that can arise.


Unfortunately, our statistics suggest that we have not done well so far. The establishment surveys conducted by Statistics South Africa suggest that the number of jobs in the formal sector, outside of agriculture, decreased from around 5.3 million in December 1994 to around 5.1 million in December 1997. Our household surveys suggest a decrease in the number employed from around 8.0 million in 1994 to 7.5 million in 1997 (Statistic SA, 1998:5).

These latter figures should include agriculture and the informal sector, but there are serious questions as to how well they capture either of these. There is also clear evidence, from comparisons with a separate rural survey conducted in former “homeland” areas during 1997, that the household surveys are only capturing a fraction of the activity in subsistence agriculture. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) argues that many of the jobs which have been lost in the formal sector, have been replaced by informal sector jobs. But until we get improved statistics from the time use and new labour force surveys, we are not able to say whether this is true or not.
Even if it does prove to be true, we need to know more about the nature of these newly created jobs. We need to know how much time is spent on them, and we need to know what types of people are engaging in them. It is only with that knowledge that the government will be able to develop appropriate policies to address the needs of those who do these jobs.

Similarly, we need to know more about those who are unemployed and not economically active, so as to address their needs. The distinction between different definitions of employment and unemployment illustrates the problem here.

The official labour force definition says that anyone who has done at least one hour of (economic) work in the past seven days is employed. In South Africa, unemployment statistics are usually reported on two different bases. The first measure is that which is used by the majority of other countries in the world, and which provides what we call the “strict” measure of unemployment. This definition says that someone must have actively looked for work in the past four weeks. It is this definition which, since last year, is South Africa’s official definition of unemployment.

The second measure is the expanded or broad definition of unemployment. This definition recognises that in many instances a person may not have actively looked for work, although wanting work, because they realise that the search is futile, because it costs too much to search, or for some other contextual reason. This second definition reclassifies as unemployed many people who would be considered not economically active under the official definition. In so doing, it increases the overall unemployment, which is defined as the number of unemployed people divided by the total economically active.

Thinking back to our informal settlement discussion groups, nine of the ten women who participated should have been classified as employed as they were undertaking some economic activity. In reality, they might well have classified themselves as not economically active under a strict definition of unemployment, as they did not search actively for employment. Under the expanded definition, they might well have been classified as unemployed, as they would probably all say that they want a “proper job”. On the other hand, most of the men would have been classified as unemployed under both the strict and expanded definitions as they undertook some job search activity.

Analysis of previous household surveys confirms that the shift from one definition to another affects some groups more than others. Rural people, and women, are more likely than urban people, and men, to be reclassified when one moves from one definition to another. Thus calculations based on our 1997 household survey found that women outside of urban areas accounted for 19% of the total population aged 15 to 65 years, but made up 29% of people reclassified from unemployed to not economically active under the strict definition. Urban men, meanwhile, were 30% of the working age population but only 19% of the total of people reclassified as not economically active. When race was added to the picture, African women were 41% of the working age population, but 57% of those reclassified. White men were 5% of the working age population, but under one percent of those reclassified. (Statistics SA, 1998:66)

On the basis of such patterns, Statistics SA concluded that “the different extents to which certain categories of people are thereby categorised as not economically active rather than unemployed does need attention from policy-makers in conceiving job-creation priorities and programmes.” (Statistics SA, 1998:67). It is for this reason that we continue to report both official and expanded unemployment rates.

Our new labour force study will almost certainly shift our current key indicators of the labour market. One suspects that we will find a higher proportion of the population is employed as well as an increased proportion who are economically active. Because most of the additions to the
economically active will be those who do odd jobs or informal work, our unemployment rate is likely to drop. One suspects that the effect will be more marked for women than men.

How will we interpret these figures? What are the policy implications.

The primary reason why people are not reporting themselves as employed is perceptions. Both informants and interviewers will often not consider selling sweets or chickens as work. They will see it, rather, as something people do in the absence of other alternatives. Many will be doing it because “proper jobs” simply don’t exist. Some will be doing it because other constraints - such as the need to look after children - prevent their finding better-paid work.

The danger is that policy-makers simply accept a lowered unemployment rate and a narrowing of the gender gap in terms of economic indicators as good news. They may feel that this implies that there is less to be done in policy terms. Our duty as statisticians will then be to do further work. We will need to show that, although more people are employed, the conditions under which they work, and the returns to that work, differ considerably.

Our work must be a further spur to the recognition that it is not only the labour ministry which deals with matters of labour. In South Africa, it would also be the Department of Trade and Industry, which is responsible for small business; the Departments of Land Affairs and Agriculture, which deal with access to land and subsistence and commercial agriculture; the Department of Labour, which is responsible for vocational training; and local government, which is responsible for things like trading regulations, and for providing the services which can increase the productivity and profitability of small-scale informal and home-based activities. In the Women’s Budget Initiative we would be looking at the policy and budgets of all of these agencies, and more.

What this has meant for the design of our time use survey

The South African time use study will have a 24-hour diary, divided into half-hour slots, as its basic instrument. The diary will be administered to the respondent rather than asking them to fill it in themselves. This methodology is necessary because of the high levels of literacy and because - to promote comparability - we have decided to administer the diary even where the person is literate and numerate.

One difference between our instrument and that of many other countries is that we do not distinguish between primary, secondary and tertiary activities. We have allowed for three activities per half hour, but are giving each of those activities equal weight. In allowing for multiple activities, we are catering for both sequential activities - those done one after the other within the period - and simultaneous activities - those done at the same time. To capture this, we had a column where the interviewer must mark yes or no to indicate whether it is simultaneous with another activity or not.

While we have allowed for simultaneous activities, we are concerned that some activities will be under-reported. The literature suggests that childcare, in particular, is usually listed as a secondary activity when time use studies provide for this category. Recent research in Nepal supports the contention that there are patterns in under-reporting of the activity, even when it is provided for.

The Nepal research found that those who do childcare at the same time as other work are less likely to mention it. This means that women are less likely than men to mention childcare. Women who do not have other people – childcare workers or family members – with whom they can share childcare, are less likely to mention it than those who do have other help. Further, those who do regular childcare often call it by a different name from the less regular carers. For example, men
and other less regular caregivers are more likely to talk about “playing” with children, while the regular carers call identical activities “supervising” or do not mention it at all (Kyoko & Shrestha, 1999).

In the South African survey we will ask, in the demographic questionnaire that precedes the diary, whether the respondent has any children under 7 years of age, and – if so – whether the children live with them. We will ask interviewers to prompt all respondents as to whether they did any childcare in the same way that they prompt respondents who do not mention eating during the day. To keep a check on the success or otherwise of this approach, we have made two codes for each of the child care activities. A “1” as the third digit will indicate that the activity was named spontaneously. A “2” will indicate that the activity was only mentioned after prompting.

Our interest in the full range of work means that we feel fortunate to be part of the testing of the United Nations trial classification. We have already had useful exchanges with the New York team which have helped to clarify the many different types of ways in which people can engage with the labour market.

We are also less interested that most researchers in developed countries in leisure activities. In South Africa we have a Self-employed Women’s Union (SEWU) which is modelled largely on India’s Self-employed Women’s Association which started here in Ahmedabad. The founder of SEWU tells how they asked, on their joining forms, what their members did in their leisure time, and how most members responded to this question with complete incomprehension. They simply did not have spare time.

On the other hand, our early tests suggest that we should pay some attention to how children spend their time when out of school. We conducted the focus group tests with children during the school holidays. In the informal settlement area, we found that children were spending extraordinarily long hours unsupervised in front of the television. In a very rural area, a young boy said that he always hoped that he would not wake early, as there was never anything to do. Neither of these scenarios are conducive to full development of these children’s potential.

A final story
To end, I have a final story. A year or two ago I was asked to make a presentation at a workshop for Southern African statisticians who worked on national accounts. National accounts are the calculations that give us gross domestic product, or GDP.

The main focus of the workshop was the informal sector and subsistence work. The aim was to help the countries in the region could improve their capturing of these activities so that they could meet the new guidelines set in the 1993 System of National Accounts (SNA93).

My session was about household activities. These are the activities that, even with the improvements of SNA93, still fall outside the national accounts proper and are thus excluded from GDP. I illustrated my talk with cartoons from the Australian time use study. One cartoon which proved particularly evocative - and which I have used since - shows a bridal couple standing in suit and wedding. The bubble from the bridegroom’s mouth says: “I do”. The bubble from the bride’s mouth says: “but I’ll do more.”

At the end of the presentation a young statistician from Botswana put up his hand. His question was direct: “Why do you hate men?” My response was also direct: “I don’t hate men, but I do wish that they would share a bit more of the housework.” The exchange was a friendly one, but went to the heart of the matter. My Botswana friend had realised that when we talk about how activities are allocated between women and men, we are talking about power, and when we are talking about power, we are talking about politics. German analysts have apparently coined the
term *zeit politik* (time politics) to emphasise the politics and power embodied in time issues (Grieco, 1995:13).

All of us in the room today are interested in time use. Most, if not all, of us are statisticians of one sort or another. Many of us are government statisticians. Both bureaucrats and statisticians have a reputation for being “apolitical”, of lacking a social awareness. Yet I would argue that virtually all statistics have social and political significance, and thus policy and political implications. I hope that this session has provided further evidence of just how true this is for time use and how we can use the statistics that cost so much in time, effort and money to produce.

I have told a long story. I hope that I have not lost everyone in going from one topic to the other. I hope that some of you can see the connections, and recognise the many ways in which we can use the work that we are doing.

References


