Harmonised Households: Ménages à Ménager (HHMM)
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Key search terms:

Disciplines: anthropology, demography, development studies, human geography.

Topics / themes: socio-demographic processes (demographic trends, family structure, intergenerational relations and transfers).

Units of comparison: demographic units (households, age groups, families, generations); spatial units (countries, Burkino Faso, France, Senegal, Uganda, UK, rural areas, communities); administration (central, regional and local government, NGOs).

Concepts: socio-demographic processes (household, generation, family, caring; values (intergenerational solidarity).

Funding: national research agencies (Economic and Social Research Council, Agence Nationale de la Recherche).

Theoretical underpinnings: social constructionism.

Methodological approaches: comparative methods; mixed / combination methods; qualitative approaches (in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews; quantitative approaches (secondary analysis); case studies; documentary searches (literature review).

Methodological issues: bias (interviewer), comparability, interpretation, measurement equivalence (conceptual), reflexivity, reliability, research cultures, representativeness, translation, reliability, validity.

Research context

Harmonised Households was funded jointly by the Agence Nationale de la Recherche (ANR) in France, and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in the United Kingdom, from October 2010 until December 2012. The project built on ESRC-funded work undertaken as a pilot project in Tanzania in 2008 and was carried out in collaboration with academic partners from different disciplinary backgrounds, including demography, geography, sociology and anthropology, in Burkina Faso, France, Senegal, Uganda and the UK.

Research topic / theme

The project is concerned with how the household is defined, and how this definition is used in censuses and surveys in each of the five study countries. The project team explored how household-level data were collected and used along the chain of production – from commissioners of studies to fieldworkers, through to analysts or other users of data – and the extent to which definitions of the household represented the lived experience of being in a 'household'. Intergenerational relationships were a lens used to examine whether household-level survey data were able to capture exchanges of intergenerational care, including care that occurs outside the household. Against a background of increasing life expectancy, changing lifestyles and living arrangements (recomposed families, transnational movements, the nuclear family becoming less common), and reductions in public spending on welfare, the topic was chosen to reflect the need to explore how older people are cared for and to provide insights into the adequacy of data collected at the household level in taking account of these exchanges. Analysing the diverse contexts in which care is provided, and understanding the (in)adequacy of household surveys to capture current trends, has implications for policies that are informed by household-level data.

Aims, objectives and research questions

The aims of the project were to understand the implications of harmonising definitions of the 'household' for survey and census data so as to represent the realities of intergenerational relationships in Anglophone and Francophone settings in Europe and Africa.

Specific objectives were:

- To analyse the evolution, over space and time, of household definitions used in censuses and surveys in Francophone and Anglophone Africa, France and the UK since 1960, and to establish the extent to which harmonisation of household concepts has occurred;
- To evaluate the implications of these definitions for capturing intergenerational support, links and exchanges;
- To assess how national statistical offices in Uganda, Senegal, Burkina Faso, France, and England and Wales perceive the household and represent it as a social unit;

- To investigate how users of household-level analyses understand and employ data at this level in developing and evaluating policies and interventions;
- To examine the ability of the conventional household definitions used in each country to represent different forms of intergenerational relations and support;
- To compare and contrast the influence of diverse factors, such as place, language, colonial history and heritage, ideology of nationhood and identity, levels of socio-economic development, roles of local and regional statistical training centres in the evolution of definitions, the extent of harmonisation, and their implications for understanding and interpreting household-level data;
- To disseminate findings to a wide range of audiences, including survey designers, users, policy advisors, academics and NGO / third sector professionals using data collected at the household level in their work.

The project was explicitly comparative and designed to address a number of specific research questions:
1. What factors have influenced, and continue to influence, definitions of the household and their harmonisation in Anglophone and Francophone settings?
2. What are the implications of current household definitions for analyses of intergenerational relations?
3. How might differences in surveys and local conceptions of the household impact on policy making regarding intergenerational relations?

Resources and governance
The research aims and objectives for the study were developed from an earlier pilot study funded by ESRC under the Survey Design and Measurement Initiative (RES-175-25-0012), conducted in Tanzania in 2008. The proposal for the present comparative project was written collaboratively by the French and UK senior researchers (five members of the team) and was not submitted to any other funding body.

Some logistical support for writing the grant application was provided by University College London, who did not charge for their services.

Different funding constraints from ANR and ESRC meant that the staff time allocated to the project differed substantially. By applying full economic costing (FEC), the time paid for senior researchers under ESRC rules is extremely expensive. To minimise this cost, the funding application essentially covered the time spent on the project by the research associate in the UK for the full period. ANR constraints in France meant that the project had to demonstrate considerable full-time staff input (without receiving any financial compensation), since research assistants can only be requested once a high threshold of staff input has been reached. Because of this constraint and the fact that the ANR cut the requested budget, the Paris bilingual research associate was employed less time (20 months), which meant that her contract ended before the project was complete.

A major problem for the French team arose due to a recent change in university governance in France: the grant had to be administered by a university unused to managing international collaborative research and, at times, it took up to six months to release funds for fieldwork and local salaries.

Management and coordination
This project was managed collaboratively by the two principal investigators, one based in London, UK, leading the ESRC side of the project, the other based in Dakar, Senegal, leading the ANR side. At each research site, a research leader and a research associate or assistant worked together to manage the day-to-day running of the project locally. The ANR paid for the Ugandan, French and Senegalese teams, and the ESRC paid for the UK and Burkinabe teams. The differential funding rules between ESRC and ANR resulted in considerable variations in the amount of time that team members were allocated on the project. For example, the Senegal-based French Principal Investigator was allocated 8.4 months of his time over 24 months, compared to 5 days per month for the UK-based Principal Investigator (roughly equivalent to 4.3 months over 24 months). The Uganda-based (French) research supervisor was allocated 7.2 months of her time over 24 months, compared to the London-based research supervisor who was allocated 4 days per month for 24 months (roughly equivalent to 3.4 months over 24 months).

The disciplinary mix of the researchers on the project and within the country teams reflects the qualitative focus of the project in addition to the scrutiny of quantitative datasets as more often used by demographers and population scientists. Knowledge of both how to conduct a qualitative enquiry and how to work with data collected at the household level was necessary to meet the requirements of the research agenda. The team needed researchers who could design qualitative interview schedules, arrange and conduct interviews, and analyse interviews using qualitative data analysis software programmes. It also needed expertise in using household-level data and the ability to contextualise household data for the different stakeholders.

Given the diverse academic traditions of various members of the research team – in particular the division between qualitative and quantitative methods – disciplinary differences had to be accommodated from the outset. It was recognised that different researchers would have different strengths and insights in their approach to research problems. Research team meetings often involved animated and fruitful discussions: for instance about where to conduct the fieldwork, how to approach the analysis of the data and where and how to disseminate the findings of the research. The different epistemological approaches thereby added a richness to the way in which the project evolved, its various foci and its dissemination strategies.

Team members were based in countries in the global north and south, working in English and in French. Many of the team spoke at least a little of the language that was not their first language, and four were bilingual. However, one of the principal investigators spoke no English and one research associate spoke no French. This meant that much team time and energy in meetings went into translating and interpreting in both directions via the bilingual team members (notably the UK principal investigator and senior French-speaking researchers). In the course of the 24 months, the team in its entirety met three times: in Paris for five days in the third month of the project, as planned in the budget; in London for a three-week workshop at the end of the first year of the project (planned and budgeted for); and once in Ouagadougou, in Burkina Faso, in the last year of the project, coinciding with a conference at which a number of papers emanating from the project were presented. In addition, the French and English teams had eight sub-meetings, to enable the coordinating partners to maintain an overview of the project as a whole. To supplement face-to-face meetings, communication was via Skype and email, and a Yahoo group was used to share data and documents.

Given the different time allocations of each researcher on the project, the distribution of tasks had to be proportionate. Each country was responsible for its own fieldwork (key informant interviews and case study household interviews and document collection), but in France and the UK, the research associates appointed at 100% of the time on the project were responsible for the administration of the project, including purchasing, budget management, database 'version control' (making sure that the master copy held the most up-to-date version of the analysed data), and website maintenance. Although little provision was made in the budget for the time spent on the project by the UK principal and co-investigators, in reality they did considerably more than was allocated, extending to participation in fieldwork, creative engagement with data and dissemination. Although other participating countries were allocated more time on the project, some research supervisors did considerably less than expected. These disparities reflect different approaches to funding regulations and requirements, different budgetary constraints in the UK and in France, and they explain an important source of the tension that often arises in international collaborative work.

Most of the differences that stemmed from different experiences of conducting research, research training and research interests were accommodated through on-going open discussions in meetings. Particular attention was paid to team work and working across levels of seniority. The more senior members of the team insisted that the views of all team members should be heard, even (and especially) dissenting voices and those from academic contexts where deference to seniority might be more common and a barrier to full creative input.

Other ways of encouraging junior members of the team were through training in data collection and analysis. In the field, less experienced researchers shadowed those with more experience to observe how to conduct a qualitative interview. Three weeks were set aside in the first year of the programme at a workshop in London to discuss, as a team, the analytical strategy: from the collaborative writing of the codebook to approaches to the data themselves, including reaching a consensus about best practice. Kathleen MacQueen *et al*. (1998) provide guidance for team analyses and codebook writing as a starting point for preparing the codebook and finalising the analytical approach. As the research assistants / associates led on the coding, the more junior team members played an instrumental role in designing and moulding the trajectory of the research project.

Since many of the team could work in both French and in English, most team members were able, in theory, to work on all the data. Initially, the intention had been to double code all the transcribed interviews to enable comparison of the coding between researchers and ensure consistency. Unfortunately, not enough time was available to exploit this opportunity. Instead, all researchers coded interviews for their own country, many of which they had collected and transcribed themselves.

All team members had access to the Nvivo database to run analysis reports. All, regardless of seniority, had ownership over the data and were welcome to suggest how to use them. The analyses were not, therefore, written up by a single team member; rather, they were used collaboratively or independently for papers being prepared for publication and presentation at conferences. In practice, dissemination was driven by the more

senior or more experienced team members, but the less experienced researchers were encouraged to contribute ideas and collaborate on papers led by more senior team members.

Professional and ethical standards
The UK and Burkina Faso data collection were subject to scrutiny by the Ethics Committee at University College London, who received copies of all interview guides and protocols.

Another source of tension concerned the naming of authors on academic papers and the contributions made by individuals. The team approach adopted meant that, if one person (usually a senior researcher) proposed an idea for a paper to submit to a conference, a draft abstract was circulated around the team, and those interested were invited to collaborate. Some of the research assistants made little or no intellectual contribution to papers, but believed that, because they had originally expressed interest, they should be included. An attempt to discuss the Vancouver protocol about authorship of papers generated considerable conflict between the two national teams.

The UK imperative to plan and manage impact, and the French ethical obligation to conduct 'restitution', or 'giving back' to the planned beneficiaries of the project, were further sources of contention. The two imperatives speak to two different expectations of ethical and professional standards and entail different approaches, although they overlap in that they usually involve engagement with non-academic audiences and certainly involve engagement with groups and stakeholders beyond the research team. 'Giving back' to people who contributed to the research is an important ethical obligation in French research, but has no direct equivalent in the UK. It requires different activities, attendant on different priorities from those concerned with impact management. A workshop held in June 2012 in Paris enabled some restitution (as well as impact for contributors to the research from the UK Office for National Statistics), and a bilingual e-conference in July 2012 was laid on for people who participated in the interviews as key informants, thereby meeting the competing restitution and impact obligations, However, it was clear that the French team had none of the same pressures to demonstrate impact compared with the UK team, which, in turn, was less concerned with the obligation to provide restitution.

Rationale for the research design
The countries where the research was conducted were selected for a number of reasons. This particular mix of research sites, based on linguistic, cultural and colonial traditions, afforded the opportunity to collect a varied mix of data at household level in each country and carry out a series of interesting analyses using a pair-wise research design, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1   Rationale for pair-wise comparative analysis

		Similarities					
		E & W	**France**	**Uganda**	**Tanzania**	**Senegal**	**Burkina**
Differences	**E & W**		European	Anglo data collection tradition	Anglo data collection t radition	---	---
	France	Ethnicity and religion data in E&W but not France		---	Socialist endeavour (nationality over and above ethnicity, religion)	Franco data collection tradition	Franco data collection tradition
	Uganda	Africa / Europe	---		Colonial history Shared border	Economically successful within African region	African
	Tanzania	Africa / Europe	Africa / Europe Linguistic tradition	Ethnicity & religion data in Uganda but not in Tanzania		African	African
	Senegal	Africa / Europe	Africa /Europe	Anglo-Franco comparison	Anglo-Franco comparison		Franco data collection tradition
	Burkina Faso	---	Africa / Europe	Anglo-Franco comparison	Anglo-Franco comparison	Political history: BF Socialist period	

The principal investigators on the project had experience of conducting fieldwork in West Africa and the co-investigator had experience of conducting fieldwork in East Africa. From a pragmatic perspective, the countries were selected because each investigator already had established research networks in the relevant locations, which facilitated the practical planning of the fieldwork. The European countries in the study were selected similar reasons, but also because, together, they represented the two main language communities in the research and had the shared experience of having been colonial powers.

The practicalities of data collection, analysis and policy formulation using censuses and surveys require the selection of a common social unit. The 'household' (called 'statistical household' by Etienne Van de Walle, 2005) is almost universally used as a unit of enumeration, despite evidence from different disciplines suggesting that the 'statistical household' as defined by survey practitioners may bear little resemblance to the social units in which many people live or with which they identify. Data from household sample surveys are the basis of much of the understanding of contemporary society, how it functions, its values and problems. Historically, statistical concepts and terms that apparently worked well in Europe were exported to colonial statistical offices in Africa, where heterogeneous forms of living arrangements required detailed and complex instructions in enumerators' manuals regarding who should be included and excluded from 'statistical households', resulting frequently in compromises being necessary to avoid double counting. The project investigated whether apparently shared terms (household / ménage) generated misunderstandings between and within cultural and linguistic contexts, because diverse groups with distinctive understandings of the concept were unaware that others were using the same term differently.

In exploring these disjunctions, the project investigated dimensions of household solidarity through the lens of intergenerational relations. Studies of intergenerational relationship that examine the content and nature of such exchanges between different generations afford one pathway through which to evaluate the validity of 'statistical households' in terms of its ability to represent functional social solidarity and support. In the context of ageing populations in both Europe and Africa, it was essential to understand the complex patterns of intergenerational relationships and their implications for welfare. Analysis of existing household survey data from West Africa suggested that diverse forms of intergenerational exchanges and obligations were missed by standard household surveys. The project examined the use of the household in various contexts and then applied that understanding to a specific analysis of how household definitions influenced contemporary understandings of intergenerational relations.

A comparative perspective was used to demonstrate where similarities and differences arise in terms of the ability of data to represent reality. The Anglo-Franco collaboration recognised the potential importance of linguistic traditions and cultural heritage in the realities of households on the ground and in data collection. The research team used data from England and France and their former African colonies to undertake pair-wise analyses within and between linguistic traditions, developed and developing contexts, and between political ideologies informing data collection and within-region comparisons in Africa. The joint data collection process involved exchange and collaboration between African and European researchers across the linguistic divide working in both continents.

Rationale for the research methods

Three complementary methods were used in each country to answer the research questions:
1. Semi-structured 'Key Informant Interviews' (KII) with experts along the chain of data production – survey commissioners, researchers, analysts, policy makers, interviewers (approximately 30 per country) – to find out about their uses of data collected at the household level and their perceived needs;
2. Qualitative household interviews with purposively sampled households (HH) in each country (n = 32 France and England, n = 48 in African countries) to investigate who was considered to be a household member, identify ambiguities and multiple memberships, and different care arrangements both inside and outside the household;
3. A documentary review of all censuses and most household surveys conducted between 1960 and 2011 in each of the five countries to examine how definitions of the household have evolved over time.

These methods had been used successfully in the pilot project in Tanzania, and the data gleaned from them were demonstrably appropriate in answering the research questions. In addition, interviewing key informants – who are experts in their field – provided a ready pool of people to whom to disseminate the research, thereby contributing to its impact.

The KII interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically using Nvivo. The HH interviews were recorded manually on a household grid along with detailed qualitative notes and an accompanying vignette of the household type and relationships written by the researcher. This information was imported into Nvivo, and household type and intergenerational care type were coded. The household definition documents were

analysed textually, paying particular attention to subtle changes in the way the definitions were formulated. Throughout, the research questions were kept in mind to drive the focus of the interviews and analysis.

The project involved close textual comparative analysis of documents from 1960 to 2011. In each country, every definition of the household was recorded in every household survey or census that occurred during this 51-year period. Comparability of the qualitative interview data in each country was ensured by translating and using similar interview schedules in each context. For the household interviews, each site used the same interview grid, which meant that, although the data gleaned from the interview might have been different in each case, the focus on the household and intergenerational relationships was consistent. Usually, the research assistant conducted the interview and wrote up the grid and the accompanying vignette, circulated it within the team and shared it on the Yahoo group. Heterogeneity in answers was encouraged.

As the researcher with administrative responsibilities for the project, the London bilingual research associate kept a master copy of all project data in Nvivo, enabling tracking of progress with the data analysis. Because of Internet connection problems in some of the African countries, the transfer and loading of the Nvivo project became difficult as the complexity of the analysis increased, and the database became heavier, thereby slowing down the analysis. Despite these problems, the methods adopted proved to be largely appropriate: the planned research was clearly defined, rigorously undertaken and feasible within the time frame.

Conceptual issues

The whole research project focused on an investigation of the understanding of a concept: the household. The first workshop (one week, Paris, December 2010) was organised around presentations by all team members on the use of the term in their country and in different contexts. By forcing researchers from different backgrounds to examine data and then present them to other team members, key issues of similarity and difference emerged rapidly; in particular, very substantial differences were found between Senegal and Burkina. This early exposure to the underlying research problematic ensured that a common understanding was rapidly reached.

Much of the other joint work early in the project also focused on the common understanding of concepts. The UK principal investigator (PI) undertook five weeks fieldwork in Burkina Faso, and all interviews were undertaken and household grids were developed with either the Burkinabe research assistant or the Burkinabe researcher, thereby enabling standardisation of interview procedures. The UK co-investigator (CI) and London-based bilingual research associate (BRAP) spent 10 days in Uganda with the French researcher and the Ugandan research assistant. About 15 key informants and a number of households were interviewed with different combinations of pair-wise working (see Table 1), thereby further standardising the approach. Given that the UK PI and UK CI had already done many joint interviews and household grids in the Tanzania pilot, they were familiar with each other's approaches. Further joint interviews involved both the London and Paris-based bilingual research associates undertaking interviews and working on the household grid in France, the UK PI and the BRAP carrying out both forms of data collection in France, and the French researcher doing some interviews with the UK CI in the UK. The BRAP also worked on some interviews and household grids in Senegal, but otherwise Senegal was less involved in collaborative work, this part of the French budget having been cut. The available evidence suggests that the budget cut had repercussions for the extent to which the Senegal team felt ownership of the project and may have affected their common understanding of key concepts.

Data collection and analysis

The choice of data sources for the project was to a large extent informed by the pilot project in Tanzania, by providing a good sense of the sorts of people to approach for the key informant interviews (policy makers in government ministries, data analysts, NGO researchers, academics, statisticians), and how to recruit them. In the UK, participation was secured from a wider pool of respondents than at the other sites, because policy makers and researchers were ready to engage with the research. The recruitment of household interview participants was more difficult in the UK than in the African countries, and required specialist knowledge of how to recruit interviewees and an appropriate sampling strategy. Purposive sampling combined with snowballing produced a convenience sample, which had its own limitations in terms of the wider applicability of the research findings. However, this drawback was mitigated by ensuring that all interviews were rigorous, all possible avenues of response were explored and, when the data were presented after analysis, by recognising their limitations.

As a qualitative piece of research that seeks to demonstrate how well household definitions capture everyday realities, the albeit small and purposively sampled dataset nevertheless demonstrated the

complexities and limitations of household definitions across and within continents and the need for standardised and rigorous ways of analysing the data comparatively.

The various approaches that could be taken in conducting the interviews had been discussed at length in a meeting in Paris at the beginning of the project. Team members participated in interviews in each others' countries insofar as budgets would allow, and interview data were shared. Standardisation for the key informant interviews was less critical. Because different key informants were known to have different experiences of and opinions about working with data collected at the household level, it was sufficient for them to be encouraged to speak broadly about household definitions, and the questions did not need to be the same for everybody.

The data analysis strategy was discussed collaboratively in the three-week workshop in London in summer 2011. The codebook was discussed and assembled collaboratively. The coding transcripts had been translated into English and French to enable team members to practise coding the same interview in both languages, and the breakdown of the sections of text to be coded was discussed. A distinction was made between descriptive codes and analytic codes and, having finalised, translated and reworked the codebook as a team, a project codebook was created in Nvivo to be used by all team members. Nvivo's capacities made it possible to verify that the interviews were being coded to largely the same extent by the whole team, providing a standardised approach to analysis. If more time had been available, double coding would have taken place to ensure further standardisation.

The analysis of household interviews was slightly different, and could only be done after the analysis of the key informant interviews. Because Nvivo does not lend itself well to analysis of Excel spreadsheets (used to record the household interviews), household vignettes were used to analysis the relevant themes in Nvivo. Analysis of the household grids took place manually alongside the analysis of the vignettes, and used similar codes. Few of the household interviews in Uganda, Senegal and Burkina Faso were in English or French. An interpreter was, therefore, employed locally to translate the interviews, and the translations were recorded onto the Excel grid by hand. After the interviews, more formal notes were typed up in either English or French together with the vignettes. Again, no Francophone household interviews were translated into English, and no Anglophone household interviews were translated into French, making it possible to keep the language of the interview close to the original. A problem arose regarding the interpreter in the field: where the researchers did not speak the language of the interview, they had little control over how accurately the answers were translated. With experience, they were able to develop a sense that a full answer had not been given or that a question had not been asked properly, and repeated questions where necessary. Analyses of the household and key informant interviews were mostly carried out by the research assistants and associates, with more senior team members participating in the supervision of analysis and use of data for publications and presentations.

The third data collection activity – the content analysis of documents defining the household in surveys and censuses in all five countries from 1960 to 2011 – was undertaken collaboratively by the UK and French teams. Time constraints meant that a temporary French research assistant compiled all the definitions and conducted a preliminary analysis, which formed the basis for subsequent analyses of the evolution and socio-economic influences on the evolution of the definition of the household.

Interpretation and dissemination of findings

The target audiences for dissemination were similar to those interviewed as key informants: policy makers, statisticians, academics, data analysts, fieldworkers, commissioners and users of household-level data. Analyses of issues around data collected using the household as a unit of enumeration, while not inherently controversial, can pose problems to analysts or planners who may not have appreciated the limitations of the household as a level of analysis. In the UK, government offices such as the Office for National Statistics (ONS) were largely receptive to the project findings in a way not echoed in France. However, it was necessary to adapt presentation of the findings according to different target audiences to stimulate their interest.

The findings suggest that the ONS has, to a large extent, endeavoured to reflect the changing reality of living in a household. By using relationship matrices, which allow more complex relationships to be recorded, the ONS is more successful in capturing hard-to-count populations than, for instance census-style surveys in France. However, even here, the ONS still misses some sectors of the population, as they admitted in discussions. When we presented the findings to them, they were pleased to know that they were catching the population well. They were willing to acknowledge that some sectors of the population could not be counted and were interested in discussing the implications of such omissions.

Dissemination activities included a number of co-authored and single-authored conference papers presented in Burkina Faso (UAPS), the UK (Leeds social geographers), Canada (CASA) and Sweden (EAPS); workshop between INED, ONS, UCL and LSE; a bilingual e-conference (online conference) where participants drawn from a wide range of countries and disciplines discussed the project findings; and a bilingual website (www.householdsurvey.info), which presents findings and advertises the project to interested people.

No single strategy was adopted for writing up the findings; most of the work was produced collaboratively or individually by different team members according to their strengths, interests and expertise. In this way, more junior researchers were able to develop research and analytical writing skills, while learning from more experienced senior academics. In addition, the work was disseminated in places and in front of audiences that might not otherwise have been targeted.

Lessons learned

Although several of the team members had already worked on international projects with researchers from very different research cultures, a number of lessons can be drawn from the Harmonised Households project for international social science researchers:

- Differences in attitudes to the project and to collaborative working, in the research skills, capabilities and experience of team members, and in governance structures can result in tensions regarding what a collaborative project is intended to achieve. Different approaches to the recruitment of respondents can create problems for the standardisation of procedures and analyses, which may affect the quality of the data in the participating countries. A unified and explicit strategy at the design stage can help overcome these problems, but will only be successful if all team members adhere to it.

- The country mix may be associated with a number of structural problems, not least the issue of the expense and challenge of obtaining visas for each country in the project, especially when dealing with researchers who are from African countries such as Burkina Faso, Senegal or Uganda. Similarly, war, disruption to amenities such as water, electricity and Internet can interrupt fieldwork, communication and analysis and slow down the progress of a project. These issues can be mitigated, but not wholly eliminated, by being aware of them when the country mix is decided and investigating how they can be overcome.

- Hierarchical 'flattening', one of the great strengths of the Harmonising Households project, describes the considerable effort made by more senior team members to level out hierarchical differences, with the aim of developing the research skills and confidence of research assistants, giving them opportunities to share responsibilities in planning the work and in acquiring ownership of its outputs. Consideration also needs to be given to possible sanctions if individuals do not live up to expectations in terms of the quality and / or quantity of work that they produce. This issue is often exacerbated in international collaborative research projects due to differences in lines of management, and in the requirements and procedures of funding bodies with regard to recruitment, monitoring and evaluation. It is, therefore, important to take account of these matters at the 'risk assessment' stage in project planning.

- In an international project where people work in different languages and institutions, and with different resources (including access to Internet), effective communication can be difficult to maintain. The Harmonised Households project demonstrated the value of exploiting different forms of communication, through Skype, email and other online file sharing platforms, such as Yahoo Groups for storing files, or sendspace.com to transfer very large Nvivo files.

- When using Nvivo and similar packages, team coding is difficult to standardise and time consuming. Sharing of the database is also problematic because of its size, particularly in countries where the Internet connection is poor. At the project planning stage, it is important to allow sufficient time for coding and, if possible, to budget for an Nvivo Server.

- A monthly 'newsletter' style email, which each member of the team is, in turn, responsible for writing and sending can be a useful way of keeping team members aware of their own progress and accountable for their own contributions to the research, while ensuring that they are regularly informed about the overall progress of the project.

References

Full details about Harmonised Households / Ménages à ménager are available on the project website: www.householdsurvey.info

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