This chapter focuses on data specific to the situation and status of women. In part, this is because, for some of the data presented in the previous chapters, it was not always possible to provide data disaggregated by gender. Moreover, the problem with population data is exacerbated when disaggregating by gender. Baster (1981) demonstrates the difficulty of using census data: as Fetter (1985) says,

Male statistics suffer from undercounting of adult men because of labour migration and flight from tax collectors, while female statistics inflate the number of women and underestimate that of girls.

These kinds of biases need to be borne in mind when interpreting aggregate data on the social conditions of women of the kind presented in the Annex to this chapter.

The role of women in development has been the subject of a considerable literature. Most empirical studies focus on women's labour-force participation, women's education and the growth of female-headed households, and these are the main themes considered in this chapter. However, given the importance of non-market labour in sub-Saharan Africa, the participation of women in the modern sector labour force is only a very partial representation of their activity and so the first sections consider the inordinate length of their working day as well as women's labour-force participation.

The next two sections consider two other major trends which may affect the status of women: the increase of education enrolment and attainment among women; and the increase of female-headed households and consequent marginalisation. The chapter ends by considering the impact upon women's health and, briefly, the potential conflict between the advantages—and oppression—of the extended family, and the benefits—and disadvantages—of liberation.
12.1 A LONG, HARD DAY

The length of their working day is, of course, only one element in understanding the conditions of women. Other important variables include ‘practices related to household income generation and maternal budgeting ... and the distribution of food and child care responsibilities within the home’ (Piwoz and Viteri, 1985). But the pattern of women’s working day provides a stark contrast with men.

Time allocation studies are most reliable for estimating the total numbers of hours spent working, less so for estimating time spent on specific activities in part because of the problem of recording joint activities. Table 12.1, drawn from Leslie (1989), summarises various studies in African countries, selecting only those with moderately large samples.

Comparative time allocation studies have shown that women work longer hours than men in developing countries, that low-income women work longer hours than better-off women, and rural women work longer hours than urban women (Birdsall and McGreevey, 1983). A low-income woman in the rural areas of developing countries may be working an average 18 hour day (Sivard, 1985).

A picture of the woman’s typical working day is given in Table 12.2, and Table 12.3 presents data from two studies which have explicitly compared men and women. The total work time per day in the Cote d’Ivoire study including illness was 6.9 hours for men and 9.8 hours for women; and in the Burkina Faso study it was 7.6 hours for men and 9.8 hours for women. As the latter study counted activities over a fixed 14-hour day, the ratio of work:free time can be compared: it was 1.2 for men, 2.5 for women.

This heavy burden puts the UNICEF child survival and development revolution (CSDR) in a different perspective. For the presumption of the CSDR is that mothers will have no problem finding the time to incorporate each of the new health and nutrition technologies into their lives. Yet even a marginal increase in the typical 10-hour day of low-income rural women may have an important effect on a mother’s decision to adopt or participate in what must appear to be essentially discretionary health behaviour. We must look at the opportunities and problems of caring for children through the eyes of the mother.