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AFRICAN HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS PROGRAMME
(Prepared by the Statistics Division)

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INTRODUCTION

1. During the past few years there has been a growing awareness of the need for better and more continuous information on the conditions and activities of African households. The African Census Programme is already making an important contribution to the improvement of demographic statistics and it is now necessary to consider the means by which the household data base can be broadened to include information on all essential topics.
2. Briefly, this involves the establishment of ongoing household survey capabilities in countries of the region. The present report describes the action so far taken and future plans for a project whose full title is: **Evolving a Post-Census Programme of Integrated Demographic, Social and Related Economic Statistics through Household Surveys.**

BACKGROUND TO THE PROGRAMME

3. Information about the household sectors of African countries is still one of the major gaps in the statistics of the region and sessions of the Conference of African Statisticians have repeatedly requested assistance in the organization of surveys to remedy the defect.
4. Both the International and African strategies for the Second United Nations Development Decade involve a unified approach to economic and social development in which the improvement of human well-being is one of the basic objectives. There is therefore a need for more comprehensive and continuing information on households.
5. The UNFPA financed African Census Programme is already making a significant contribution to better information on the population of Africa and some of its essential characteristics. The proposal to develop more comprehensive and continuing household inquiries is a logical sequel to this work in that it will provide the means of interpreting and using basic demographic data more effectively in the light of economic and social conditions. However there is no intention of encouraging countries to embark on extensive survey programmes before they have completed their population censuses.
6. There was a significant amount of household survey activity in Africa during the period immediately before and after independence, but it largely ended by 1970 ^{1/}. A revival of interest is now evident, particularly in countries which have carried out population and agricultural censuses.
7. Earlier African surveys were usually ad hoc economic or demographic inquiries which did not form parts of integrated programmes of data collection and analysis. A different approach is now required to enable analysis of the inter-relationships between demographic, social and economic factors. Demographic characteristics and trends are strongly influenced by the economic and social environment and, conversely, have a significant effect on the productive capacity and living conditions of populations.
8. In the African situation, many of the relevant data can be collected only directly from households. There is therefore an urgent need for a project which will assist African countries to collect and utilise

1/ Household Economic Surveys in Africa, E/CN.14/NAC/53.
Methodology of Demographic Sample Surveys, Series M, No. 51.

information from this source in a fully integrated and continuing manner. The costs incurred by individual countries in maintaining survey organizations after an initial period of assistance will not be excessive, particularly when it is borne in mind that these organizations will also be used for the collection of industrial, price and other data.

9. It should also be noted that the draft World Population Plan of Action, E/CN.9/292, calls for demographic and multi-purpose surveys to supplement census operations. The seventeenth sessions of the Statistical and Population Commissions further stressed the importance of data obtainable from surveys. In considering the proposed new system of social and demographic statistics and its relationships to the UN System of national accounts, the Statistical commission requested less emphasis on sophisticated systems and more on practical data collection.

ACTION TAKEN

10. In the light of the foregoing considerations a preliminary draft project proposal was submitted to the eighth session of the Conference of African Statisticians in November 1973. The Conference strongly supported the proposal and gave attention to ways in which the programme could be developed. Among the points agreed as a basis for immediate action were the following:

- (1) Implementation of the programme will involve the establishment of continuing field organisations for the conduct of household surveys. Such organisations will normally be functionally centralised but will be available for investigations in a variety of subject fields. They are essential for satisfactory statistical development and will also be useful for future population censuses.
- (2) It will require an overall subject-matter plan of topics to be investigated over a period of years. This should develop as a cyclical series of inquiries and will ensure that no particular survey is overload.
- (3) The economics of survey taking have to be borne in mind. Sampling errors are dependent on absolute sample size, which means that surveys are relatively more expensive for smaller countries. This could provide an opportunity for collaboration between countries.
- (4) The question of where and when to begin work on the programme will depend on opportunity and care should be taken not to divert resources from other important projects.
- (5) As households are the natural source of a wide variety of demographic, social and economic information, the proposed programme should be of interest to a number of donor agencies and countries. Collaborative financial arrangements therefore have to be envisaged.

- (6) A Working Group on Methodology, Organization and Content of Household Surveys should be convened in 1974 to examine the prerequisites of the programme. It was suggested that the International Association of Survey Statisticians should be invited to participate in the meeting, together with African experts and subject-matter specialists.
11. In August 1973 an ECA enquiry was addressed to African statistical services, requesting information on current and planned household surveys. The circular letter gave a brief description of the proposals for integrated demographic, social and related economic statistics, but emphasised that arrangements for assistance had not yet been established. Of the ten replies received, nine indicated activity in household survey development. During subsequent discussions of the Conference of African Statisticians, the interest of several more countries became apparent.
12. If ECA member States were invited at the present time to participate in a household surveys programme, it is probable that ten or more could make viable requests for assistance. The number will increase considerably when current preoccupations with population, agricultural and industrial censuses have ceased. It would therefore seem sensible to establish a programme for the development of household surveys as soon as possible and certainly before the prospective demand for assistance becomes too great. This would avoid the problem of expert recruitment which accompanied the earlier phase of the African Census Programme.
13. A project request to UNFPA in respect of the Working Group requested by the Conference of African Statisticians was forwarded to UN Headquarters in December 1973. In the same month the ECA Executive Secretary decided to establish a Household Surveys Programme Steering Committee to co-ordinate the secretariat's activities and promote a multi-disciplinary approach.
14. Activities in January 1974 included a further examination of possible participation in the programme and requirements for assistance, revision of the proposals for the overall programme in the light of comments made during the Conference of African Statisticians, and the establishment of contact with two of the consultants suggested for the Working Group.
15. The Steering Committee held its first meeting on 8 February. After considering a report on recent activities, it gave attention to further action in the light of comments received from the UN Statistical Office and Population Division. It was agreed that the proposals for the overall programme should be further extended to give a more detailed specification of country participation and the requirements for financial and other assistance. Another important consideration was the initiation of discussions with prospective donor agencies and countries and it was decided that this should be done when arrangements for the Working Group were finalised.
16. With regard to the timing of the Working Group meeting, it was agreed that the nine-day period beginning 2 September would be feasible.

17. The functions of the Working Group will be to spell out the basic requirements for African household survey programmes and, in so doing, to finalise the proposals for a comprehensive project. The Steering Committee recommended the following agenda for the meeting:

- (1) Brief review of previous African household surveys with respect to methodology, co-ordination and coverage.
- (2) Household data requirements.
- (3) Development of permanent field survey organizations.
- (4) Examination of survey methodology and adaptations needed for multi-subject programmes.
- (5) Co-ordination of household surveys with the African Census Programme, etc., including the utilisation of population census data.
- (6) Technical assistance and related implications of Items (2) - (5).

18. It was felt by the Committee that special attention should be given to the specification of items of data to be collected in multi-subject survey programmes in much the same way as was done for the African Census Programme and the World Fertility Survey. This will be the subject of agenda Item 2 which will also deal with the integrated analysis of demographic, social and related economic data. In connection with the latter, the Committee took the view that, while it is not too difficult to organise integrated programmes of data collection oriented to particular national requirements, it will take some time to develop effective integrated analytical arrangements.

19. The secretariat is currently preparing outlines of working documents for the various agenda items and these will be discussed with the consultants when arrangements for the Working Group are finalised.

PROPOSED PROGRAMME ARRANGEMENTS

Organisation and objectives

20. The African Household Surveys Programme is conceived as a flexible programme of technical and other assistance to help African governments in setting up permanent field survey organisations concerned primarily with the collection of data from households. In the long run, it is intended to meet the information requirements for the unified approach to economic and social development envisaged for the Second UN Development Decade.

21. Implementation of the programme will involve some expansion of national statistical services through the development of their field survey components. The Conferences of African Statisticians and Demographers will be regarded as the principal consultative bodies to guide and review progress, taking into account the recommendations of the Statistical and Population Commissions of the United Nations.

22. It is hoped that the programme will be of interest to a number of donor agencies and countries and it is for this reason that rather flexible arrangements are necessary. Assistance to individual country projects might in some cases be organised through normal United Nations machinery, while in others bilateral arrangements could be used. Satisfactory co-ordination of activities will be needed at the regional level and the Steering Committee mentioned earlier in this report will play an important role in this respect.

23. Participating governments should be called upon to give reasonable assurance regarding the continuation of survey activity after the initial period of assistance has been completed. Such assurances can most easily take the form of the establishment of permanent posts for field survey operations and continuing budgetary provision for surveys, preferably within the context of long-term programmes of statistical development.

24. The co-ordination of household surveys programmes with other field operations is an important consideration. There is no problem in respect of the African Census Programme because countries will not normally embark on household surveys before they have completed their population censuses. Co-ordination with the World Fertility Survey has to be achieved through careful programming of national survey operations and there is also the possibility of using common first and second stage sampling frames. An additional consideration is the assistance already being given to African surveys by international and bilateral agencies which could possibly be brought more directly into the overall programme.

25. Current proposals for the programme envisage rather heavy reliance on regional advisory services and the employment of country technical assistance experts only when absolutely necessary. This makes for a more economical operation, which is an important consideration when it is borne in mind that the cost of household surveys is small compared with that of population censuses. A recent budget proposal for an African household survey showed country expert services to be nearly half the cost of the entire project, which does not seem very reasonable. Two other relevant points are that ECA experience over a long period has demonstrated the adequacy of regional advisory services in implementing household surveys, and it is necessary to avoid the expert recruitment problems which have hindered the African Census Programme.

26. The overall programme is proposed to last for a period of five years. By the end of the period, a great deal of organisational and technical experience will be available in the region and countries should be in a good position to assist one another in the further development of surveys. Nevertheless, limited continuation of regional advisory services beyond the end of the project period will probably be desirable.

Household data requirements

27. It may be useful to add a few tentative comments on the nature of the household survey programmes which African countries may wish to establish. A convenient starting point is provided by the UN Handbook of Household Surveys Series F No. 10, which deals with the following survey topics:

Demographic characteristics
Health
Food consumption and nutrition
Housing conditions and facilities
Educational characteristics and cultural activities
Employment
Economic level of the household.

28. These topics can be arranged in 21 possible pairs. If they are considered on this basis, it is clear that there is nearly always a significant causal relationship between the two topics in each pair. Only for the following three pairs does it seem likely that such a relationship might not necessarily exist:

Food consumption	Housing
Food consumption	Education and culture
Housing	Education and culture.

Even in these cases it is probably that useful statistical relationships would be evident.

29. The existence of strong inter-relationships between the various factors which affect household levels of living contributes no guidance in respect of data analysis. Analysis of household data should preferably be considered in the context of a comprehensive data framework. For national accounts and related branches of economic statistics, the framework already exists and can be used in a selective manner in the light of national priorities. In the demographic and social field, the fundamental concepts of an integrated system have already been widely discussed and some guidance is available in terms of standardised definitions and classifications. However it is likely that demographic and social data will have to be incorporated in overall statistical analysis by rather ad hoc means for some time to come.

30. It is less difficult to determine the main components of household survey programmes. A review of the detailed items recommended in the Handbook of household Surveys leads to the following considerations:

- (1) Except in unusual situations, African household surveys would normally incorporate a preliminary enumeration of households. In addition to providing a frame for the ultimate sampling stage, this enumeration can be used for obtaining:
 - (a) basic information on demographic, economic and social characteristics, which is useful in itself and may also be needed in interpreting the survey results;
 - (b) data required for stratification of the household sample;

- (c) basic housing information, even though this topic may be investigated in more detail in the ultimate sample of households.
- (2) Internal migration, fertility and mortality form a group of topics which can conveniently be investigated together. A fairly large sample of households drawn from those listed in the preliminary enumeration would normally be involved.
- (3) Health, employment, education and cultural activities are another group of topics for which data could possibly be collected simultaneously. The sampling arrangements would be a little different from those applicable to (2) because of high intra-class correlations.
- (4) Inquiries dealing with the economic level of households call for smaller samples than those in (2) or (3), but records for individual households need to be maintained over relatively long periods. These inquiries must incorporate data on household enterprises, and more detailed investigation of food consumption can be included on a sub-sample basis. It may be necessary to deal with urban and rural areas separately.

31. In addition, permanent survey organisations will probably also be expected to deal with other statistical work involving the collection of data direct from enterprises and the public. The principal topics appear to be as follows:

- (5) Collection of producer and retail prices.
- (6) Non-household industrial and employment inquiries.
- (7) Agricultural censuses and surveys.
- (8) Internal transport.

Agriculture has been included in the list only for the sake of completeness and it is appreciated that most countries have extensive agricultural organizations which are used for censuses and the collection of current production data. In any case, provision for recording the economic transactions of the farming community is included under item (4).

32. It seems fairly clear that an enumeration of population, normally in a sample of area units, should be envisaged as an annual exercise. Its purpose would be the provision of a frame for the selection of a household sample to be investigated in more detail and the collection of general information.

33. The detailed inquiry in any given year could deal with demographic characteristics, social characteristics, or the economic level of households along the lines indicated in items (2) - (4) above. If it is decided to collect household economic data in separate urban and rural surveys, the basic field programme would consist of a four-year repetitive cycle of operations.

34. With regard to the non-household survey topics, the position is as follows. Price data have to be collected on a continuing basis, so staff for this purpose have to be added to the field organization. Industrial and employment inquiries with which survey organisations might be concerned are those conducted on an annual basis. Because these data collection operations are discontinuous, there would clearly be advantages if they could be incorporated, at least to a limited extent, in the work programmes of the household survey supervisors. Internal transport could be regarded as a possible alternative topic for investigation in one year of the survey cycle described above. Transport data are useful in interpreting household enterprise records, particularly in the field of agriculture, because they show where the products of each area are consumed. However, they are not needed very often.

35. There are of course many possible variations on the arrangements described above and they have to be determined in the light of national priorities. In particular, it may be worth noting that the pattern of surveys suggested here is somewhat different from that adopted in developed countries, where "employment status" and related factors appear to be the central considerations in household inquiries. In Africa, it is doubtful whether they should have the same predominance at a time when it is necessary to gather reasonably comprehensive information on the functions and conditions of more loosely organised economic and social structures.

CONCLUDING COMMENT

36. The Household Surveys Programme should be of considerable interest for the African region because it can considerably improve the factual basis for social and economic development efforts. Its success, however, depends not only on the provision of technical and financial assistance, but also on the efforts which countries themselves make in developing adequate survey organisations and in establishing effective programmes of surveys. The latter in particular will require a great deal of constructive thought. A general line of approach has been suggested in this paper, but individual countries still have to face the task of determining their own priorities for individual inquiry topics and working out the details of the resulting survey programmes.