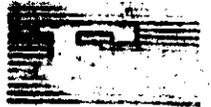


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OBJECTIVES AND METHODS OF HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS

UNDER AFRICAN CONDITIONS

(Note by the Secretariat)



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1. The aim of this paper is to examine the methods appropriate to the main objectives of household surveys with a view to giving some guidance on the formulation of survey programmes under African conditions.

2. There are three distinct types of survey organization which need to be taken into consideration.

(1) Surveys of the multi-purpose type, where a number of different topics are investigated by means of the same sampling scheme and same recording methods.

(2) Surveys covering different topics and requiring different methods which are, nevertheless, carried out simultaneously by the same survey staff.

(3) Investigations which are conducted on an individual basis.

Of these three groups the first has an undoubted attraction with respect to simplicity, but it has great limitations which have not been clearly recognized in some African surveys. There is always a temptation to incorporate additional topics in a survey, even though these cannot reasonably be investigated by the method used for the other items and the result can be a considerable wastage of effort.

3. In the attached table an attempt is made to show the principal types of household survey and the main characteristics of each with respect to scope and method. The surveys are classified into three main groups - consumption, income and expenditure surveys - surveys in the rural household sector - surveys dealing with demographic and social characteristics. The list itself is not exhaustive and it is appreciated that the details relating to each type of enquiry by no means allow for all the variations in methods which may be adopted. It is however, hoped that the table will show sufficiently clearly the principal differences which must be taken into account.

4. The scope of each enquiry is indicated in terms of the population group to which it normally refers and closely related to this is the question of geographical coverage. The principal factor which has to be considered with respect to survey design is the need for stratification in the selection of households. The other principal survey characteristics relate to field procedures and recording and are the frequency of visits to each household, the duration of the period in which visits take place to the same sample of households and any extension of the basic programme over time which may be required in the form of further recording on the original sample or recording on a sample which is changed from one period to another. The frequency of visits, which largely determines the number of households which can be covered by a single enumerator and the total duration of the survey are two of the principal factors affecting cost. The third is the variance of the item or items measured which is not shown in the table. A further point of importance, is the definition of the household as a unit for survey purposes.

Scope and coverage

5. The objectives of some types of survey imply a limitation in scope in terms of population groups or else in geographical coverage or both. Included among these are cost of living studies, dietary surveys and employment surveys. Most other enquiries cover wider areas and larger population groups, but there are still some important differences. For example, enquiries dealing with agricultural activity and household industries, relate only to the households associated with the activities concerned, whereas surveys of consumption and expenditure usually require more comprehensive coverage.

Sampling design

6. First stage sampling frames are not considered in this paper, because under African conditions they tend to be somewhat standardized for different types of survey due to lack of availability of data on which selection can be based. In large towns lists of houses may be available as a starting point, but elsewhere the geographical organization used in a

population census or locality lists are usually the only frame available for primary units. The possibility of geographical stratification at the first sampling stage should however not be ignored. A fairly large enumeration of households in selected primary units is normally the next step in most surveys, since it is the only way to obtain a frame for secondary units. Important differences arise in the sampling method by which households are selected from this frame. In addition to differences in scope as defined by population groups to which reference has already been made there is the question of whether a stratified selection of households is necessary. This is of course dependant on the variability of the factors being measured. In the case of surveys of limited scope and geographical coverage stratification can usually be avoided provided the groups investigated are sufficiently homogeneous. Also in many of the surveys involving single visits to households, such as those dealing with household structure, housing conditions, etc, stratification is either not applicable or else there is insufficient data on which it can be based. In this type of survey it is of course in any case less important because a large sample can be investigated at relatively low cost. Nearly all other surveys cover a wide range of income, production, etc, and for these some form of stratification is definitely desirable. The only exception is the case of surveys intended to estimate aggregates of consumption and expenditure items when these are limited to items such as food which do not vary greatly throughout the income range.

Definition of secondary sampling unit

7. The definition of the household as a unit for survey purposes has been a matter of considerable controversy over many years and it is hoped that December meeting will, to some extent, clarify the matter. Definitions suitable for practical survey purposes have been found in past surveys and the question of interest in the present context is that the basis of these definitions varies for different types of survey. For enquiries dealing with income, domestic expenditure and other financial transactions

of households it is necessary to define the household as a group of persons with a common budget. In the case of dietary surveys on the other hand the definition must aim at isolating groups of people who take their meals together and it is appreciated that in some communities this is not an easy matter. A further difference arises in the case where agricultural information is obtained through household surveys. There is no difficulty when households are owners and operators of holdings, but special arrangements have to be made to cover the cases of absentee owners, holdings which are not operated by a single household and households which are responsible for more than one holding. Differences in the sampling unit, such as those described above, form a very definite limitation on the number of factors which can be investigated by the same survey.

Recording methods

8. When the sampling design has been determined the next consideration is the recording method the two principle points being the frequency at which households shall be visited and the duration of these visits to the same sample. Except in cases where all information can be collected at a single visit, the deciding factors appear to be the number of transactions which have to be covered by the records and their regularity. In the case of food purchases, for example, many items are bought in small quantities, at very frequent intervals and visits must also be frequent if a reasonably complete account is to be obtained. In the case of receipts it has been suggested that such visits should be on a daily basis on the assumption that records are maintained by the enumerators and not by the households, but it is appreciated that some variation in the periodicity of visits is sometimes practicable. Some other items, including receipts from the sale of the more important cash crops, payments to farm labourers and purchase of larger items of equipment, on the other hand, occur less frequently and are more easily remembered by households, so that they can be recorded without difficulty at less frequent intervals. For these items visits at periods varying from one week to one month may be found effective and in some special cases an even longer

period may be possible.

9. The length of time during which visits should continue is dependant mainly on seasonal variations in the factors measured. In a cost of living study or in a survey where aggregates of consumption and expenditure items are the principle objective it is often assumed that the pattern and level of purchases will not vary greatly from one month to another and the same consideration may sometimes apply to investigations made for demand analysis purposes. Where such an assumption can be made, it is possible to limit the records to a total period which is normally one month, but which is sometimes as short as one week. However, the assumption in respect of regular purchases is almost never completely justified, particularly in respect of items such as clothing and household durable goods. To avoid an extension of the recording period as a result of seasonal variation and irregularity in the purchase of these items a retrospective record covering, say, the twelve months preceding the enquiry is often used in addition to the record of current purchases during the survey. When this is done however it is necessary to take into account possible biases in the records. In the case of surveys covering income, distribution, indebtedness and savings it must be accepted that there are considerable psychological difficulties in approaching households as well as important fluctuations in the level of transactions on a seasonal basis, particularly in rural areas and it is necessary that records should cover the same sample of families over a period of several months or even a year. The same applies to cost of agricultural production and productivity of the labour force in agriculture.

Sampling over time

10. With respect to sampling over time the two important points are, stratification according to seasonal fluctuation and renewal of sample from one period to another. Where seasonal fluctuations are known to be important, it is necessary that a survey should extend over a long

period if satisfactory results are to be obtained. For enquiries covering consumption and expenditure aggregates, it is legitimate to replace the entire sample from one period to another with a view to obtaining an average of monthly expenditure over an entire year. It is usually an advantage to regard this form of sampling over time as a stratified sample and there is the additional possibility of changing the sample size from one period to another in order to reduce the cost of the survey during periods when it is known that the variance of transactions measured is smaller. A different example of sampling over time arises in the case of dietary surveys when there is a seasonal change in the pattern of food consumption. Such surveys normally involve only a small sample and the important requirement is to have an accurate indication of seasonal changes, so that repetition of records must be carried out on the same sample. The question of optimum utilization of field staff can also make it desirable to spread a survey over a long period even though seasonal fluctuations may not be important. With a small fixed number of field staff, for example, if a sample is replaced on a monthly basis records can be obtained for quite a large number of households over a period of several months.

Cost of surveys

11. The final consideration is the relative cost of surveys of different types and, as already pointed out, the two principle factors are the number of households which can be handled by each enumerator and the sample size required. The number of households per enumerator, at any one time, is largely dependant on the frequency of visits and these numbers are shown in approximate terms in the table. With regard to sample size, information is available only from a few past surveys and it is proposed to consider this in greater detail when the ECA publication on household surveys is prepared next year. At the present time the main questions of interest are the relative sizes of samples required for different surveys. For enquiries covering a wide income or production range the variance of the factors measured can be expected to be very large and consequently a large sample will be needed even when stratification is used. On the other

hand, when less variable items such as food consumption form the primary objectives a satisfactory investigation can be carried out with a much smaller number of households.

Conclusion

12. This paper is intended to form the basis for a discussion of the methods applicable to the principle types of household survey likely to be needed in Africa. From the analysis of methods it should be possible to indicate which survey subjects can be covered by the same sample design, which can be incorporated in programmes of simultaneous surveys and which need to be organized on an individual basis.

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