
INTERNATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY NETWORK (IHSN)

Information note prepared by the World Bank with input from the IHSN Management Group

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Demand for social statistics has been continuously on the rise in recent years with the increasing focus on development effectiveness and managing for results. But, despite decades of technical and financial assistance for household surveys to generate the needed statistics, many countries still do not have adequate data for monitoring development outcomes. Externally funded survey initiatives are not being sustained and mainstreamed into country statistical systems, and many national systems are caught in a vicious spiral of under-performance, domestic under-funding, and duplicative or conflicting donor agendas.

The *Action Plan for Improving Development Statistics* presented at the Second International Roundtable on Managing for Development Results (Marrakech, February 2004), recommended six urgent actions to improve statistics for measuring development outcomes. One of these actions was the formation of an international household survey network (IHSN), to identify, promote and implement coordinated and sustainable solutions to problems of availability, timeliness, cost-effectiveness, and dissemination of household survey data.

The IHSN was established on 27 September 2004. Founding members agreed that to start the IHSN's work should focus on (i) coordinating international survey programs, by fostering better timing, sequencing and frequency of internationally-sponsored surveys; (ii) promoting adoption of international standards and best practices by harmonizing data collection instruments; (iii) establishing a central survey data repository; and (iv) developing tools and guidelines for improving survey data documentation, dissemination and preservation.

The IHSN is an informal network that operates solely on the basis of voluntary contributions (in kind or in cash) from its members. A "virtual" Secretariat was put in place to coordinate the IHSN activities, hosted by the World Bank. To oversee these activities, a Management Group brings together representatives of the PARIS 21 Secretariat, International Labour Organization (ILO), United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), UNICEF, United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), World Health Organization (WHO), and World Bank (WB). The IHSN is a powerful contribution to efforts to strengthen sectoral statistical systems such as the Health Metrics Network.

Good progress has been achieved in developing a central survey repository and tools for microdata documentation, dissemination and preservation. Less progress has been made in the more challenging areas of coordination and harmonization of survey programs. To allow fast implementation of some key activities, the World Bank will be allocating a budget to the IHSN core program. Active participation from all members will be critical to the success of this program.

Background, rationale and mandate

1. International conferences and world summits held between 1990 and 1995, and the Millennium Summit in 2000, identified various sets of goals and targets which reflected a broad consensus on development issues amongst international organizations and their member countries. This resulted in a constantly growing demand for socio-economic data. This demand has not only been growing, it has also evolved as new issues and priorities emerged. Today, the push for increased accountability of national and international development agencies — the need to measure aid effectiveness and to “manage for results” — have amplified and diversified the data needs.

2. In developing countries, sample household surveys are the most effective way of obtaining many of the indicators needed to monitor development outcome. The international community, and government agencies in some countries, have responded to this growing demand by sponsoring and implementing various survey programs.

3. Although international agencies are often providing technical and financial support, the responsibility to collect data lies with the national statistical producers. In most countries, the capacity to collect and process data has been strengthened. But despite decades of technical and financial assistance toward statistics, many of them still do not have adequate survey data. Externally funded initiatives are not being mainstreamed or sustained, and many national systems are caught in a vicious spiral of under-performance, domestic under-funding, and duplicative or conflicting donor agendas. Solutions to these issues must be found both at the national and the international levels. On-going technical assistance projects must be pursued, but more coordination and new initiatives are needed.

4. To better coordinate the activities of international organizations engaged in household surveys and develop joint initiatives, the *Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics* (MAPS) recommended the creation of an International Household Survey Network (IHSN).

5. The IHSN was established in Geneva on 27 September 2004. Regional development banks (AsDB, AfDB, IADB) and the World Bank, UN agencies (FAO, ILO, ITU, UNESCO, UNICEF, UNSD, WHO), PARIS21, DfID, the Secretariat for the Pacific Community, and other agencies participated in this meeting or in a prior consultation meeting held in Washington, DC in June 2004. Eurostat and Afristat subsequently joined the Network.

6. The mission of the IHSN is to improve the availability, accessibility and quality of survey data to encourage their use by national and international development decision makers, users and stakeholders. The IHSN will also aim to increase the cost-effectiveness of survey programs with a view to make them more sustainable and to reduce the burden of international survey programs on national statistical systems (e.g., by avoiding duplication of activities). Its members agreed to work towards these goals through a program of survey coordination, harmonization, and improved tools for archiving and dissemination of survey data and metadata. They agreed that to start, the IHSN would work in priority on (i) coordinating international survey programs, by fostering better timing, sequencing and frequency of internationally-sponsored surveys; (ii) promoting adoption of international standards and best practices by harmonizing data collection instruments; (iii) establishing a central survey data repository; and (iv) developing tools and guidelines for improving survey data documentation, dissemination and preservation.

7. To implement these activities, a “virtual” secretariat was put in place, hosted by the World Bank. The secretariat operates on the basis of voluntary contributions (in kind or in cash) from member agencies. The World Bank has so far absorbed most of the associated costs.

8. To oversee the Network activities, a Management Group has been composed comprising representatives of the PARIS 21 Secretariat, the ILO, DFID, UNICEF, UNSD, WHO, and the World Bank. The Group has met once with the members also keeping in contact with the secretariat staff at the World Bank to review the status of work and to address specific areas of concerns to their agency. At the World Bank, the Chief Economist has shown particular interest and formed a small advisory committee to review the IHSN's goals and work in progress, providing valuable feedback.

9. The IHSN is an informal network, which does not impose any formal obligation for its members. Participation is open to international and bilateral agencies engaged directly or indirectly in household surveys in developing countries.

More on specific accomplishments and planned activities

Coordination of survey planning

10. Few developing countries have the financial and technical resources to implement large-scale survey programs without external support. Large scale surveys are carried out infrequently, often on an ad-hoc basis, especially in the poorest countries. As donor support is not sufficiently coordinated, there are many examples of duplicated or conflicting donor-sponsored survey activities. A first step towards better coordination of support to survey programs was the development and implementation of a joint information system on on-going and planned survey activities. A prototype of a web-based system is available on the IHSN website. Contact persons have been nominated in various member agencies, who will assist the Secretariat in maintaining this database.

11. Another activity will be the production of guidelines on designing national survey programs. Since national survey programs are a key component of national strategies for the development of statistics (NSDS), these guidelines will be developed in close cooperation with PARIS21 and will become part of the overall guidelines on NSDSs. Another key partner is the Health Metrics Network (HMN), who is promoting enhanced coordination of household survey programs in the context of efforts to strengthen health information systems. The aim is that countries develop well-integrated, demand driven survey programs as part of a national health information system. This would include linking health-focused surveys with those directed to cross-sectoral issues such as living standards, education or employment, thus generating important information on the links between health and socio-economic determinants.

Harmonization of survey methods and instruments

12. Surveys are more valuable when they allow temporal and cross-country comparisons, i.e. when methods and data collection instruments are harmonized. The IHSN priorities will be to (i) support efforts of harmonization of survey methods and instruments, possibly with a focus on areas for which standard guidelines are not available yet or areas of particular relevance, e.g., international labor migration and remittances, water and sanitation (with the Joint Monitoring Program), infrastructure, and informal economy; and (ii) support the development of a "bank of questionnaire modules" for variables related to the MDG indicators. At this stage, the IHSN has only proceeded to a stock-taking exercise, centralizing material (questionnaires and guidelines) from various survey programs. The next steps will include a comparative assessment of these instruments (scope, complexity, cost of implementation, usability, compliance with international guidelines), and the production and sharing of recommendations for future surveys.

13. Another potentially useful activity would be the collection and dissemination of country-specific information on practical aspects of survey implementation (e.g., wage rates and allowances for interviewers, local per diems for national staff, other budget components, software used by national statistics offices, etc.).

Central survey catalog

14. To be useful survey data must be carefully analyzed and used. Given their importance and their scarcity, one would expect every survey to be thoroughly exploited. This is, however, rarely the case. Reasons for the under-use of survey data include the lack of analytical capacity at the national level, and the non-accessibility of properly documented survey microdata to secondary users. Building on the World Bank's household survey databank, the IHSN is maintaining a joint "Central Survey Catalog" (WHO provided metadata on the World Health Surveys, UNICEF on the MICS, etc.) The catalog lists over 2,300 surveys and censuses (not all of them with full metadata and dataset; see Appendix). A web-service tool has been developed, which allows contributors to easily retrieve metadata from the catalog. The list of surveys is publicly available at the IHSN website with some metadata. The World Bank is finalizing the development of an application that will allow easy and secure sharing of microdata amongst IHSN members. A strategy for sharing the responsibility of maintaining the databank, as well as a formal microdata dissemination policy that would comply with the rules imposed by the official data depositors, will have to be established before this service can be implemented.

Microdata Management Toolkit

15. Many data producers are willing to disseminate their micro-datasets but face technical difficulties. Guidelines and tools must be provided to data producers to assist them in properly documenting, anonymizing, disseminating and preserving their datasets. The World Bank has financed the development of a *Microdata Management Toolkit*. Version 1.0 of the Toolkit is being finalized. It is already available to and used by several IHSN members and national statistics offices. Several key survey sponsors have expressed their intention to use it as a standard tool for microdata dissemination (e.g. IHSN and Unicef will work together to provide the Toolkit with specific guidelines and utilities to interested MICS-participating countries). The IHSN Secretariat will coordinate the finalization of the Toolkit Users' Guide, its translation in various languages, the implementation of a training and roll-out program, and further application development and technical support.

16. To complement the Toolkit, the IHSN Secretariat is coordinating the production of a Handbook on Microdata Documentation, Dissemination and Preservation, which will provide technical, legal, ethical and policy guidelines to data producers. This document will build on existing material (such as the guidelines on microdata confidentiality being prepared by the Conference of European Statisticians, or technical guidelines from established data archive centers).

IHSN website

17. To ensure proper sharing and dissemination of the IHSN products, a website has been developed (www.surveynetwork.org). The priority for the near future is to improve the design and enrich the content of the website, and to move the site to a dedicated, more reliable web server.

Funding

18. The World Bank has absorbed most of costs of activities noted so far and has secured financial assistance from interested bilateral agencies. Other members' contributions have been mostly valuable in kind support. To finance IHSN's future work, the World Bank's Development Grant Facility¹ will provide funding for the Marrakech Action Plan for Statistics including IHSN's core activities (about 900K US\$ annually). Other IHSN members are encouraged to contribute (in kind or in cash) to the Network activities.

Lessons learned, challenges and opportunities

19. A key challenge for the IHSN during its first year of existence was to operate on the sole basis of voluntary contribution from its members. The activities for which specific funding was made available (e.g. the development of the central survey catalog and the production of the *Microdata Management Toolkit*, funded by the World Bank) have obviously progressed faster than others. The funds provided by the World Bank's Development Grant Facility will allow the Secretariat to accelerate the implementation of other activities in the short term. It will however remain crucial that IHSN members contribute by sharing information, and by participating in various IHSN activities when needed.

20. Another opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of the Network may be offered by the mandate given to the World Bank by the International Development Agency (IDA) contributors and by the G-8 Gleneagles Summit, to develop and implement an accelerated data collection program for measuring development outcomes in IDA countries, in particular in sub-Saharan Africa. Implementing this program (largely but not exclusively based on sample surveys) will not be part of the mandate of the IHSN, but the IHSN can be used as an instrument for ensuring proper coordination of this program with other agencies' activities, for information sharing, and possibly for initiating participation of IHSN members in this initiative.

21. The first year of activity of the IHSN has confirmed the relevance of such a coordination and information sharing mechanism, and the interest and willingness of its members to cooperate in achieving its goals. The IHSN Management Group appreciates being given the opportunity to report on the Network activities to the CCSA, and will welcome comments and suggestions from its members on the IHSN role and work program.

¹ The Development Grant Facility (DGF) is the World Bank's mechanism for providing grant funding for global and regional development initiatives which are of high value for client countries but cannot be supported adequately through regular country-based operations. The eligibility and approval process are rather demanding and strict. Examples of approved programs include: the river blindness, malaria and AIDS program; the *Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR)*; and support to *Cities Alliance* program. This year, the Board approved additional allocations totaling \$18.9 million to support new initiatives including the *Statistical Capacity Building Program*, the *Global Program for the Assessment of Educational Achievement*, *Mainstreaming Nutrition in Mother/Child Health Programs*, the *Program on Fisheries, TerrAfrica* (to promote sustainable land management) and the *Global Road Safety Facility*.

Central Survey Catalog - Status as of 15 August 2005

Table 1: Number of datasets by region

Region	Identified	Available
East Asia and Pacific	333	33
Europe and Central Asia	408	93
Latin America and Caribbean	588	248
Middle East and North Africa	143	18
South Asia	152	25
Sub-Saharan Africa	631	203
Total	2255	620

Notes:

1. “Identified” means that the survey is listed in the catalog, with some metadata. The content of metadata varies considerably. Completing this information is a continuous effort.
2. “Available” means that the micro dataset has been uploaded in the World Bank’s central data repository, or that it can be accessed on-line from an external provider (e.g. Macro International website for DHS, or UNICEF website for MICS).
3. Many more datasets are available at the World Bank, but have not been uploaded in the central repository yet.

Table 2: Number of datasets by type

Type	Identified	Available
1-2-3 Survey (Africa)	2	1
Agricultural Census	99	0
Agricultural Survey	14	0
Business Environment and Enterprise Performance Survey (EBRD BEEPS)	27	27
Child Labor Survey (ILO)	13	11
Core Welfare Indicators Questionnaire Survey (World Bank CWIQ)	19	5
Demographic and Health Survey (USAID/Macro Int. DHS)	162	145
Income/Expenditure Survey	324	53
Informal sector survey	8	1
Integrated survey (non LSMS)	219	77
Labor Force Surveys	209	98
Living Standards Measurement Survey (World bank LSMS)	77	56
Multiple Indicator Clusters Survey (Unicef MICS)	66	50
Population and Housing Census	680	0
Priority Survey (World Bank)	55	37
Productivity and Investment Climate Survey (World bank/ADB PICS)	23	23
Socioeconomic Monitoring Survey	44	3
World Fertility Survey (WFS)	2	0
World Health Survey (WHO)	53	0
Others (e.g., migration surveys, time use surveys, etc)	163	36
Total	2259	623

Note:

The total in table 2 exceeds total in table 1 as a few surveys belong to more than one category.

Table 3: Number of documents by type

Document type	Identified
Questionnaire	1198
Manuals and other technical documentation	1992
Survey report	617
Analytical document	622
Other (administrative, etc)	593
Total	5022

Note:

About 50 percent of the identified documents are available in electronic format. A major effort of scanning documents has already been done. Many more documents are available but have not been scanned and uploaded yet.

Important notes:

1. Availability of a dataset at the World Bank doesn't mean availability to all interested users. The World Bank usually does not have ownership of the microdata, and complies with the rules imposed by the official data depositors. Data is only shared with their prior formal authorization.
2. Availability of a dataset does not imply that the dataset is fully documented. In some cases, the documentation is sparse. The Microdata Management Toolkit was developed to assist countries in better documenting and preserving microdata and the related metadata.
3. A web-service has been developed to provide public access to the list of surveys and selected metadata. Only non-copyrighted and non-confidential information is made public. The IHSN website makes use of this web-service to publish the list of surveys. This web-service is available to IHSN members.