Expert Group Meeting on
Methods for Conducting Time-use Surveys
13-16 October 1997
New York

Report of the meeting

By

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I. Opening and organization of the meeting

1.   The meeting was held at United Nations Headquarters, New York, from 13-16 October 1997. The following experts participated: Michael Bittman (Australia), Dabilani Buthali (Botswana), Andy Harvey (Canada), Chris Jackson (Canada), Abaynesh Makonnen Gizaw (Ethiopia), Iiris Niemi (Finland), Jacques Charmes (France), Luisella Goldschmidt-Clermont (France), Indira Hirway (India), Linda Sabbadini (Italy), Katsuya Akasaka (Japan), Parsla Eglite (Latvia), Mercedes Pedrero (Mexico), Meena Acharya (Nepal), Gustav Haraldsen (Norway), Margarita F. Guerrero (Philippines), Linda Stinson (United States), Lourdes Urdaneta-Ferrán (Venezuela). The Statistical Office of the European Community (EUROSTAT) and the International Labour Office (ILO) were also represented.

2.   The Director of the Statistics Division of the United Nations Secretariat, Mr. Hermann Habermann, opened the meeting. He welcomed the participants and spoke of the increasing importance of data on time-use. He pointed to the two different approaches to a classification of time-use activities that were to be reviewed and summarized the goal of the meeting as arriving at an agreed classification, specified to the two-digit level, that could be tested in countries.

3.   The annotated agenda of the meeting is attached, and the list of documents distributed are in Annex 1 and Annex 2, respectively. Ms. Guerrero presided during the first two days of the meeting and Mr. Bittman during the last two days.

II. Overview of experiences and objectives of time-use surveys

4.   A presentation on the EUROSTAT Pilot Survey on Time Use identified problems related to the specification of activities, but noted that the general survey design proved successful. The presentation on the time-use study in Italy also identified problems with the specification of activities and concluded that improvements in survey methods rather than the classification system were required to improve the amount of information specified in time-use diaries.

5.   With respect to objectives and uses of time-use surveys, the priority uses of and interests in time-use data were discussed by each participant for their country. The most common objectives identified by both developed and developing countries, related to issues of gender and work, specifically the division of labour in the home and improvement in the measurement of women's unpaid work. A related objective concerned the use of time-use statistics in the preparation of household satellite accounts. Another common objective concerned changes in allocation of time across broad categories of activity.

6.   Plans to undertake national time-use studies in three developing countries -- India, the Philippines and South Africa -- were described. Among the objectives for these surveys are to quantify women's contribution to economic activities, to measure the extent of child labour, and to understand the relationship between welfare and poverty. The participant from India also

included among the objectives the need for information on livelihood strategies and on when people are free of work as a basis for planning skills formation, training and other poverty alleviation programmes.

III. Alternative schemes for classifying time-use activities

7.   The documents for review by the meeting were "Trial classification for time-use activities" (ESA/STAT/AC.59/1), and "An Alternative approach to the time-use activity list" (ESA/STAT/AC.59/2).

8.   The main rationale for the "Trial classification" proposed by UNSD was the growing interest to have a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the use of time in different societies. Time-use studies also provided a unique tool with which to measure unpaid work in both developed and developing countries and to supplement labour statistics in developing countries. Given these objectives, the proposed classification differed from other existing time-use classifications, such as the one used in the pilot surveys organized by EUROSTAT and other national classifications in three main ways:

(a) The system of national accounts (SNA) was used as the basic framework for determining the economic nature of the activities;

(b) Activities for non-market production which are an important part of production in developing countries, had been assigned to one major group with detailed specifications at two and three digit levels; and

(c) "On-the-job" activities which are normally not specified in detail, had been given more detailed breakdown and classified primarily by employment status categories.

9.   As the "Alternative approach" pointed out, the attempt to develop more detailed classification in two major groups of economic activity had accentuated the problem of duplication in the activity classification. This and other problems raised by some reviewers of the draft "Trial classification" therefore needed to be addressed by the Expert Group. Some of the concerns to be discussed included: (i) how specific activities of different groups of the population, such as children and the disabled, might be classified; (ii) the extent to which "on-the-job" activities should be specified in the classification; and (iii) how context variables were to be used in the classification.

10.   The note on the "Alternative approach" was prepared[*] as a reaction to the Secretariat's proposal in order to resolve what was considered as particularly problematic in the proposed "trial classification": (1) an abundance of both internal and external duplications of activities: internal duplications referring to activities of basically the same type being classified in different parts of the "trial classification"; and external duplications referring to the use of other classifications to introduce distinctions based on the context of the activity, into the proposed "trial classification"; (2) a terminology for the groups concerned with work-related activities which reflected activities undertaken by establishments rather than those of the persons working. The alternative approach was to create a classification system consisting of (i) a

classification of types of time-use activities; and (ii) a number of classifications of identified "context" variables, which could be used to group time-use episodes according to the needs of various descriptive and analytical perspectives. An example of (i) was presented with references to the "trial classification", as well as examples of context variables incorporated into the proposed "trial classification".

* by Eivind Hoffman and Adriana Mata, ILO, Bureau of Statistics. The paper was prepared in a private capacity, and the views and proposals did not necessarily reflect the position of the ILO or the Bureau of Statistics

11.   The meeting acknowledged that while the "Alternative approach" presented an approach to the classification of time-use activities different from those that had to date been used for time-use studies, the groupings presented in the traditional time-use classifications could generally be derived by cross-classifying a "type of activity" classification with the context variable defined by responses to the question "for whom?". However, the meeting considered that the approach of the "trial classification" was preferable because of its stronger links with existing time-use classifications, although it was noted that the dependence on SNA groupings made it confusing and potentially difficult to apply in practice. Specifically, many believed that it would be too complicated to separate market from non-market production in the household sector.

12.   The meeting recognized the usefulness of specifying details of time use in work situations for analyzing the impact of labour regulations and the relationship between the content of work and of leisure, and for specific types of market research. It was however felt that there should be more careful consideration of the purpose that such a classification would serve and of the extent of detail that could realistically be collected without overloading the diary and adding to the already heavy burden on the respondents. The meeting welcomed the initiative taken to open the block of time devoted to work and suggested that a separate classification of type of "on-the-job" time-use activities might be developed by ILO to respond to the need for this type of information.

IV. Structure and specification of the classification

13.   The discussions on the best approach to adopt for a trial international classification focussed on the purpose of the classification, its scope and structure, the content of each major group, and the use of context variables for grouping activities.

14.   The meeting noted that the classification was to provide the basis on which data from time-use surveys would be coded and presented in categories that would be meaningful in the assessment of national labour inputs into production of all goods and all types of services; in the compilation of household satellite accounts; and in examining trends in the broad uses of time. The two main principles for specifying the classification were therefore to:

    (a) Provide a structure which is consistent with the conceptual framework of the System of National Accounts (SNA) and allows for creating aggregates for satellite accounts. For this reason, it was desirable that at the second and other levels of the classification it be possible to

combine subgroups and categories of activities to form the conceptual groupings within the SNA (i.e. market and own-account production by households), as well as productive activities within the general production boundary (using the third person criterion);

(b) Ensure comparability with other existing time-use classifications.

15. Furthermore, it was suggested that although countries were expected to adapt the proposed international classification to their national social and economic realities, every effort should be made to maintain international comparability at the 2-digit level of classification.

16. It was agreed that the scope of the classification would continue to cover all activities on which time was spent, classified under ten major groups. The disaggregation of time spent on the job, should however be limited to identifying breaks, secondary jobs, etc. The following major groups were adopted (see Annex 3 for their content and subdivision):

1. Employment for establishments
2. Primary production activities (not for establishments)
3. Services for income and other production of goods (not for establishments)
4. Household maintenance, management and shopping for own household
5. Care for children, the sick, elderly and disabled for own household
6. Community services and help to other households
7. Learning
8. Social and cultural activities
9. Mass media use
0. Personal care and self-maintenance

17. Regarding the content of each major group the meeting outlined the following general considerations which should be applied.

18. Activities which represented production within the SNA production boundary could be classified in major groups 1 to 3*. Activities which fell predominantly within the general production boundary but outside the SNA boundary, using the "third person" criterion of the SNA, were to be classified in groups 4 to 6; and major groups 7 to 9 and 0 covered non-production activities. Further distinctions between the major groups were as follows:

Excluded are activities classified to 15, 18, 28 and 38; and included are activities classified to 61.

19. *Major group 1: Employment for establishments* - includes paid and unpaid employment in establishments (i.e. fixed structures and large-scale agricultural holdings) irrespective of the industrial sector of the activity. To be consistent with definitions of actual hours worked and of economic activity, this major group also includes short breaks during working hours, and the work component of apprenticeships. "Seeking employment" is also included here, to be consistent with earlier time-use classifications.

20.   *Major group 2: Primary production activities (not for establishments)* - is comprised of the activities not covered in major group 1 which mainly include peasant or subsistence farming and activities connected with other types of primary production. The outputs which result from activities classified under this major group may or may not be sold or bartered, and could be for households' own consumption.

21.   *Major group 3: Services for income and other production of goods (not for establishments)* - consists of activities for production of goods and services not covered in major group 1. These are typically income-generating services and production of non-primary goods for sale or for household's own consumption.

22.   *Major group 4: Household maintenance, management and shopping for own household* - comprises services such as general management of the household, performing housework, and shopping, which are performed by members of the household for their own household.

23.   *Major group 5: Care for children, the sick, elderly and disabled for own household* - covers individual services pertaining to the physical care of children and care provided to other members of the household who are sick, disabled or elderly.

24.   *Major group 6: Community services and help to other households* - covers both obligatory and voluntary services which are provided for the benefit of members of the community, as well as help extended to other households (such as households of relatives, friends and neighbours).

25.   *Major group 7: Learning* - covers attendance in formal education and other types of schooling and vocational training, including studying in preparation for classes and examinations, taking courses, etc.

26.   *Major group 8: Social and cultural activities* - consists of those activities which are primarily for personal benefit, or for the benefit of own household or of others (including family members, neighbours and friends).

27.   *Major group 9: Mass media use* - covers activities related to the use of mass media, such as listening to the radio, watching television and reading newspaper, magazines, novels, etc.

28.   *Major group 0: Personal care and self-maintenance* - comprises those activities required by the individual to meet their own biological needs, and includes time spent caring for one's own self or receiving this type of care.

29.   The meeting discussed at length the boundaries of the major groups and the categories of activities which needed to be defined at the second digit level. The resulting output of the discussions was a "Proposal for a Trial International Classification of Time Use Activities" which is presented in Annex 3. In addition, the meeting made the following observations and identified unresolved issues which could be left for further consideration and discussion on the basis of national experiences and research.

(a) The difficulty of developing a classification that would cover the diversity of all national situations was recognized. The group stressed the importance of countries using the agreed 2-digit level classification to ensure comparability. The Statistics Division will develop a 3-digit classification which countries may adapt to their respective national contexts. The group urged that country-specific changes should only be made at the 3-digit or more detailed levels.

(b) "Waiting" is a very common activity in both developed and developing countries, and forms a particularly significant component of some types of activity, for example, travel, searching for employment, visits to health care centres, paying for services, etc. However, the time spent in the activity "waiting" had often not been reported in the diaries of respondents in most studies that had been carried out in developed countries. It was proposed that for the 2-digit level activity categories in which waiting was a significant component, a specification of "waiting" as a type of activity at the third digit level of classification might be introduced". Moreover, instructions on where and how to code "waiting" should be clearly explained.

(c) The distinctions between major group 1 and groups 2 and 3 needs further clarification to make the groups operational. The Secretariat would therefore need to provide a definition of "establishment" which was the primary basis for classifying employment in major group 1.

(d) There was some interest in comparing the amounts of time spent on activities for market production with the time spent on similar activities for non-market production within and outside the SNA production boundary. Given that clarification of the "for whom" variable was necessary in order to identify market and non-market activities, it was suggested that further research would be needed to determine the contextual variables and the response categories expected.

(e) Another issue suggested for further study concerned what was generally referred to as supervising children. Since a significant part of this function took place concurrently with other activities, such as housework, reading, relaxation, etc., indications of the time spent on supervising children (unless clearly reported as such or as a secondary activity) would have to be obtained from cross-classifications with responses to the question "with whom".A supplementary study of this phenomenon to better measure time input in child care within the household was proposed.

30.   In the discussion of contextual variables required for the classification, the Group observed that the two main questions needed for distinguishing activities of one major group from another were "for whom" and "location". The specification of categories of these variables were needed to clarify and distinguish activities in one grouping from another.

V. Methodological issues relevant to the classification

31.   Given the limited time available, the meeting discussed only briefly the range of methodological considerations involved in collecting time-use data. The discussion raised issues concerning the recording procedures, units of recall or time span, the coding of write-in responses and the structure of the diary. The recording procedures included: self-reporting by

respondent with mail-back diaries; self-reporting with diary pick-up and checking of responses; face-to-face or telephone interviews; and observation method. The units of recall or time span within which respondents were made to consider the activities could vary from a whole week to a day. The two basic forms of structuring the diary involved either using fixed time intervals or an open format with the beginning and end times for each activity.

32.   The time diaries might have intervals of any duration. The most common were 10 or 15 minutes. It was believed that although the fixed intervals would not present a problem in developing countries, this method should not be used if the recall method was being used. The strategy for reporting activities could be to ask for a chronological report or to ask for the activities that the respondent readily remembered and probe successively until completeness was achieved.

33.   With respect to the number of respondents per household, either one person was selected from each sampled household to complete a diary, or each of the eligible members of a given household completed a diary. It was believed that the latter method could present problems in many developing countries.

34.   The meeting noted that there were advantages and disadvantages to each procedure or technique. The choice of approach with respect to the kind of diary, technique of recording, etc., would depend on a combination of factors, including the characteristics of the target population (e.g. literacy levels), communication technology and infrastructure (such as telecommunication and mailing systems), and available resources.

35.   The meeting discussed the types of information needed and identified the following as important context variables: "for whom", "with whom" and location. It was recommended that classifications for these variables be developed. The collection of information on secondary activities was also considered to be desirable.

36.   The meeting further noted that while there was substantial experience in the collection of time-use data in developed countries, it would be necessary to experiment with different formats and methods in order to assess their relative effectiveness for collecting time-use data in developing countries.

VI.   Plans for finalizing, external review and testing of the classification

37.   The Expert Group discussed plans for follow-up work on the document and agreed that:

   (a)   Participants should be given the opportunity for further review and input;

   (b) Participants from developing countries were encouraged to submit wording for the classification that would reflect the situation in their countries or regions.

38.   It was recommended that a meeting of a small working group was needed to reconcile comments on the revised classification and to assist in finalizing the document. The Statistics

Division would try to identify a suitable opportunity, for example in connection with another meeting, and the necessary resources to convene such a meeting.

39.   It was also noted that further development and formal adoption of the classification by the Statistical Commission depended on its testing in developing countries. It was agreed that the classification, while not complete, would provide guidance to countries in their work and countries planning time-use surveys were encouraged to work within the agreed framework.

VII.   General conclusions

40.   The meeting emphasized that a good classification was only the first step in improving the collection of time-use statistics. Countries also needed guidance on how to carry out time-use surveys. The meeting agreed that it would be important to prepare a manual to provide methodological guidance on time-use surveys relevant to a wide range of circumstances.

41.   The meeting stressed the importance of developing methodological tools to facilitate national implementation of the classification. In this regard, it would be necessary to:

- Develop appropriate coding tools which would reflect the responses and determine their effective use for the corresponding codes;
- Prepare a correspondence table with other time-use classifications to facilitate comparisons with other studies over time;
- Provide basic categories for the context variables needed to implement the classification.

42.   The group encouraged national statistics offices and researchers to experiment with the different diary formats and methods and to share information about their experiences in the development of these techniques.

43.   The meeting expressed appreciation of the work of the Statistics Division to develop an international classification which would serve the needs of both developing and developed countries. The group agreed to assist in these efforts and urged international organizations and bilateral agencies to support further development of this work, in particular in developing countries. The following specific suggestions were made:

    (a) Meeting participants agreed to share information about planned and ongoing studies, particularly in developing countries.

    (b) Countries with time-use data collection experience were urged to form bilateral association with developing countries to provide technical and other necessary support for carrying out such studies, and several participants offered to explore ways in which their institutions could support time-use work in developing countries.

    (c) Countries should consider ways of testing the classification and provide feedback on improvements needed. Interest in doing so was expressed in connection with planned work in India, Nepal, the Philippines and South Africa.

(d) There was interest in the organization of a workshop to bring together persons in the field of time-use statistics from developed and developing countries. It was proposed that the International Association of Time Use Researchers (IATUR) could conduct one in connection with its next meeting to be held 26 July - 1 August 1998 in Montreal.