

STATISTICAL DATA COLLECTION IN MAURITIUS

1.1 Organisational Framework

The Central Statistics Office (CSO), which was set up in 1945, is the official organisation responsible for the collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination of all official statistics relating to all aspects of the economic and social activities of the country. By virtue of the Statistics Act 2000, the CSO is the central depository for all statistics produced in Mauritius. Section 5(c) of the Act stipulates that the Director "shall co-ordinate and monitor statistical activities in all ministries and government departments, local authorities and other statutory bodies" with a view to ensuring, among other things, that approved statistical standards and procedures are applied. Currently there are two ministries which have developed their own statistical systems. These are the Ministry of Health and Quality of Life and the Ministry of Fisheries.

1.2 Organisations involved in data collection

Statistical data collection in Mauritius is not restricted to the CSO and government ministries and departments. A number of non-government organisations are also actively engaged in statistical data production for their own internal purposes and/or for servicing other organisations, including government ministries and departments. Foremost among them is the University of Mauritius which often conducts surveys and studies, either as part of its own research activities or on behalf of other bodies.

The Centre for Applied Social Research (CASR), which is a joint initiative of the University of Mauritius and the Mauritius Research Council, was set up in the year 2000 with a view to undertaking further research on the strengths and weaknesses of the Mauritian society. The centre piece activity of the CASR is the *Mauritius Social Audit* - a project meant to provide barometric measures on major issues concerning the welfare of the population. Thus the Centre collects data on topics such as financial well-being and stability, access to financial services, employment, health, education, inequality, family dynamics, local environment, social network/capital, social attitudes and demographics.

The Bank of Mauritius, which is responsible for balance of payments, also produces a wide range of monetary and banking statistics such as reserve money, monetary ratios, circulation of money, commercial banks' assets and liabilities and inter-bank transactions.

Business organisations such as Mauritius Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mauritius Sugar Syndicate, Mauritius Chamber of Agriculture, Mauritius Employers' Federation, have their own system of data collection for their respective fields of interest.

Some non-profit institutions also produce statistics from their administrative records and conduct surveys from time to time on subjects of topical interest or current concern. Foremost among these NGO's is the Mauritius Family Planning Association which has carried out studies on abortion and AIDS-related risk behaviour in Mauritius.

1.3 Data sources

The main sources used by CSO to obtain information for the compilation of official statistics are: (a) censuses, (b) sample surveys and (c) administrative records.

(a) Censuses

Censuses provide first hand primary data at source. Mauritius has a long history in the taking of censuses and a detailed description of these censuses is given in Section 5: "Censuses and Surveys".

Censuses are conducted at regular intervals to provide up to date data at low spatial level for planners and decision makers. They also provide data for benchmarking purposes. The results provide sampling frames for the conduct of other sample surveys.

(b) Sample Surveys

The CSO has a regular programme of sample surveys covering household and enterprise income and expenditure and labour force. These surveys are conducted at periodic intervals and provide an important source of data to planners. Furthermore, in order to address the demand for more social indicators, a Continuous Multipurpose Household Survey has been conducted since the year 1999 and is meant to be an on-going exercise covering various topics of interest.

The details of these sample surveys are given in section 6 "Censuses and Surveys".

(c) Administrative records

As a result of their routine administrative activities, most government ministries and departments generate various types of information that can be used as primary sources for statistics, depending on their relevance, consistency, coverage, completeness and accuracy. The main organisations whose record systems are exploited routinely to yield substantial statistical output are:

- Civil Status Division of the Prime Minister's Office (vital statistics)
- Customs and Excise Department (trade statistics)
- Income Tax Department (income tax statistics)
- Judicial Department (judicial activities)
- Ministry of Education and Scientific Research (education statistics)
- Ministry of Finance (Government Finance statistics)
- Ministry of Local Government and Solid Waste Management (licensing statistics)
- Ministry of Social Security, National Solidarity & Senior Citizen Welfare and Reform Institutions (pension contributions and benefits)
- National Transport Authority and Traffic Management Unit (road transport statistics)
- Passport and Immigration Office (statistics of international travel and tourism)
- VAT Department (VAT statistics)

1.4 Problems of data collection

(a) Response problems

In spite of this provision, however, there are always some respondents who feel reluctant to provide data requested by the CSO. The main reasons for this reluctance are twofold: on the one hand there is the response burden imposed on respondents who have to make special efforts and find the time to assemble the information, and on the other there is the fear that the data may be used for purposes other than statistical, especially taxation.

Because of these restrictions, CSO assists ministries and Government departments to collect data under their own legislation. Besides, the Statistics Act 2000 makes provision for the joint collection of data by the Central Statistics Office and any other Ministry of Government Department, local authority or statutory body.

(b) Other problems

Many research institutes or private firms are conducting surveys for market research or opinion polls, thus increasing the burdens on would be respondents who may be selected in more than one survey at a time. Some people may not be able to differentiate between questionnaires for an official survey conducted by the CSO and those carried out by private organisations.

Data collected from administrative sources are not devoid of problems. The forms and documents which have been established independently of the CSO, may lead to inconsistencies and incomplete coverage. Besides, these organisations may be using non-standard definitions and methods and this necessitates careful putting together to have meaningful statistics.