Measuring children's time use in MICS

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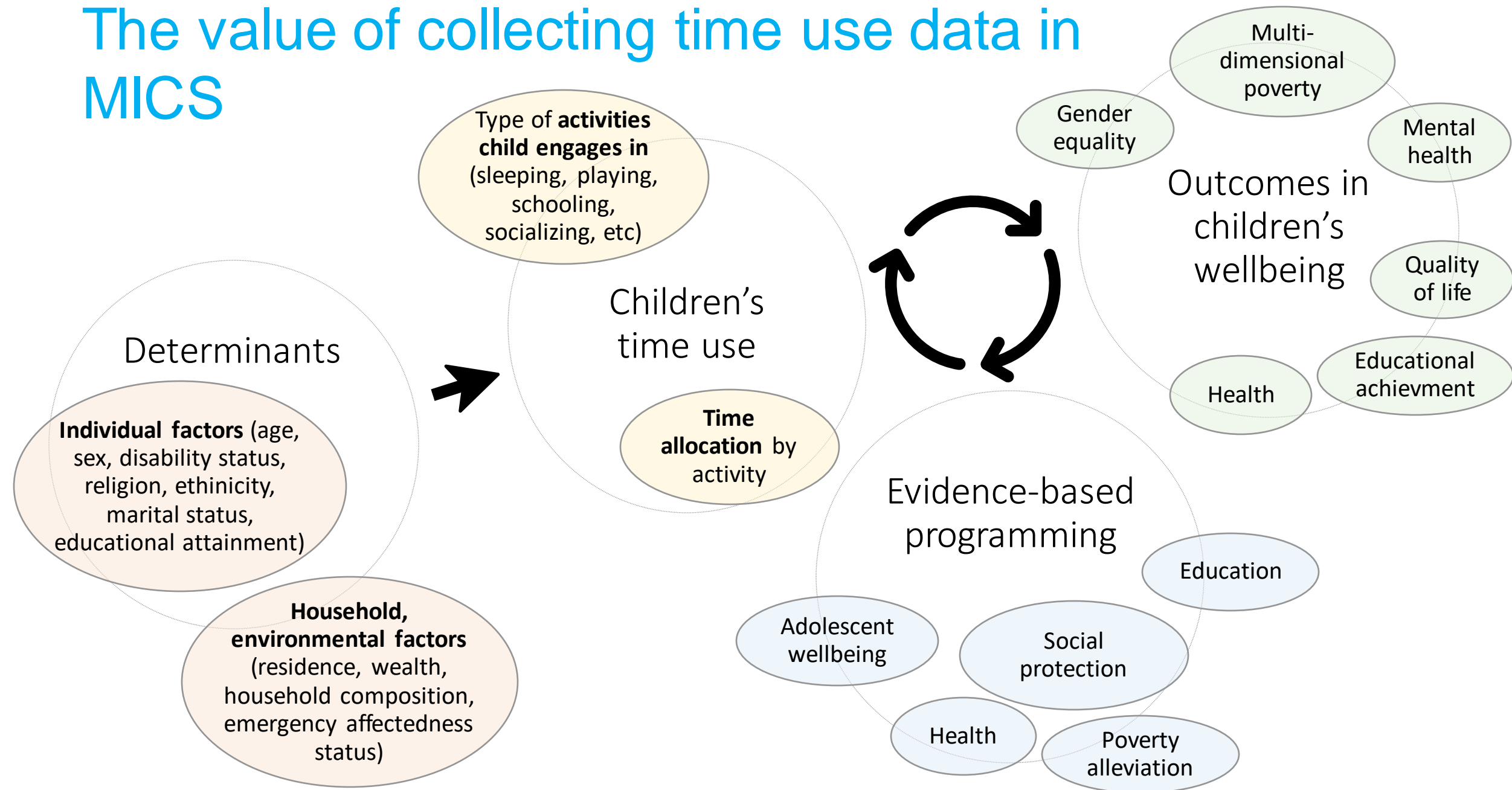
Why measure children's time use?

"Before we can evaluate how well children are doing and why some are doing better than others, it is important to understand what they are doing, with whom, and in which social contexts and institutions."

Harding (1997)

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Addressing the data gaps

❖ Limited understanding about how the way children spend their time affects their wellbeing and shapes their opportunities

❖ Gender disparities in time use begin to form in childhood yet focus of time use data collection largely on adult population

❖ No standard data collection tools to measure children's time use

The value of collecting time use data in MICS

Type of **activities child engages in** (sleeping, playing, schooling, socializing, etc)

Children's time use

Time allocation by activity

Determinants

Individual factors (age, sex, disability status, religion, ethinicity, marital status, educational attainment)

Household, environmental factors (residence, wealth, household composition, emergency affectedness status)

Outcomes in children's wellbeing

Multi-dimensional poverty

Gender equality

Mental health

Quality of life

Educational achievment

Health

Evidence-based programming

Education

Adolescent wellbeing

Social protection

Health

Poverty alleviation

Challenges collecting time use data in MICS

- Seasonality bias

- Limited use of time pieces in remote and low literacy areas

- Social desirability bias

- Enumerator training requirements

Challenges (cont'd): Self vs proxy reporting

Is there social desirability bias when caregivers report? (e.g. under/over reporting of stigmatized/desirable activities)

Parents underreport girls' domestic work (Levison 2000)

Social desirability bias by proxy respondent may decrease with age (Janzen 2016)

How accurate is caregivers reporting? Do they know what children are doing?

Discrepancies in time spent in paid/unpaid work, sleep and leisure

Few discrepancies in time spent learning (Rost 2020)

At what age can children self-report?

From age 8-10, most children can report on their own time (Eurostat 2016)

TU instruments typically completed by caregivers of children 12 yrs. or younger and by children themselves, 13-17 yrs.

Considerations for time use data collection in MICS
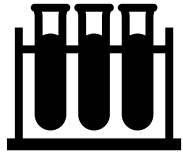
Field testing

- Stylized questions vs. time diary
- Child versus caregiver reporting
- Adequacy of time use categories adapted from ICATUS 2016
- Additional respondent burden in multi-topic survey
- Low literacy, rural settings
- Enumerator training

Guiding criteria

Relevance across diversity of settings, and for policy and programming

Trade off between granularity and complexity of codification and training

Getting quality data without adversely affecting overall MICS quality
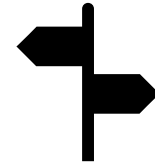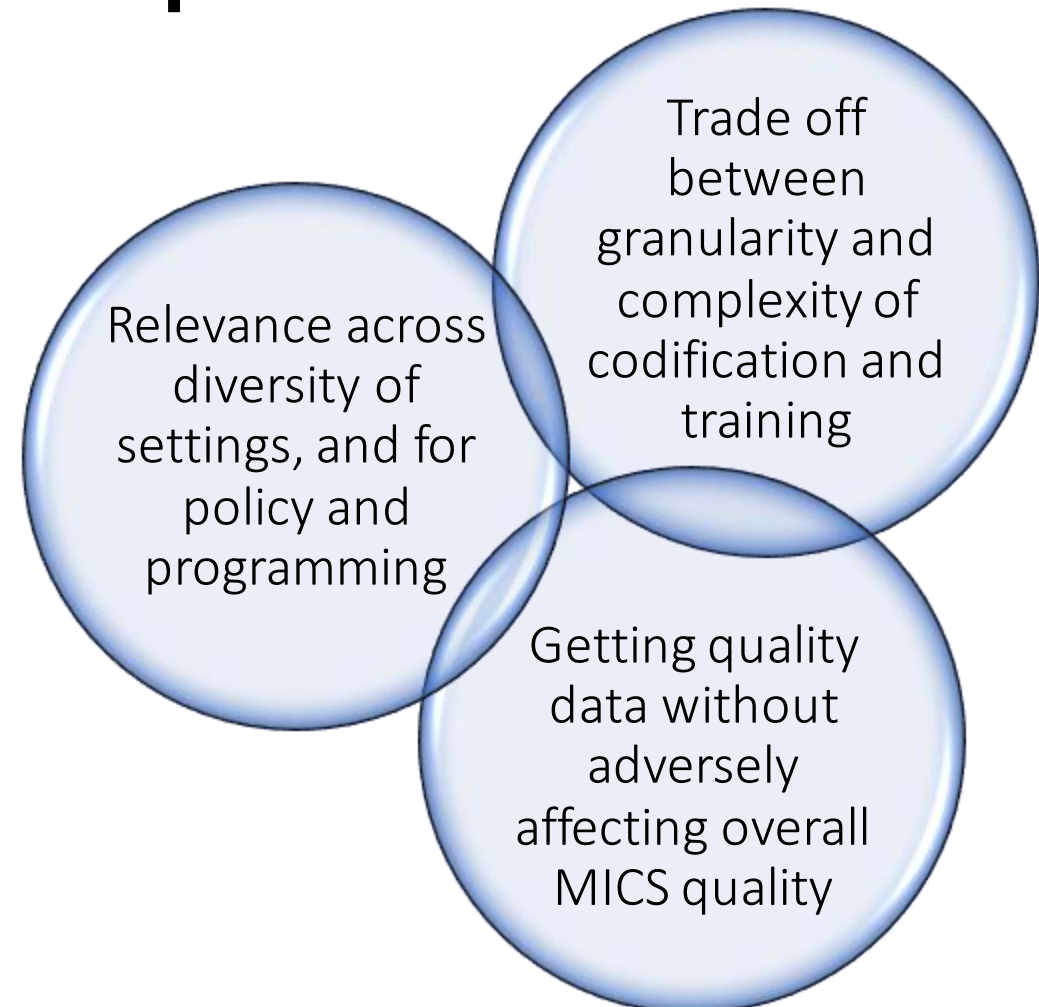
Overview of children's time use field testing

	Malawi (2017)	Belize (2019)	Zimbabwe (2022)
Instrument	Stylized questions with 2 reference periods (7 days & 24 hrs.)	Survey-based time diary (past 24 hrs.) Adaptation of ICATUS 2016 to prioritize children's activities	Survey-based time diary (past 24 hrs.) Further adaptation of ICATUS 2016 Introduction of contextual questions
Sample design	Split purposive sample of 447 households in 2 rural districts (Nkhata Bay and Balaka)	Probability-based sample of 680 households in 2 districts (mostly rural; urban)	Split purposive sample of 250 households in urban, peri-urban and rural settings in Mutare
Respondent	Proxy reporting by primary caregiver of children aged 5-17	Proxy reporting by primary caregiver of children aged 5-17	Self-reporting by adolescents aged 15-17 and proxy reporting by primary caregiver of adolescents aged 15-17
Implementing partners	UNICEF Malawi & Malawi National Statistical Office	UNICEF Belize & Statistical Institute of Belize	UNICEF Zimbabwe & Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency

What have we learned?

- In general, respondents pleased to speak about their day/their child's day
- Stylized questions & time diary
  - **Respondent fatigue** observed with stylized questions, potentially owing to cognitive burden of retrieval and aggregation
  - Diary performed better but probing needed to avoid gaps in accounting of activities
- Some difficulty collecting accurate information in low-literacy settings
  - Non-numeric responses ("a bit", "not long" etc.) required time estimation after extensive probing

What have we learned?

Child self reporting versus care-giver proxy reporting:

- Caregivers not as able to report child's activities and duration when child away from home
- Caregivers found it harder than children to report activities children were engaged in, even when children at home

What have we learned?

- Quality data depends on good interviewer-respondent rapport and strong interviewing skills

  - Interviewing techniques differ from typical MICS survey administration (facilitated conversation rather than scripted set of questions)

- With adequate training and practice, interviewers' probing and activity coding skills significantly improve

- CAPI can minimize entry and estimation errors with prompts and consistency checks but can interfere with interview's flow

- Training manuals need to be customized to provide country-relevant examples to aid in activity coding

- Sufficient time for training is critical

What have we learned?

Developing a time diary meaningful for children involved:

- **Re-classification and re-grouping** of ICATUS domain activities and introduction of **new activity labels** to prioritize children's activities and align with UNICEF programming

- Examples - School attendance in person/remote, gaming separately from play, socialization in person/through digital technologies, social media as entertainment

  ➢ Tradeoff between granularity and complexity of coding and interviewers' training

- Introduction of **contextual questions** related to homework support/tutoring, digital/online engagement associated with learning, socialization and civic participation (Zimbabwe)

- ICATUS activities adaptation and contextual questions were understood, but small samples did not capture low prevalence activities in testing locations

What's next?

Time use module for children 10-17 yrs. now available as complementary topic in MICS7

- Direct reporting for children aged 15-17

- Proxy reporting by caregiver for children aged 10-14

- Tool package includes administration guidelines, interviewer's instructions, protocols and ethical considerations for interviewing children

- Further methodological work to lower direct reporting for children 10-14 as well as to collect time use data for children below age 10

Thank You

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