

**Household Surveys in a Changing Data Landscape**  
**Challenges, Opportunities and an Agenda for the Future**

**Conference Room 4**

**28 February 2020, New York**

Household surveys play an important role in meeting national data needs, for example, in measuring poverty, employment, skills and learning inclusive education, food security, access to health services and public services, discrimination and violence, inter alia. Household surveys are also critical for monitoring inequalities by gender, class, location disability and other markers of disadvantage, which is critical for monitoring progress against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition, household surveys are an invaluable source of data for behavioural and attitudinal measures which cannot be collected – for example – through administrative data systems. A mapping exercise recently conducted shows that around one-third of all SDG indicators (80 out of 232 indicators), covering 13 different goals, can be sourced from household surveys.<sup>1</sup>

Despite their crucial role in national statistical systems over the past decades, household surveys are now facing many funding challenges and scepticism about their usefulness and adaptability to this era of a changing data landscape. Household surveys are increasingly portrayed as slow and costly. With rising income and urbanization, response rates in surveys (especially in high-income countries) have been declining, with more and more individuals becoming reluctant to participate in surveys. Survey data are often underutilized, which raises further questions on the usefulness and the value of household surveys. With national statistical offices overstretched and underfunded to meet the growing demand for data, household surveys are too-often framed as obsolete when compared and contrasted with other data sources such as “Big Data” and administrative data. Some have even speculated that in a not-too-distant future, Big Data may eliminate the need for surveys altogether.

Are household surveys still relevant in the changing data landscape? And if so, are there new roles for that household surveys can play in this new data landscape in addition to the value they currently hold? How do we unleash the full potential of household surveys to add value to other data sources? What are the real opportunities and limitations of alternative data sources *vis a vis* household surveys? How do we improve the effectiveness of household surveys and their contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development?

Organised by the United Nations Statistics Division, in collaboration with the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Household Surveys, the seminar provides a platform for national statistical offices, international organisations and the research community to debate and discuss strategies to realise the full potential of household surveys in this new environment. The seminar will help identify the way forward for further

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<sup>1</sup> “Out of a total of 232 SDG indicators, 80 indicators were identified as obtainable from household surveys”, even if currently not all of them are collected using this data source. Achieving the Full Potential of Household Surveys in the SDG Era, Background document, Statistical Commission item 4c, 2019

methodological development in household surveys, for scaling up innovative approaches in countries and for identifying capacity building needs. The seminar will also explore and suggest practical ways to streamline and scale up those innovative approaches and do so equitably, with low income countries benefiting in equal manner.

Opening remarks – Mr. Stefan Schweinfest, Director, UN Statistics Division (5m)

#### Session 1. 10:00 – 11:30am A New Role of Household Surveys in the SDG Era

This first session will set the scene for the day-long event and discuss some of the strengths and weaknesses of household surveys, and the challenges and opportunities offered by a changing data landscape. Following an opening keynote speaker, the ensuing panel will gather experts from different disciplines and institutional perspectives for an open discussion on the role of household surveys in the SDG era.

Keynote speaker: Mr. Xiao-Li Meng, Whipple V. N. Jones Professor of Statistics, Department of Statistics, Harvard University

#### ***Big Data and Small Surveys: Which one should we trust more?*** (30 min)

Moderator: Mr. Gero Carletto, Manager, Development Data Group, World Bank

Panelists:

- Ms. Irene Saleminck, Director, Innovation, Development and Management, Statistics Netherlands
- Ms. Ola Awad, President, Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
- Mr. Emmanuel Letouzé, co-Founder and Director, Data-Pop Alliance
- Mr. Mark Hereward, Associate Director for Data and Analytics, Planning and Monitoring, UNICEF
- Mr. Xiao-Li Meng, Whipple V. N. Jones Professor of Statistics, Department of Statistics, Harvard University

#### Session 2. 11:30am – 1:00pm Adding Value to Household Surveys through Integration

Integrating household surveys with other data sources can bring various benefits, for example on producing more granular and timely data with a good understanding of the context behind the data. Enhanced integration would also provide added value to household surveys, since they can be used as a validation and ground-truthing tool for other data sources. The session showcases innovative methods on integrating data from household surveys with data from other sources such as administrative systems, geospatial data, remote sensing and citizen-generated data.

Moderator: Mr. Papa Seck, Chief Statistician, UN Women

Presentations (15 min each):

#### ***Using satellites to amplify the power of household surveys***

Mr. Marshall Burke, Assistant Professor, Stanford University

#### ***Better (citizen) science with household surveys***

Ms. Andrea Wiggins, Assistant Professor, University of Nebraska

***Using data from LinkedIn and household surveys to measure gender gap in labour market, activities related to STEMS and income***

Mr. Juan Daniel Oviedo, Chief Statistician, National Statistics Office of Colombia – DANE

***Integrating Data Sources to Complement and Improve Household Survey Data***

Mr. Utz Pape, Senior Economist, the World Bank

Session 3. 3:00 – 4:30pm Innovations in Household Surveys

The session showcases innovative approaches adopted in household surveys, which aim to improve the efficiency and quality of survey data; or to enhance the richness of data and better understanding of wellbeing. The session comprises a number of short lightning talk presentations each showcasing a methodological or technological innovation in household survey data collection and use.

Moderator: Ms. Ariunzaya Ayush, Chairperson, National Statistics Office of Mongolia

Presentations (7 min each)

***Productivity and Health: Physical Activity as a Measure of Effort - the integration of household survey data, administrative data and data from accelerometers***

Mr. Andrew Dillon, Professor, Northwestern University

***Improving the availability and quality of individual-disaggregated survey data: the LSMS experience***

Mr. Talip Kilic, Senior Economist, the World Bank

***Blending survey and passive data***

Ms. Stephanie Eckman, Senior Survey Methodologist, RTI

***Managing data quality in CAPI surveys***

Ms. Leesha Delatie-Budair, Deputy Director General, Statistical Institute of Jamaica

***Why geocoding a sampling frame might prove useful?***

Mr. Vincent Loonis, chef de la division des méthodes et des référentiels géographiques, Institut National de la Statistique et des Études Économiques, France

***Delivering quality statistics in household surveys through innovations and modern approaches - experiences from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS)***

Mr. Shane M. Khan, Specialist for household surveys and analytics, UNICEF

***Innovative methodology to collect information on sensitive and rare events through surveys***

Ms. Angela Me, Chief, Research and Trend Analysis Branch, UNODC

Session 4. 4:30 – 6:00pm Household surveys in a Changing Data Landscape: an Agenda for the Future

This last session will be a moderated panel discussion, inviting panellists to reflect on what was presented during the day, giving their views on the overall debate and offering practical recommendations on a way forward. Specifically, the panellists will be asked to reflect on (1) scalable solutions to increase the value

of household surveys at the national, regional and global level, especially in responding to the SDG data requirement; (2) strategies to ensure an equitable diffusion and adoption of innovation in less developed countries; and (3) priorities for activities at the global level for short- and medium-terms.

Moderator: Mr. Stefan Schweinfest, Director, United Nations Statistics Division

Panellists:

- Mr. Samuel Annim, Government Statistician, Ghana Statistical Service
- Mr. Andy Tatem, Professor, WorldPop, University of Southampton
- Mr. Rolando Ocampo, Director, Statistics Division, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
- Ms. Haishan Fu, Director, Development Data Group, World Bank
- Mr. Neil Jackson, Chief Statistician, Department for International Development (DFID), United Kingdom