Collection of Vital Inflation Data
There and back again

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South Africa
Contents

- Shifting nature of lockdown
- South African data collection response
- Experiences in other African countries
- Benefits of international collaboration
- Reflections
South Africa lockdown timeline

End March and April: Level 5
- Most COICOP groups (except essential goods & services) prohibited
- Most travel restricted

May: Level 4
- List of items permitted for sale broadened
- Travel for permitted work allowed

June - mid August: Level 3
- All retail available except alcohol and cigarettes
- Certain services (e.g., gym, sports spectating, hotels) still prohibited

June - mid August: Level 4
- All retail except cigarettes
- Air travel, sports spectating prohibited

Mid August - Level 5
- All retail
- Sports spectating prohibited
Impact on field price collection

- **April:** No field work - online price collection only
- **May:** Negotiations with unions on field health protocols.

- 1/3 of field staff not able to visit stores due to health risks
- Remaining staff not equally distributed across collection areas – challenge for geographic indices

- Collection in last week of May – focus on fresh food, clothing and other newly permitted retail items
Online price collection

- Team of 12 staff members working from home to manually collect prices from online presence of retail chains
- Replicated field sample to maintain continuity
- Collected prices of permitted essential items at end of March to compare with April
- Collected online prices weekly in April and then monthly
- Developed webscraping tool but not used
Impact on CPI collection and processing

- Online data captured in excel and required changes to capturing system
- Field quality control processes not suited to online data
- CPI compiled on significantly less data
- Imputations for prohibited products
- April CPI delayed by 1 month
- Regular communication with users important
Essential products CPI

- Short publication to inform country of price changes of essential goods
- Compiled weekly in April based on available online prices
- Aimed to assess possible excessive price increases – there were none picked up
- Much interest from media and users
- But ... economic meaning not clear and different outcome to monthly CPI
Experience of selected African countries

- Generally less severe lock down than South Africa
- Limited availability of online prices
- Special permissions for price collectors to travel
- Government branded vehicles
- Purchasing of PPE
- Emailing questionnaires to stores or phoning (limited success)
- Office staff and families collect prices while shopping
International collaboration

Crisis shows benefit of international agencies supporting NSOs

- Intersecretariat working group Business continuity guidance document – March
- UNECE wiki page - March
- UNECA seminar on Data collection for compiling CPIs - May
- IMF Afritac South webinar on CPI business continuity – August
- UNECE/OG – October
Reflection

- Lack of time for preparation meant little changes possible to collection strategies
- Changes more possible in processing and compilation than collection of data
- What challenges with coming out of crisis (the return journey)? Is it now back to business as usual or waves – when does it end?
- Has this prepared us for future crises?
Thank you