

Positioning Household Surveys for the Next Decade

Haoyi Chen (UNSD Inter-Secretariat Working Group on Household Surveys)

chen9@un.org

Abstract

Household surveys play a critical role in meeting national data needs. A recent mapping exercise found that approximately one-third of all Sustainable Development Goal global indicators (80 out of 232 indicators), covering 13 different goals, can be sourced from household surveys. Despite their fundamental role in national statistical systems over the past decades, household surveys are facing funding challenges and skepticism on their continued utility within the changing data landscape.

Within this context, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated existing challenges for household surveys, given limitations on face-to-face survey operations as a result of social distancing and other restrictions in many countries. A survey conducted by the UN Statistical Division and the World Bank in May 2020 found that 96 percent of national statistical offices either partially or fully stopped face-to-face data collection at some point during the pandemic. The increased need for timely, high-quality data on the impacts of the pandemic heightened demands for more efficient household survey systems relative to the status quo.

In response to these challenges, national statistical offices have acted quickly to respond to new data needs introduced by the pandemic, while maintaining the continuity of existing data collection programmes. To do so, countries have adopted innovative approaches and/or turned to alternative data sources, with most countries implementing one or more rounds of phone or web surveys measuring the impact of COVID-19 in the past year.

Looking ahead, the global data community faces several key questions on the future of household surveys. How will COVID-19 reshape national household survey programs in the future? How can we establish sustainable household survey programs that are resilient and versatile to future shocks like COVID-19? Will COVID-19 be a catalyst for innovation in the field of household surveys? What are the priority actions for countries and for the international community in the next decade for household surveys?

A position paper is being prepared by the Inter-Secretariat Working Group of Household Surveys (ISWGHS) that aims to identify priority areas and the enabling environment, both at the national and international level, for household surveys to better perform their foundational roles, meet new data demands and increase their development policy and research impact in the remaining decade for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The paper articulates these priorities as a blueprint for action for the ISWGHS, given its mandate of supporting countries as they work towards achieving the SDGs.

ISWGHS looks forward to receiving feedbacks from experts attending the meeting on the position paper.