



**Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean**  
Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean

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Regional Workshop on Informal Sector Surveys in the  
Caribbean Subregion  
Castries, Saint Lucia  
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**REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON INFORMAL SECTOR SURVEYS IN THE  
CARIBBEAN SUBREGION**

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## Table of contents

Introduction.....	1
Agenda Item 1: Opening remarks .....	1
Agenda Item 2: Background and objectives .....	2
Agenda Item 3: Elements of the Informal Sector Survey .....	3
Agenda Item 4: Elements of the Informal Sector Survey .....	5
Agenda Item 5: Country presentations on current methods used to adjust the National Accounts Statistics for the contribution of the informal sector to GDP.....	6
Agenda Item 6: Concepts and methodologies used to estimate the value added by the informal sector	8
Agenda Item 7: Using survey data to estimate the informal sector's contribution to GDP .....	9
Agenda Item 8: Informal sector surveys – the way forward .....	9
Agenda Item 9: Closure .....	10
Annex: List of participants.....	11

## **Introduction**

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean, with support from the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Central Statistics Office in Saint Lucia, convened a two-day *Data Dissemination Workshop on the Informal Sector and Informal Employment* on 12 -13 October 2009 in Castries, Saint Lucia.

This workshop was one of the culminating activities of the Interregional Project on the *Measurement of the Informal Sector and Informal Employment* being conducted in the Caribbean subregion. The workshop served as a forum for presenting the findings of the survey of the informal sector which was carried out in Saint Lucia over the period April 2008 to January 2009. In addition, it was aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- (a) To exchange and learn from good practices in the conduct of informal sector surveys in the subregion
- (b) To learn how to analyze data to assess informal employment
- (c) To demonstrate the use of survey data to measure 'value added' of the informal sector; and
- (d) To identify a way forward for the use of the 1-2 methodology in the Caribbean subregion, to collect data for assessing the informal sector's contribution to GDP

Given the nature of the training, participants at this workshop were directors of statistics and other senior statisticians from countries in the subregion with ongoing labour force surveys. A number of experts from regional organizations/agencies were also in attendance. A full listing of participants and the workshop programme is annexed to this report.

### **Agenda item 1 Opening remarks**

In opening the workshop, the Director of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean provided some background information on the Development Account Project "*Interregional Cooperation on the Measurement of the Informal Sector and Informal Employment*", under which the workshop had been convened. He recognized the key role played by the Central Statistics Office in Saint Lucia in facilitating the pilot of the 1-2 survey. He also commended the Statistics Division of ECLAC Headquarters, Santiago and other agencies, such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and ILO for the support that led to the successful implementation of the project.

The Director stressed the value of the workshop and outlined the benefits to be derived from participation. He reiterated the importance of accurate and up-to-date data for the promotion of evidence-based policy formulation and the development of sound programmes that would aid the development process. In conclusion, he articulated his expectations of the forum, not only in increasing the knowledge base, but also in garnering support for the replication of the 1-2 methodology in the subregion and fostering stronger partnerships between ECLAC, ILO and member States in that initiative.

## **Agenda item 2**

### **Background and objectives**

The representative of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean presented an overview of the workshop and its expected outcomes. In particular, he reiterated the thrust of the ECLAC office in promoting the 1-2 methodology with the expectation that it would be replicated by National Statistical Offices in the Caribbean. He also provided further insight on the project which had been conducted in the subregion citing, among other things, its purpose, partners and accomplishments.

In his discourse, he referred to the various definitions that had been coined for the informal sector and informality and stated that those definitions varied by organizational use. He pointed to the evolution of the notion of informality since it was coined in 1972 by the ILO and provided the ensuing definitions of “informal employment” and “informal sector”. For the purposes of the project, informal enterprises were defined as household unincorporated enterprises that did not maintain a complete set of accounts and which were either own-account enterprises or enterprises with employees. Informal enterprises were further determined by the following criteria:

- (a) Market production: all or at least some of the goods and services produced were market oriented
- (b) Non-registration of the production unit or its employees
- (c) Nature of the economic activity.

He elaborated on the significance of measuring the informal sector and, on that basis, provided the rationale for conducting the interregional project. He concluded by highlighting the contribution of the project findings to the fulfilment of the Millennium Development Goals, in particular, Goal 1 (To eradicate extreme poverty and hunger) and Goal 3 Target 4 (Promote gender equality and empowerment).

### **Discussion**

Issues related to the purpose(s) of measuring the informal sector dominated the discussion. Participants recognized the value of the information collected from the surveys of the informal sector and, in particular, the usefulness of the data for policy formulation. The Director of ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean drew attention to the outcomes of the G20 Summit which put the informal sector into sharp focus. He noted, in particular, the priorities of G20 that targeted the micro small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), such as the provision of resources and micro-credit to countries. He described the impact of those new international developments in providing the impetus to governments to incorporate surveys of the informal sector as part of their regular statistical programmes, since access to those resources was contingent on the availability of supporting data on the sector.

The representative of the Netherlands Antilles restated the importance of the survey data for policy formulation and, on those grounds, posed the question about the level of involvement of policymakers in Saint Lucia in the project. In response, the representative of Saint Lucia spoke to the involvement of the Chamber of Commerce in the exercise. He stated that his office had supplied the Chamber with the preliminary statistics generated from the survey and further underscored the value of the survey and its integration into activities conducted by the Chamber. The representative of the ILO indicated that the preparation of the data collection instruments involved a large number of stakeholder groups and that their contributions had been incorporated into the survey. The representative of ECLAC pointed to the National Advocacy Workshop that had been convened for

stakeholders prior to the survey as a means of raising awareness on the importance of measuring the informal sector.

The representative of Grenada supported the conduct of the survey of the informal sector indicating that, in particular, the measurement of its contribution to GDP would help in improving GDP estimates and reducing the debt ratio.

### **Agenda item 3 Elements of the Informal Sector Survey**

#### **Survey Design and cost**

In his presentation, the Director of the Central Statistical Office in Saint Lucia addressed two main areas of the survey: the sample design and the costing of the exercise. He noted that the sample for the survey was derived from the “grand sample” of the 2001 census. A two-stage systematic stratified random sample was used for each quarter of the labour force survey. At the first stage, Enumeration Districts (EDs) or Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) within the administrative districts were selected based on the grand sample. In the second stage, households were selected within the EDs using a random start. A sample of approximately 750 households or 2500 persons was selected for each quarter.

In terms of the cost of the survey, he noted that several adjustments had to be made to the payment structure for enumerators to cover the additional time which would have been required to complete the expanded questionnaire. In the final part of the presentation, he addressed some of the survey constraints: (a) impact of the lengthened Labour Force Survey (LFS) questionnaire on the completion of the survey; (b) strain of recruiting additional enumerators and conducting additional rounds of training; (c) challenges with linking the Household Unincorporated Enterprises with at least some Market Production (HUEMs) with specific records in the LFS; (d) segmentation of data processing to facilitate the timely processing and release of the LFS results; and (e) issues related to reconfiguring of the sample to include establishments in the agricultural sector after the first round of the survey.

#### **Challenges with survey administration and data**

The representative of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean elaborated on some of the points raised by the previous presenter on the challenges posed by survey administration and data collection. He addressed the general issues of survey administration and stressed on the elements of recruitment and training of field staff which typically presented the greatest challenges. In that regard, he reiterated the value of: (a) conducting thorough training for field staff; (b) following rigorous recruitment procedures that would ensure that only the best suited interviewers or enumerators were enlisted for the field work; (c) preparing detailed manuals that would serve as guides for the enumerators; and (d) providing adequate supervision for field staff. He provided some guidelines for the preparation of effective questionnaires, interviewing hints and pointers on the supervision of fieldwork. He ended his presentation by focusing specifically on the challenges that were presented in the conduct of the 1-2 survey in Saint Lucia. He highlighted concerns raised by the enumerators about the length of the questionnaire and noted some other challenges in the administration of the survey that warranted the recruitment of additional enumerators and the conduct of additional training sessions.

#### **Data processing, fieldwork and analysis**

The representative of Saint Lucia provided an account of his office’s experience with the field work, data processing and data analysis components of the exercise. With respect to the field work,

he outlined the survey methodology used and identified some of the challenges that were encountered including: lengthy interviews, high number of call-backs, high enumerator dropout rates and issues with the identification of HUEM owners. He elaborated on the elements of data processing, analysis and tabulation and made recommendations for:

- (a) The revision of the questionnaire design and data collection procedure;
- (b) The use of improved data editing, verification and consistency checks; and
- (c) The application of appropriate missing data techniques, such as regression or hot decking imputation to deal with missing values.

### **Lessons learnt/ recommendations**

In the final segment of this agenda item, the representative of Saint Lucia spoke to the value of the survey in providing information on the informal sector, its size and composition, and made the following recommendations:

- (a) There was a need for the conduct of a more rigorous pilot that would allow for the detection and treatment of potential problems with the survey instrument and data collection procedure;
- (b) The administration process should be more efficient and allow for greater autonomy;
- (c) Greater emphasis should be placed on advocacy and the conduct of a more targeted public awareness campaign that would allow for the dissemination of information on the purpose of the survey and mobilize greater support from the public;
- (d) There was a need for the development of a more concise data collection instrument that would rely less on recall and reduce respondent burden;
- (e) A household or establishment census should be used in phase 1 of the survey instead of a sample survey like the LFS. The rationale behind this being that a census would facilitate a more desirable process of probability sampling for the selection of the HUEMS in phase 2.

### **Discussion**

The representative of the Netherlands Antilles pointed to the differences in the definitions of informal sector presented in the Household Chapter of the System of National Accounts (SNA) and those used by ILO. She sought clarification on how those two definitions overlapped. In response, the representative of Saint Lucia outlined the steps that were taken by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) with support of the Regional Commissions and partner countries in crafting a definition that reflected the various International Convention of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) resolutions which fitted within the SNA framework. He noted that this definition had been submitted to the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) with the intention of adopting it for the subregion.

Participants posed a few questions on the use of the 2001 population and housing census as the master sample frame and the practices for updating it during the intercensal period. The Director of the Central Statistical office in Saint Lucia stated that there were no interim updates, instead, he drew attention to the exercise which had been undertaken by his office to update the visitation records ahead of the 2010 census. This would serve as a mechanism for relisting of all EDs. The representative of Trinidad and Tobago shared his experience with the Continuous Sample Survey of

the Population and noted that the methodology employed for that survey allowed for the relisting of households every three to five years.

The discussion also addressed the challenges of identifying unregistered units and the use of area sampling as an alternative to the mixed household enterprise approach. The representative of ILO noted the inherent limitations of the area sampling and the enterprise-based approach as it failed to capture the diversity of informal sector activities and HUEMs.

Recognizing the magnitude of the 1-2 survey, participants concurred with the proposal made for the conduct of those surveys with less regularity, say every two or three years. Further, it was agreed that a core set of questions from the 1-2 surveys should be retained and attached as a module to the LFS. That module would be used for interim updates of the informal sector data.

#### **Agenda item 4 Elements of the Informal Sector Survey**

##### **Structure of employment**

The representative of the ILO presented the findings of the informal employment component of the survey. He reported on the key labour force statistics and labour market trends for Saint Lucia and highlighted some key trends: (a) declines in labour force participation rates for youth (15 -24 years); (b) rapid increases in the share of the labour force aged 55-64 years; (c) large declines in share of the self-employed since the 1990s; and (d) declines in employment in the agricultural sector.

He noted the measurement challenges and issues with the criteria for defining informality that affected the construction of a robust estimate of “informal jobs in the formal sector”. He presented the key tables derived from the survey that showed the structure and distribution of informal employment in both the formal and informal sectors. He also presented the main characteristics of informal enterprises in the country and noted some of the challenges of being informal as expressed by the HUEMS. He concluded with the following recommendations:

- (a) There was a need to strengthen the LFS, redesign the module and improve the linkage between the LFS and enterprise survey
- (b) Clear criteria for determining informality need to be established
- (c) A more disaggregated analysis of the survey results should be conducted in order to identify target groups in the informal sector who require support.

##### **Evolution of informal sector research in Latin America and the Caribbean**

The representative of ECLAC, Santiago, traced the beginnings of research on the informal sector by ILO in Africa and gave an account of the experience in Latin America through the work done by ECLAC and the Regional Employment Programme for Latin America and the Caribbean (PREALC). He elaborated on the ILO recommendations that formed the basis for the launch of work on informality and the informal sector. He noted that initial estimates of the size of the informal sector were done through the use of household surveys using some predefined criteria. Subsequently, estimations were done using 1-2 surveys that comprised a household survey and an establishment survey for the purposes of deriving information/characteristics of both the supply and demand sides of the sector.

He provided some insight on the two approaches used by ILO for measuring the informal sector:

- (a) Establishment surveys that gave information on the outputs, value added and capital among other characteristics of independent workers and workers involved in micro enterprises
- (b) Household Surveys that produced information on main characteristics of independent workers, unpaid family workers and workers involved in micro enterprises as well as informal jobs in the formal sector.

Following the discussion of the informal sector, he addressed the new concept of the informal economy and outlined the characteristics of persons involved in informal employment, which included, among others: family workers that worked for formal enterprises; workers that were not covered by social security; and dependent and independent workers whose production units did not meet criteria for being formal establishments. He concluded with a brief account of his experiences in a few of the Latin American countries.

## **Discussion**

The issue of the treatment of item non-response and the analysis of data with missing values generated a high level of discussion among the participants. The representative of ILO addressed this issue stating that the high levels of non-response (“Don’t Know”) for key questions among employees and enterprises posed a challenge. He noted that features of the survey, such as the use of multiple options and the use of proxy respondents, were two major factors that contributed to the high levels of non-response. The representative of Saint Lucia suggested the use of administrative data on employees paying national insurance contributions as a means of validating the values produced and improving estimates. Related to non-response was the issue of the payment of incentives to respondents. It was suggested that the rates used might have in fact been disincentives and, as such, consideration should be given to the revision of those rates for future surveys.

The representative of the Netherlands Antilles drew attention to the evolution of the concept of the “family worker” who essentially supported the work of the enterprise, from “unpaid family worker” to “contributing family worker” and alerted participants to the fact that this concept encompassed child labour.

## **Agenda item 5**

### **Country presentations on current methods used to adjust the National Accounts Statistics for the contribution of the informal sector to GDP**

Country representatives delivered short presentations on the methods being used by their offices to adjust the National Accounts Statistics to incorporate the contribution of the informal sector to GDP.

#### **Commonwealth of the Bahamas**

The representative of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas reported that informal activity was concentrated primarily in the restaurant, private education/nursery, other community/social/personal services, construction and retail trade sectors. She elaborated on the use of regular LFS and census data to compile estimates of the gross value added by the informal sector in the main industrial sectors using the production approach. She further stated the use of the expenditure approach for estimating consumption of the household-based enterprises that comprised the informal sector.

## **Belize**

The representative of Belize stated that surveys of the informal sector were not part of the statistical programme of the Statistical Institute of Belize and, as such, estimates of the size of the informal sector had not been produced in the past. She, however, drew attention to the other official statistics produced by the institute through its annual LFS and quarterly national accounts.

## **Commonwealth of Dominica**

The representative of the Commonwealth of Dominica noted that independent estimates of informal sector contribution had not been produced in the past. In the absence of such measurements of informal sector activities, she elaborated on current practices for compiling value added by certain sectors where there was a higher concentration of informal activity. Value added for the construction sector was estimated using import data. For the agriculture sector, on the other hand, it was estimated using production and export data. She stated that the plans for rebasing of the GDP series and conducting of regular LFS would allow for incorporation of informal activities.

## **Grenada**

The representative of Grenada stated his office's plans for improving GDP estimates among which were key activities, such as the rebasing of the national accounts and the construction of Supply and Use tables. He noted that GDP estimates were compiled using the production approach and elaborated on how informal activity was captured for the key sectors. He commended the use of more direct methods such as the 1-2 survey for compiling estimates of the contribution of the informal sector to GDP and noted the value of the survey for identifying the structure and characteristics of that sector.

## **Netherlands Antilles**

The representative of the Netherlands Antilles stated that the Central Bureau of Statistics introduced two modules to measure the size of the informal sector and informal employment in its 2004/2005 round of the LFS. She outlined the criteria used for identifying informality and spoke to the methodology applied through the LFS. She noted the challenges with item non-response manifested through high numbers of "don't knows" which prompted a change in the methodology for the 2006/2007 survey.

## **Suriname**

The representative of Suriname stated that initial estimates of the contribution of the informal sector to GDP were produced by the General Bureau of Statistics in 2001. These estimates were calculated through the application of the production method and using the official and labour force statistics. She provided insight on the calculation of value added by each of the following key sectors: agriculture, mining, manufacturing, trade, transport and other services. She noted that estimates of the contribution of the informal sector to GDP produced between the 2004 and 2008 oscillated between 16% and 15%.

## **Trinidad and Tobago**

The representative of Trinidad and Tobago stated that informal sector activities were concentrated in the manufacturing, transportation, distribution, personal services and agriculture sectors. The Trinidad and Tobago System of National Accounts (TTSNA) currently produced estimates of those key economic sectors to GDP, however, there were some limitations with the current practice as: (a) informal sector activities were not treated separately in the TTSNA; and (b)

not all informal activities were measured. He identified institutional constraints and the lack of an established methodology which took into account the country's existing survey programmes as the main reasons for the non-separation of informal sector in the TTSNA. He concluded by stating his office's interest in the use of the 1-2 survey methodology being initiated in the subregion by ECLAC and solicited any technical/financial support that could be provided for the implementation of that methodology.

## **Discussion**

The mechanisms for collection of employment data for the agriculture sector were discussed in-depth. In that regard, queries were raised about how the role of extension officers who were responsible collecting data on income, yields and acreage etc., could be improved to facilitate the coverage of some data on employment in the sector. Notwithstanding the fact that the ICLS concept of the informal sector was limited to household-based non-agricultural activities with market production, participants recognized the amount of informal activity that was concentrated in agriculture and sought to identify strategies that could be used for data collection.. Recommendations were made for the development of rapports between the Ministry of Agriculture and Statistical Offices and the use of human resources to maximize and fulfil some of those data needs.

The discussion also focused on the potential impact of the introduction of value added tax (VAT) on informal activity. Participants noted that while VAT-administration system might help with identifying with identifying small businesses and, as such, served as a mechanism for updating the enterprise registers, the imposition of such a method of indirect taxation might retard the growth of the informal sector and force informal enterprises to become formalized. Participants also registered concerns about how informal enterprises would handle the new tax burden which might, in the end, be passed on to the consumer.

## **Agenda item 6**

### **Concepts and methodologies used to estimate the value added by the informal sector**

The representative of Saint Lucia specifically addressed the developments related to the derivation of a definition for the informal sector. He made reference to the resolutions of the International Conference of Labour Statisticians that led to the crafting of the initial concepts of the informal sector and informal employment and addressed the treatment of the informal sector in the SNA. He highlighted the terminological differences between the ICLS concepts and the SNA framework and noted the challenges that inhibited the construction of a harmonized definition across all countries. Against that backdrop, he underscored the importance of the work undertaken in the subregion, through the project, to improve statistics on the informal sector and derive a set of guidelines for producing internationally comparable estimates of the informal sector within an SNA framework. He elaborated on the concept of a HUEM, a household that produced goods and services for its own consumption and market production, and traced the criteria for identifying HUEMs through an LFS using a flow chart. He presented, the national accounts methodologies for computing the value added by the informal sector using the income, expenditure and production approaches.

## **Discussion**

Participants queried the flow chart used for determining informality as in its current form it allowed for national definitions of the informal sector. They challenged the approach as it would not allow for international comparability. Further, they drew attention to the fact that differences in definitions would consequently affect the measurement of value added and present yet another challenge for comparability among countries. In response, the representative of Saint Lucia stated

that there were national differences in criteria for registration and, as a result, that fundamental challenge would invariably be encountered with the definitions.

### **Agenda item 7**

#### **Using survey data to estimate the informal sector's contribution to GDP**

In this segment of the workshop, the representative of the Saint Lucia expounded on the approaches for estimating the value added by the informal sector. He used examples to illustrate the production and income approaches under two scenarios: (a) no overlap in data on the formal sector; and (b) existence of some overlap in sectors.

### **Discussion**

The key concerns related to the sustainability of the survey and mechanisms for updating the national accounts data in subsequent years. Participants observed that the 1-2 survey was conducted in an abnormal year when the effects of global issues, such as the economic crisis, would have probably caused gravitation towards the informal sector. In that regard, the issue of data smoothing was raised. In response, participants were reminded that such techniques relied on the existence of historical data and, as such, it would not have been possible to capture trends on the basis of just one survey. Given that comprehensive surveys of the informal sector would not be conducted annually, the challenge would be with constructing a proper series that would allow for the application of those statistical techniques and examination of trends in that sector of the economy.

On the issue of the capture of illegal activities as part of the informal sector, the representative of the ILO provided a clear distinction between informal activities and illegal or underground activities. He noted that while there was some slight overlap, illegal activities were part of the unobserved economy, as they were by nature forbidden by law and not typically declared or recorded.

### **Agenda item 8**

#### **Informal sector surveys – the way forward**

In summing up and looking at the way forward, the meeting agreed to the following:

- (a) The country report which would serve as an input for the interregional meeting in Bangkok would be finalized in time for the meeting
- (b) ECLAC would move expeditiously to secure funding that would facilitate the hiring of a consultant to prepare a handbook on 1-2 surveys of the informal sector. This document would serve as a one-stop for information on the surveys in the subregion and would comprise an analytic and descriptive report of the processes and procedures for conducting 1-2 surveys. It would also incorporate Saint Lucia's experience with the pilot survey
- (c) The countries represented at the workshop endorsed the survey methodology for conducting 1-2 surveys of the informal sector and proposed the formalization of the survey methodology
- (d) The adoption and use of the International Household Surveys Network (IHSN) toolkit for metadata documentation should be promoted since it would assist with the production of documents that were International Organization for Standardization (ISO) compliant
- (e) There was a need to move forward with the production of a shorter questionnaire that would facilitate the conduct of more regular surveys. In that regard, the meeting endorsed the

proposal made by ILO for the convening of a meeting with the harmonization group and other key partners, such as the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), ECLAC and CARICOM, that would look into the refinement and revision of the questionnaire as well as the sampling for the survey

(f) The promotion of an approach for strategy and advocacy for data sharing of labour force statistics that targeted policymakers was reiterated. To that end, the meeting accepted the proposal made by the representative of ECLAC, Santiago, for the convening of a workshop or short course that would focus on the measurement, analysis and design of policies similar to what was done by PREALC for countries in Latin America.

### **Agenda item 9**

#### **Closure**

In closing, the Director of the ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean acknowledged the contribution of the Central Statistics Office, Saint Lucia, to the success of the project through their agreement to serve as a pilot country for the survey. He thanked the participants for their active participation and enriching discussions.

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