



Getting the Numbers Right:

Making Statistical Systems a Real Plus for Results

IBRD Results

SYNOPSIS

Achieving meaningful and lasting reductions in poverty requires a clear understanding of the scope of the challenge, something that is impossible without accurate and timely data about populations and living standards. IBRD has for more than a decade worked with countries in Latin America and the Caribbean to help them develop or improve their collection and analysis of statistics, helping tailor their poverty reduction efforts to their people's needs.

Challenge

Since 1996, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) has been providing support to governments in the Latin America and Caribbean region to help improve the quality, frequency, accessibility, and comparability of statistics, as well as to reinforce the overall level of coordination between users and producers. Despite relatively high levels of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, investment in national statistical systems has remained limited, and in many countries (with some notable exceptions such as Mexico and Brazil) statistical agencies have limited capacity and are not able to take advantage of the latest technological advancements in data management and approaches for harmonizing information systems.

IBRD's work in statistics in the region was mainly triggered by an inter-institutional agreement (MECOVI), established with the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) almost 15 years ago. Its focus was primarily on improving household surveys and strengthening national statistics agencies (NSAs). Emphasis was also given to ensuring quality demand for data from both public agencies and civil society organizations. During the 1990s, significant progress was made with re-

spect to household surveys, for example through improved quality of sampling frameworks, improved data processing, and data comparability across time and countries, but challenges remained. Many countries in the region still lacked a strategic vision in terms of the overall management of the statistical system. Their NSAs needed to be strengthened, coordination across key actors of the national statistical system needed to be reinforced, and more dialogue and alignment was needed among producers and users.

Results

IBRD's work in statistics has been seminal to the series of improvements in terms of poverty measurement and overall quality of data in Latin America and the Caribbean. At least 20 countries can now correctly estimate poverty data as a result of collaboration with the Bank. Outputs and outcomes in this area can be organized into three categories: Promotion of national strategies for the development of statistics, including support for monitoring and evaluation activities; Support for surveys (and capacity building) and data bases harmonization; Knowledge exchange.

Wide adoption of national strategies for the development of statistics (NSDS). Ten out of 17 Latin Ameri-

Key results and statistics:

450+ household surveys are included in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) database

210 harmonized household surveys are included in the SEDLAC database, a joint effort by the IBRD and the Universidad Nacional de La Plata in Argentina.

14 countries created or are working on a National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) with IBRD support and one state government in Mexico has created its own statistics strategy.

150+ statistical teams in LAC participated in the First Regional Award for Innovation in Statistics organized by the IBRD.

100+ datasets have been documented within the Accelerated Data Program (ADP) and will be uploaded to the Regional Data Archive catalogue to be available for public use in 2010.

5 middle-income household surveys have been harmonized with the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS)

36 countries (33 from LAC, Canada, the United States and Spain) are part of the Knowledge Transfer Network of the Statistical Conference of the Americas supported by the IBRD that will define and build a sound training program on statistical development.

can countries have designed NSDSs. IBRD's support to countries in this area has mainly been through technical assistance and the fostering of dialogue between users and producers of statistics. These strategies aim to ensure that countries produce quality information (mainly to track national development plans or strategies), develop their national statistical capacities, adopt international standards for statistics and have an organized and systematic communication between suppliers and users of statistics. Currently Bolivia, Paraguay, Guyana, and the Dominican Republic and Mexico's Yucatán state are in the process of designing their strategies. In the Yucatán, it will entail the creation of a State Committee for Statistical and Geographic Information. Although all Mexican states have the mandate of installing such bodies by federal law, Yucatán is the first one to comply. Progress overall has been facilitated by a strong collaboration with the National Statistics Institute (INEGI), which is keen to replicate the state's steps throughout Mexico.

Improved surveys, and data documentation, dissemination, harmonization, and use. IBRD has supported the improvement of six Central American countries' household surveys on living standards through training, capacity building, and technical assistance, including strategic dissemination of social indicators. It has also supported

the promotion, development, and use of poverty maps by national statistical agencies in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras, by Panama's Ministry of Economy and Finance, and planning agencies and universities in Guatemala. Poverty maps were adopted and used as a tool for targeting social programs in four of these countries. IBRD has also supported countries in dealing with emerging issues such as the increase in commodity prices and its impact on food security and poverty. Special reports were prepared for countries such as Honduras, Guatemala, Bolivia, and Brazil.

Continuous engagement with all the national statistical offices in the region led to the construction of a complete database of 450 household surveys, which the IBRD stores and, more importantly, makes available to stakeholders in the region. Since 2003, the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region has had a unique tool to support inter-country comparisons developed by the IBRD in collaboration with the Universidad de La Plata in Argentina, the Socio-Economic Database for LAC (SEDLAC). SEDLAC allows timely access to high-quality, socio-economic statistics, including indicators on poverty, inequality, household income, employment, education, housing, access to durable goods and services, annual growth rates in welfare functions, pro-poor growth indicators, gender and other numerous demographics. SEDLAC has developed

and disseminated easily accessible products to facilitate benchmarking poverty outcomes in the region.

In cooperation with the OECD/Partnership in Statistics for Development in the 21st Century (PARIS21), IBRD is supporting the Accelerated Data Program (ADP) to improve the preservation, documentation and dissemination of micro-data through a Management Toolkit (MMT) and complementing workshops for micro-data management based on international standards. More than 16 public agencies have benefited from the ADP since 2007. IBRD also conducted pilots of harmonization of household survey datasets from five countries in Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, Peru, Uruguay, and Guatemala) with the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS). As a result, statistics from these countries could be easily compared not only with other countries in the region but also with OECD countries.

Knowledge Sharing. IBRD has helped facilitate the sharing of information on statistical good practice between developing countries, and between developing and wealthier nations. Nine countries in the LAC region recently convened to share experiences in the technical and operational aspects in preparation for the upcoming 2010 round of population censuses. This collaboration is particularly relevant given the increased use of mobile technologies like hand-held computers or personal digital assistants (PDAs) for data collection; Colombia was the first country to use these devices for a census operation in 2005. Mexico followed suit but for a smaller operation: a special census looking at land distribution and uses. Brazil will not only use PDAs, but also mini-laptops and the Internet for data collection/processing in its upcoming census 2010. Given Brazil's population of 190 million people, the 2010 census will be the largest electronic data collection worldwide.

To encourage and disseminate innovation in statistics, IBRD launched the Regional Award for Innovation in Statistics in fiscal year 2008, the first one of its kind worldwide. It drew attention from 20 Latin American countries and more than 150 statistical teams. Good practices collected during this event will be strategically disseminated making the most of technology and communications advancements. At the request of interested countries, IBRD will facilitate financing for adoption of new technologies etc. The Second Regional

Award process is underway and will put special emphasis on the Caribbean—a region that has traditionally under-invested in statistics. A few countries, including Brazil and Mexico, have also expressed interest in the creation of similar national competitions. IBRD promoted the creation of a consortium among these two countries and Colombia so that they are able to establish an effective joint research and development programs of innovative statistical products and processes, involving staff from the three national statistical offices.

Approach.

Well-functioning and well-developed national statistical systems are the backbone of effective monitoring and evaluation, and better policy making. IBRD has adopted a progressive approach to developing effective national statistical systems since MECOVI was formally launched in 1996 and, more recently, with the launching of IBRD's LAC Team for Statistical Development (TSD) in 2006. TSD has supported countries in mainly three areas: a) improving the supply of statistical information, b) increasing the demand for statistical information, and c) fostering coordination between producers and users of statistical information. The three challenges needed to be addressed in a coordinated and systematic fashion. First, TSD promoted National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS) in LAC as a guiding framework for countries. Second, TSD strengthened the partner-





ship with the Center for Distributional, Labor and Social Studies (CEDLAS) of the University of La Plata to support the production, expansion and dissemination of the Socio-Economic Database for LAC (SEDLAC), a unique harmonized database and set of indicators necessary to track and benchmark poverty and social outcomes in the region. Through the NSDS and SEDLAC the IBRD team aimed to improve the availability and comparability of basic statistics to support benchmarking social outcomes across countries, better targeting of social expenditures and the development of systematic monitoring and evaluation systems. The sequence of these interventions and timeframes has varied across countries in line with their unique policy and political processes, and institutional framework.

IBRD contribution

Efforts in statistics carried out in LAC are generally tied to other IBRD projects or initiatives in the region. IBRD has provided assistance through Poverty Assessments, Non-Lending Technical Assistance (financed with core knowledge funds or in most cases via Trust Funds), or in the case of Yucatán through a “fee-for-service” approach. Capacity building many times is in response to demand expressed during seminars and conferences or a perceived need for better statistics, as identified for example through an existing monitoring and evaluation project. A continuous engagement with the national statistics agencies in the region

overall has allowed for a constant needs assessment, and more importantly, identification of opportunities to influence policy dialogue.

There are currently 15 approved Trust Fund operations, totaling US\$4 million. Half of these approved trust funds are of regional scope and the other half are country specific. In addition, IBRD allocates a significant amount of staff time to build statistical capacity as a byproduct of analytical and advisory activities carried out in partnership with government counterparts.

Partners

The complexity of statistics development has required the IBRD to build a broad and strong network of partners, ranging from academia, other donors, and public agencies. Support to governments has not been limited to the statistics agencies, but it has been targeted to planning agencies, and other line ministries involved with overall monitoring and evaluation. Harmonization efforts and knowledge-sharing perhaps have resulted in the largest partnerships such as that with the Universidad de la Plata in Argentina for the operating of SEDLAC, with the OECD for the Paris21 capacity building program and the Accelerated Data Program, and also with the IADB for the MECOVI program, and recently, for the development of a State NSDS in Yucatan, Mexico.

Although continuous dialogue has been sustained with all the statistics agencies in Latin America, special interaction has been sustained with the respective institutes in Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico through the Innovation Consortium. This has been due to their relative leadership in terms of innovation in data collection and the need to share their experiences with other countries in the region.

Next steps

In the years ahead, the TSD will continue to support client countries in the same three areas, with the aim of strengthening its statistical capacity to improve monitoring and evaluation. This will require aligning the institu-

tional and technical capacity of national statistics agencies with new demands and stricter standards and protocols. In addition, we will help our clients face two relatively new and increasingly pressing challenges. The first is the need to work with national statistics institutes to build incentives to retain young graduates with strong technical skills and often find more lucrative positions in the private sector.

Secondly, the recent economic crisis underscored the need for more frequent and rapidly processed information on socio-economic conditions of households in order to design appropriate crisis response programs. Nicaragua and Guatemala are exploring options to develop smaller and more agile annual surveys that combine household and employment data. Similarly, in 2010, SEDLAC will focus on expanding coverage to provide harmonized data from labor market surveys, which tend to be carried out more frequently than household surveys. Finally, IBRD (with assistance from the Spanish Trust Fund and other donors) is developing the “Listening to LAC” project (L2L). The aim of this project, which is just unfolding, is to use cell phones for self-administered surveys in order to collect real-time, panel data on life events. By collecting data in real time and skipping data entry steps such as the input of paper surveys into computer databases, L2L is expected to be able to generate panel data that can inform policymakers on current indicators, thus helping them to respond more quickly and effectively to trends. In addition, this data collection instrument will help policy makers assess the impact of their programs in real time, as well as to observe evolving household coping mechanisms, related to migration, school attendance, employment patterns, nutrition, etc.

LEARN MORE

MULTIMEDIA

- LAC Team for Statistical Development
<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/LACEXT/EXTLACREGTOPPOVANA/0,,contentMDK:21239536~pagePK:34004173~piPK:34003707~theSitePK:841175,00.html>
- SEDLAC
<http://www.depeco.econo.unlp.edu.ar/sedlac/eng/>

