

Women's Work & Employment Partnership

Phase One Activities & Outcomes



Background

In 2013, the 19th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS 19)—which is hosted by the ILO every 5 years, adopted new international standards on the measurement of work, employment and labour underutilization.¹ Official labour force statistics around the world are based on the standards adopted by the ICLS and countries use these agreed recommendations as a basis to develop and update their national labour force surveys (LFS) and other household surveys measuring work and/or employment.

All productive activities, paid and unpaid, are now recognized and defined as “work,” while the definition of employment has been narrowed to work performed for pay or profit. New forms of work, such as: own-use production work (including production of goods and services intended mainly for the household or family), volunteer work, and unpaid trainee work are now recognized and identified for separate measurement in their own right.² For surveys measuring employment, this means that activities to produce goods for own use—such as subsistence farming or fishing, fetching water or collecting firewood—are no longer considered part of employment. Given that women in developing countries tend to be disproportionately engaged in productive activities intended mainly for own use, particularly subsistence and small-scale agriculture, which may or may not also be intended for sale, the implementation of these new standards can have a major impact on estimates of women’s employment. Further, those activities no longer counted as employed need to be measured through dedicated modules of questions, depending on their significance in the country

in question. Supporting the necessary updates to household surveys to manage these changes requires development of clear and practical guidelines to ensure that women’s employment and broader economic contributions are fully captured and made visible in country statistics.

Following these changes, in 2014, Data2X partnered with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), and the World Bank (WB) to launch the Women’s Work and Employment partnership (WW+E). WW+E is a knowledge-sharing platform to support implementation of the ICLS 19 definitions of work and employment across different types of labor and agricultural surveys, with a specific focus on how men’s and women’s work in subsistence agriculture can be measured accurately. All partners have established programs to support and/or conduct household-based surveys across countries with a strong interest in measuring men’s and women’s employment. The ILO has a program to support national labour force surveys (LFS) and related surveys, the World Bank conducts the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) that supports multi-topic household surveys, and the FAO regularly conducts agricultural surveys across countries and is designing a new multi-topic Agricultural and Rural Integrated Survey (AGRIS). Through the WW+E partnership, the agencies shared their respective activities to test and develop practical guidance aligned with the new standards. In this first phase, the agencies conducted small scale tests in different countries, using qualitative and/or quantitative approaches such as cognitive interviewing and experimental field tests—placing special emphasis on survey questions that would distinguish or establish the boundary between own-use

¹ See: http://www.ilo.ch/global/statistics-and-databases/standards-and-guidelines/resolutions-adopted-by-international-conferences-of-labour-statisticians/WCMS_230304/lang--en/index.htm

² See: <http://www.ilo.ch/global/statistics-and-databases/statistics-overview-and-topics/lang--en/index.htm>

and market-based work in subsistence agriculture. The seasonal nature of work in agriculture, varying local interpretations of key terms used to identify work and employment and the use of proxy respondents in surveys also needed to be considered in the measurement of this boundary. Data2X regularly convened partners to share methodologies and findings that address these issues and work towards a cohesive set of gender-related good practices for countries. While the agencies have previously been in regular contact on various issues, this platform created a forum for direct exchange among technical staff from the different agencies beyond what has typically happened before. This first phase has served as the foundation for ongoing collaboration and plans are already being developed for the continuation of this work.

Individual studies undertaken in Phase One included:

- **ILO:** Undertook pilot studies testing five different model LFS questionnaires updated to the new standards, in 10 countries (Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Namibia, Tunisia, Ecuador, Peru, Philippines, Vietnam, Kyrgyzstan, and Moldova). Quantitative and qualitative testing methods were used. Each country tested two different questionnaires through cognitive interviews followed by larger experimental field tests that built on the results from the cognitive interviews. The key objectives of the ILO pilot studies were to assess the impact of using different question sequences to identify persons in own-use production work, employment, and labor underutilization, and document any differences in the way the models operated between men and women, and persons living in rural and in urban areas.
- **FAO:** Conducted an assessment of survey instruments and questionnaires, including agricultural surveys and censuses, household budget surveys, and time use surveys, to establish a baseline on current approaches that measure work in agriculture. In turn, the assessment was used to develop FAO's AGRIS labor force module, which will be implemented on rotating basis. AGRIS is an agricultural holding-level integrated survey; it is a new initiative that aims to fill data gaps in existing agricultural surveys by collecting data on agricultural production, agricultural inputs and farm practices, along with household- and individual-level data on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. FAO also conducted methodological work to develop an AGRIS labor module that is consistent with the ICLS 19 definitions and operationalized key concepts (i.e. distinction between various forms of work and the boundary between market and non-market based work) within the structure and objectives of an agricultural survey. Although this module has not been proposed to countries yet, it is part of the standard AGRIS package and FAO is ready to assist countries who are interested in adopting an AGRIS labor module compliant with ICLS 19.
- **World Bank:** Conducted a 12-month agricultural labor survey experiment in Ghana (2015-16) and Malawi (2016-17) designed to assess the reliability of low-income farmers' ability to recall time spent on agricultural activities and to assess their own-use and market-based production activities under ICLS 19. The surveys collected data on men and women farmers' reported intentions to sell (at the main activity level overall — i.e. crops or livestock, and separately for individual crops/livestock), at the beginning of the long rainy season and throughout the season. Additionally, crop disposition end-line data was collected after the main harvest and beyond to compare intended and actual sales, by crop and at the aggregate activity level.

Partnership Results and Lessons Learned

METHODS

The partnership focused on approaches to establish the boundary between own-use production of goods and employment—specifically, subsistence farmers' main intended destination of output. This can be complex, since the extent to which agricultural work is mostly unpaid or paid can depend on multiple factors such as type of crop/livestock activity, season, and local context, among others. In addition, an important question addressed by the partners was whether men and women interpret boundary-related questions differently. An added partnership priority was building consensus around this issue and producing good practices for countries applicable across surveys with different sampling strategies and objectives.

To this end, Data2X provided a platform for the agencies to share survey questionnaires, materials, and methodologies for the field tests. By convening regular meetings and discussions, partners came together to collaborate on testing approaches and survey modules. For example, the World Bank's Ghana split sample design (using different questionnaires for similar samples) was adopted by the ILO in its own field tests. At the request of the World Bank, the ILO prepared a short version of test questionnaires for inclusion as one of the three approaches tested in the World Bank's Malawi study. FAO also adopted ILO's cognitive testing approach in its own tests for the AGRIS labor module. Results from the five pilot questionnaires tested by the ILO allowed FAO to better understand how questions (or the question flow) could be reformulated to fit their agricultural survey. While all three agencies have regular contact on different policy agendas, the partnership has created a unique forum for direct exchange among technical staff at these agencies, including coordination on testing approaches and survey design. Overall, this exchange of experiences served to strengthen each

agency's testing approaches and to identify the use of a combination of qualitative methods, in particular cognitive interviewing, and quantitative methods as a good practice in survey questionnaire development.

FINDINGS

Data2X partners encountered challenges measuring women's work across the different surveys, due to the varied nature of women's activities in and outside the home. Despite these challenges, agencies found that there is significant interest among users in the application of the new standards, and the type of information that these standards can yield. This is creating pressure on National Statistical Offices (NSOs) to meet these demands despite tight resources. Technical support and guidance are needed on the best ways to apply the standards.

Through their work programs the agencies will be generating a wide range of reports and guidance incrementally over time. Some of the initial cognitive and field test findings of note are outlined on the following pages.

Question Wording and Flow

Designing the wording and flow of questions to distinguish between paid and unpaid activities was a crucial task among the different pilot studies. For example, ILO's cognitive tests found that the order of sections across employment and own-use production work mattered, and respondents could report the same work twice in questionnaires, once as employment and once as own-use production work. Double reporting of activities was also more common in rural areas and among less-educated respondents—often due to the complex nature of these questions, the flow of questions (as mentioned above), memory recall for reported working time, and some problems untangling activities to produce goods and to provide services that are closely related (cooking reported with processing of foodstuff for storage or making small repairs versus major renovation work, for example).

FAO also found that both men and women exhibited difficulties in distinguishing the destination of the agricultural holding's production from the destination of the products they specifically work on. This likely occurs because household members normally contribute to several activities on the farm, and thus discerning the contribution of the individuals from the entire farm's production is not straightforward. The World Bank also found that questions on market versus. non-market activities elicited different responses if these questions were asked at the main activity level (i.e., whether crop production or livestock rearing overall was for market or for own use) or at a finer disaggregation level (i.e., main intended destination for each type of crop and livestock held by the household).

In the case of measurement of unpaid work ILO found that using more detailed lists of activities assisted respondents in reporting their participation. In the case of paid work it was found that careful wording and translation were critical to ensure respondents reported their work correctly. For example, concepts like "for profit," "in kind," "job," "main activity/situation," and "household" had to be carefully converted into appropriate questions. It was particularly noted that in some contexts words like 'business' were considered to only refer to work in very formal business, with the risk that people in informal employment or who provided unpaid support in a family farm or business (often women) would exclude themselves when asked about working in a business.

Further all agencies noted the criticality of reference periods. The standards from ICLS 19 refer to different reference periods for work, from a week/7 days to 4 weeks/one month in key concepts. The ILO found recall and judgment difficulties around seemingly simple terms like 'the last 7 days' and found it necessary to reference specific dates in places to assist respondents. These difficulties become even greater when trying to measure working time, and there were also substantial recall issues in reporting working time over a 4 week

reference period for own use production of goods. As discussed below, the implications for question interpretation and recall are pronounced for women in low-income contexts, who are often involved in multiple activities.

The lessons learned allow conclusions to be drawn on how to improve questionnaire content but also highlight the critical importance of good testing practices and national adaptation of questionnaires to reflect country context and language.

Women's Multiple Work Burdens

Overall, the ILO field tests found that women face greater problems in distinguishing paid and unpaid work because many of these activities are conducted in tandem, particularly in poorer contexts. As result, women often faced more complex questions in distinguishing work and employment and in reporting the time spent in the various activities. Using detailed stylized retrospective questions to cover unpaid working activities in questionnaires, while improving reporting, also added to respondent burden, which can create additional measurement error. In the ILO's pilots, for example, they noted it was much more difficult for respondents to report time spent working in routine unpaid work, such as childcare or other domestic tasks. This was especially the case for persons, primarily women, for whom these are a main activity.

Women in poor, developing-country contexts are also heavily involved in casual and contributing family work (helping in the family business), which can be missed in labor force surveys. In its cognitive and field tests, the ILO documented the relevance of including additional "recovery" questions for casual work, and for persons working in a household or family business but who do not recognize this contribution as work. For example, women often said they helped with stocking, storing, and other activities on the farm, but they had to be prompted specifically to report these activities. Inclusion of dedicated questions to identify persons

engaged in these activities proved essential to more comprehensively capture women employed in casual self-employment activities and in household or family businesses.

The ILO tests also shed light on potential classification problems for women who are co-operators of their family businesses. In the field tests, the ILO included a few questions to assess whether respondents who self-identified as contributing family worker) were also involved in making decisions about (1) the running of the business, or the day-to-day administration of the business, (2) whether they had decision-making power over income, and (3) their level of involvement (frequently, seasonally, or only occasionally, etc.) in the business. The decision-making process can be rather complex because it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between the operator of the family business and other workers (often women) who view their work as help but who may contribute to decision-making as well. This finding is feeding into ongoing work at the ILO to update the International Classification of Status in Employment (ICSE), which includes looking at separate classifications for workers based on their employment relationship (such as casual, short term and seasonal employees, contributing family workers, domestic workers, and members of producers' cooperatives).

Questions on decision-making will inform ICSE revisions on the possible need to better identify partnerships within family businesses. This could potentially address concerns that individuals who work together in a family business may be assigned to one category or the other relatively arbitrarily on the basis of legal ownership of the business or cultural attitudes concerning gender roles. The ICSE and the WW+E partnership work therefore overlap and can inform each other going forward.

Proxy Respondent Bias and Social Desirability Bias

The need for targeting direct respondents was highlighted in the agencies' findings. All agencies found that the common survey practice of using proxy respondents to report for other household members can magnify measurement error given the difficulties men and women face in distinguishing their own work burdens across paid and unpaid activities. The ILO also found that from an operational perspective, women often act as proxy respondents in household surveys. In their field tests, the ILO documented the level of under- and over-reporting due to the use of proxy respondents. This would be important information for NSOs planning future household surveys.

The ILO field tests highlighted the role of preconceived or cultural notions of what women and men "should" be involved in when gauging their response—the ILO field tests, for example, found that in some contexts men were unwilling or uncomfortable to answer questions related to activities to provide services for own final use, such as cleaning or cooking. Women who were contributing workers in the family business often said they were not employed, but after posing some follow-up questions, they talked about their role in helping the family business.

Lessons on Survey Implementation

As already noted a general conclusion from the programs of all three agencies was that achieving good questionnaire design requires substantial effort to be put into a range of activities which have to take place before field work commences. These lessons extend beyond questionnaire content including related practicalities of survey implementation some of particular relevance to distinguishing employment from own use production of goods. For example, timing of reporting was found to influence responses received – the World Bank's Ghana experiment found that women's employment rates are more sensitive to the timing/season of data collection.

Policy Implications and Next Steps

Understanding women's and men's work through well-designed, individual-level surveys is critical for policy. However, many countries do not regularly produce statistics on unpaid work, posing a significant problem for gender-targeted policies, in particular, measures related to employment and childcare. Furthermore, the types of work women and men engage in are often different across countries. In some countries, for example, a higher proportion of men work in the agricultural sector compared to women, and vice versa in other countries. To this end, the WW+E partnership has created a working forum for collaboration across agencies implementing household surveys covering topics closely related to measuring work and employment. The first phase shed light and brought up important questions on the implications of the new ICLS framework on women's work and employment, which will be investigated further in the next phase. NSOs in developing countries in particular are eager to roll out the new definitions to obtain more comprehensive measures of men's and women's employment and work, but they are looking for guidance on how to operationalize the new standards in national surveys. Given the new ICLS framework, there is also strong interest in better measurement of women's unpaid work, which currently is underreported (or not reported at all) in surveys.

Understanding how the ICLS 19 changes should be implemented across different types of surveys — whether labor force surveys, agricultural surveys/censuses and integrated household surveys — is also important going forward. Surveys supported by different agencies covering similar topics have different measurement objectives; they can vary in length, structure and flow of questions, and use of framing and recovery questions, which affect how the levels and changes in outcomes of interest are measured. For instance, women's employment may be underestimated in surveys that do not include recovery or follow-up questions on employment or contributing

family work. Since the types of work women and men engage in also vary considerably across countries, greater coordination across surveying agencies can also help improve cross-country comparability of statistics.

As a result, the next phase of the WW+E partnership involves a number of activities:

- (1) Developing evidence and guidance on appropriate measurement approaches which can be used in surveys with different core measurement objectives.** The reports and guidance generated by the agencies arising from their work in recent years will be a significant resource to NSOs in completing this important work. However further evidence is needed to build on those experiences. In the next phase of the WW+E partnership, the World Bank and ILO will be conducting a joint pilot survey in Sri Lanka to further investigate how to implement the new ICLS 19 standards consistently across surveys with varying measurement objectives. The survey will also examine issues related to women's multiple work burdens, as well as proxy respondent bias and social desirability bias, that were brought up in the first phase of the partnership.
- (2) Providing coordinated technical support (e.g. reviews of survey instruments, trainings of headquarter staff and enumerators, as appropriate) to NSOs.** The overarching goal of WW+E is to facilitate more comprehensive measurement of women's work across paid and unpaid activities to guide policy and program development. This of course is a formidable task, involving a regular, coordinated effort among data producers and countries to discuss how local context affects men's and women's interpretations of work and employment, seasonality, and time allocation. Despite these challenges, Data2X partners are well positioned to help integrate these new methods into national statistical systems.

(3) **Enhancing institutional collaboration.** In addition to the technical objectives, the next phase of the partnership will deepen the collaboration between the agencies. Unlike under the first phase – where each agency conducted a coordinated, yet parallel, set of activities—the second phase will support joint in-country fieldwork, publications and dissemination activities. The three main audiences for these communications include (a) NSOs, (b) funders and other high-level decision makers, and (c) researchers and other technical experts who are trying to understand how to transition to the new employment standards. Enhanced institutional collaboration will be an important vehicle to advance the technical objective of improved cross-survey comparability of labor market statistics going forward.



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