



International
Conference of
Labour Statisticians
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Resolution concerning statistics of work employment and labour underutilization Subsistence foodstuff producers

Subsistence foodstuff producer 19th ICLS Resolution I

- Subsistence foodstuff producers (para 24)

*“constitute an important **subgroup** of persons in own use production work”*

*“performed any of the activities specified in paragraph 22(b)(i) in order to produce foodstuff from agriculture, fishing, hunting or gathering **that contribute to the livelihood of the household or family;**”*

*“**excluded** are persons who engaged in such production as **recreational or leisure activities**”*

If the additional criteria are not operationalised impossible to distinguish own-use production of foodstuff from subsistence foodstuff production (default)

► Sri Lanka pilot study overview



Sri Lanka pilot study overview

- Primary objective – comparison of outcomes from a LFS and a multi-topic living standards survey
- Within the LFS tests included questions to operationalise the definition of subsistence foodstuff producers
- Multi-stage design
 - Cognitive interviews (20 individuals)
 - Household interviews (800 households, interviewed twice)
- Challenge – design practical questions that can assess either the contribution to livelihood or recreational nature

Sri Lanka pilot study overview – cognitive interviews

- Initial focus – importance of contribution to household livelihood
- Focussed on affordability to buy food and the contribution to consumption (major part of the food eaten or not)

Question

1. *Thinking about the foodstuff your household produces could you afford to purchase the food if you were not producing it?*

a. YES -> NOT SUBSISTENCE

b. NO -> ASK Q2

2. *And is that foodstuff....*

a. A major part of the food that your household eats -> SUBSISTENCE

b. or used to complement the food your household buys -> NOT SUBSISTENCE

- Comprehension difficulties observed
 - E.g. is it 'a major part' of the consumption of the specific product or of all consumption

Sri Lanka pilot study overview – quantitative testing

- Updated questions
- Asked to knowledgeable household member only
- Only asked if they reported there was some own-use production in the household
- Focus on having enough food if it was not being produced and affordability of replacement food

Question

1. You told me that your family produces food from farming or fishing for your own consumption. If you were not producing this would your family have enough food to eat?

a. YES -> NOT SUBSISTENCE

b. NO -> ASK Q2

2. And could you afford to buy the food your family needs?

a. YES -> NOT SUBSISTENCE

b. NO -> SUBSISTENCE

Sri Lanka pilot study overview – outcomes

- Initial feedback from interviewers relatively positive
- However, detailed analysis created doubts about the quality of the information – various issues to consider
 1. Should the importance of the contribution be measured at household or individual level?
 - a) Own-use production of goods measured at individual level but asking about contribution to livelihood at individual level could lead to inconsistency of reporting
 - b) Lower burden to ask single knowledgeable household member – ‘subsistence household’ a starting point
 - c) Requires indicator to be derived based on a mix of household and individual level information

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Sri Lanka pilot study overview – outcomes

- 2. Does the identification of subsistence activity relate to other information collected such as employment?
 - a) Standards do not envisage relationship to other information
 - b) E.g. a person with full-time paid employment could still be a subsistence foodstuff producer
 - c) This is reasonable but it raises questions about what we mean by ‘subsistence’
 - d) Sri Lanka data showed the large majority of ‘subsistence’ producers live in households with multiple household members in employment (potentially including themselves)

- ▶ 3. What components of the definition should we directly attempt to operationalise?
 - a) Standards reference both contribution to livelihood and exclusion of leisure activities
 - b) Testing focussed on contribution to livelihood
 - i. While affordability of replacement food seemed to be reasonably understood other criteria on importance of contribution were not
 - ii. Large majority of those who said they would not have enough food to eat were in fact employed in own-account agriculture – likely misunderstanding

- ▶ 3. What components of the definition should we directly attempt to operationalise? Contd.
 - c) Misunderstanding possibly based on loss of all agricultural production – careful formulation needed in cases of mixed production or mix of employment in agriculture and own-use production

Significance of application of criteria

	Number of households	Number of Own-use producers of foodstuff
Total interviewed	968	404
Asked the two questions on subsistence	417	224
Would have enough food to eat without own-use produced foodstuff	179	107
Would not have enough food to eat without own-use produced foodstuff	238	117
Could afford to buy other food if the food the produce would not be available	209	107
Could not afford to buy other food	29	10

- Additional criteria made a very significant difference
- 227 own-use producers identified and asked questions
- Applying criteria of having sufficient food with own-use production reduces number to 117
- Of these 100 said they would be able to afford to buy other food
- Leaves 10 'subsistence foodstuff producers'

Lessons learned

- Tests indicate questions on contribution livelihood can be complex
- Various inconsistencies suggesting questions did not work as intended (e.g. households that were ‘subsistence’ households but with no own-use producers)
- Evidence shows that application of additional criteria reduces numbers substantially – default approach can be a significant overestimate of subsistence foodstuff producers in some settings
- More work needed to operationalise the criteria
- Could be questions on contribution and recreational nature of activity at individual level (easier to analyse)

Issues arising / next steps

- Analysis also suggests the wider concept of subsistence is not clearly defined and lack of clear set of indicators, for example
 - Number of subsistence households
 - Number of people living in subsistence households
 - Number of subsistence foodstuff producers in subsistence households
- Could create a clearer context for statistics on subsistence
- However – beyond work statistics – requires input from a wider group
- Issue was discussed in sub-working group of working group on informality statistics in 2020
- Agreed that default approach is problematic and further work needed

Questions to ICLS

- Is this a topic of interest?
 - Note – 19th ICLS definition does not necessarily require revision – operationalisation is a challenge
- Should further testing work be done?
 - Ideas welcome
 - Experiences welcome
 - Countries and other agencies to collaborate also welcome
- Should a wider conceptual discussion take place on statistics on subsistence – is there demand at national level for this information?
 - If not we can proceed with improving measurement only