

# ILO Initiative to address rural labour statistics in the context of national development for decent work

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The International Labour Office **Department of STATISTICS**, responsible for compiling and disseminating the full range of labour statistics produced in countries (and disseminated in **LABORSTA**, the ILO labour statistics database) carried out a first investigation in 2010 to find out what labour statistics topics were available in international data repositories for urban and rural areas of countries around the world. The initiative was to prepare a dataset of the resulting statistics and to document the definitions used to classify urban and rural areas in these official labour statistics. The process and its three outcomes are described and presented below; firstly, the **Rural Labour Statistics Dataset** providing available employment, unemployment and economically active population statistics classified by rural and urban areas; secondly the **Rural Metadata** for Methodological Information; and thirdly analytical presentations of the **Rural Analysis**, for 80 countries and territories.

## Key tools and resources

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“The ILO overarching priority in rural work is capacity-building”<sup>1</sup>. In the field of labour statistics, this means, among others, compiling information on labour in rural areas and strengthening national statistical systems to produce indicators of rural labour. Since 2008, the **joint FAO/ILO** website initiative demonstrates how the Food and Agricultural Organization and ILO have collaborated over the years to strengthen their impact on rural development and poverty reduction. In 2010, the Department of Statistics pooled together a number of data resources, products and tools (described below) as a contribution to the knowledge base on statistical collections that provide the rural/urban disaggregation for labour statistics. In order to serve the longer-term goal of rural development, this was a necessary first step towards the eventual achievement of agreed definitions and methodologies for regularly collecting and analyzing statistics and information on rural employment, unemployment and rural work in general.

The initiative aimed to compile, document and analyse the rural labour-related statistics that are already available and disseminated in different international repositories by our international partner agencies such as FAO, OECD, World Bank etc., as well as rural labour statistics from other international and national databases on the Internet. The point was to avoid asking constituents directly, thereby creating an additional burden for them from this special exercise. Further visual analysis of the available statistics in the form of charts and graphics was prepared. Once this part of the project was implemented, the next step was to map from the database the spectrum of classification criteria used by available countries to define urban and rural areas or the concept of “rurality”. The work involved in particular:

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<sup>1</sup> Factsheet for rural information folder , ILO Employment Programme, June 2010.

- Researching public statistical websites (including ILO websites) and contacting author organizations (sometimes national statistical offices);
- Identifying relevant rural statistical time series and related variables:
  - collect annotated meta-data on the rural/urban classification scheme used,
  - download or otherwise extract, available data sets or time series for individual countries with an urban/rural breakdown,
  - where possible, collect classifying variables: sex, age-group, etc.;
- Following up already established organizational contacts to achieve the necessary statistics;
- Creating a consolidated dataset by country, year and topic;
- Inventorying the characteristics of the rural labour statistics dataset;
- Mapping rural/urban classification criteria;
- Performing basic analysis of the variables obtained.

## New rural products

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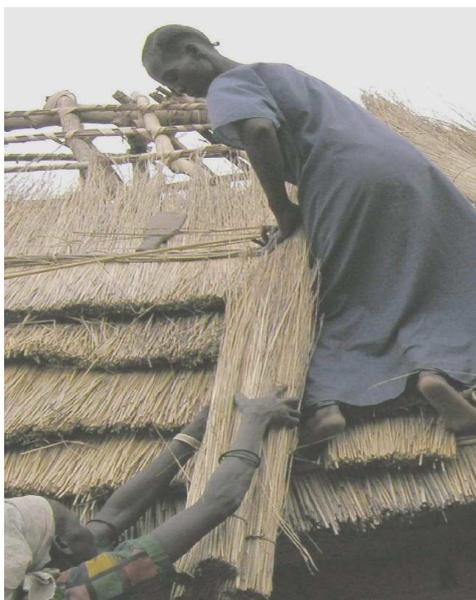
- ✓ The **ILO Rural Labour Statistics Dataset** comprising labour statistics in rural areas from international repositories for 80 ILO member States. These consist mainly of the rural/urban disaggregates for employment, unemployment and economically active population, by sex and age groups for various years. As background to understanding current national data collection practices that encompass a rural dimension, and to take stock of international data availability.
- ✓ The **ILO Rural Labour Statistics Metadata** or a technical inventory that maps for all 80 countries the criteria defining the rural/urban classification used, and the availability of other characteristics for the labour statistics gathered in the ILO Rural Labour Statistics Dataset:
  - a) Topics – Employment, Unemployment, and Economically active population (sum of employment and unemployment). Working time for one country.
  - b) Characteristics of sex and age group.
  - c) The years and relevant national statistical source.
  - d) The international reference repository.
  - e) The definitional criteria (variables) defining rural and/or urban areas in the national data source.
- ✓ **ILO Rural Analysis** are pre-prepared visual presentations for rural/urban analysis of Employment, Unemployment and Economically Active Population statistics, in the form of charts, graphics, maps and more. These main rural indicators are computed from the ILO Rural Labour Statistics Dataset for countries and by continent, derived from national sources and based on national definitions classifying areas in 80 member States. Visual presentations enhance the knowledge-base and depict rural realities in a comprehensible way. Visual analysis contributes to a better understanding of the need for appropriate rural development actions, and helps to back up ILO programmes and projects in support of Rural Decent Work issues.

## Labour statistics for rural development

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The rural dimension adds to the conventional dissemination of labour statistics by sector of activity, one of which is the agricultural sector. This has been used as an approximation for rural labour or rural employment in the past. Labour statistics that cover all types of work activities including agriculture, according to their urban or rural location provide member States with a more useful reflection of the characteristics and needs of men, women and children workers in the rural areas.

**Rural women carrying out roof thatching activity.** (ILO Photo Library)



**Rural labour statistics go beyond labour statistics in the agricultural sector.** Their wider scope therefore serves constituents to design, monitor and assess development programmes that reinforce, not jeopardize, rural areas. They are a primary tool for implementing the ILO Plan of Action for Rural Employment. They assist its objectives by supporting rural development as an integral part of national development, to ensure the spread of Decent Work also to rural areas, through a comprehensive “stocktaking of the nature, magnitude and changing patterns of rural employment in the world, with a particular focus on developing countries..”<sup>2</sup>

Employment in agriculture is multi-dimensional and the work is often casual, temporary and/or seasonal. Workers also frequently move between jobs and between informal and formal segments of rural economies. Partially for those reasons, agricultural employment is difficult to capture in statistical instruments, yet despite that fact, statistics would seem to be more readily available for employment in agriculture, as compared to employment in rural areas.

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<sup>2</sup> Resolution concerning promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction, adopted 11 June 2008, International Labour Conference, 97th Session.

The agricultural sector continues, nonetheless, to play a major role in providing work in many rural areas. Although men's participation in agriculture is declining over recent years<sup>3</sup>, agricultural work is still a main source of livelihood for rural women. Their role in agricultural production thus becomes ever more fundamental. However, because of misrepresentations and deep-seated gender injustices that cloud recognition of women's role in agriculture, let alone their role in rural employment and in work in general, their overall contribution to rural development and national development is not recognized proportionately. These gaps can begin to be addressed by collecting relevant rural/urban labour statistics, disaggregated by sex. The table below shows the example of India and the amount of time spent by men and women on the different components of labour in urban and rural areas in 6 States measured in a Time Use Survey.

### India Time Use Survey for 6 States

**Table. Weekly average time (hours) spent on all activities; Combined States**

Activities	Rural Time		Urban Time		Total	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>SNA</b> (within production boundary)	<b>42.31</b>	<b>22.53</b>	<b>41.06</b>	<b>9.16</b>	<b>41.96</b>	<b>18.72</b>
<b>SNA</b> (beyond production boundary)	<b>3.74</b>	<b>33.95</b>	<b>3.44</b>	<b>36.44</b>	<b>3.65</b>	<b>34.63</b>
<b>Total work</b> (SNA general production boundary)	<b>46.05</b>	<b>56.48</b>	<b>44.50</b>	<b>45.60</b>	<b>45.61</b>	<b>53.35</b>
Non-SNA	121.98	111.50	123.47	122.44	122.42	114.58
Total Weekly Average Hours	168.03	167.98	167.97	168.04	168.03	167.93

Note: Figure of total time for each may not be exactly equal to 168 due to effect of rounding. Courtesy TURC, India, 2010.

Categories of Activities, 1998/99.  
 SNA economic activities (Within the Production Boundary):  
 I.Primary production activities, II.Secondary activities, III.Trade, business and services.  
 Extended SNA (Beyond the Production Boundary):  
 IV.Household maintenance, management and shopping for own households, V.Care for children, the sick, elderly and disabled for own household, VI.Community services and help to other households. Non-SNA:  
 VII.Learning, VIII.Social and cultural activities, mass media etc, IX.Personal care, self-maintenance.

## Towards defining rural labour statistics

Some 3.4 billion<sup>4</sup> men, women and children; an estimated three-quarters of the world's poor, live in rural areas. Rural and urban spheres and their associated rural and urban labour markets are becoming increasingly interconnected. The International Labour Conference at its 97th Session in 2008 considered fundamental the promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction. The ILO is committed to implementing a comprehensive strategy to promote employment and decent work in rural areas. This strategy includes, of necessity, the identification, defining and statistical measurement of rural labour statistics that focus on both farm and non-farm employment, on formal and informal employment, carried out by rural men, women and children, as well as on their wages, working time, underemployment, unemployment, etc.

3 FAO, ILO, SARD and Women, 2007.

4 Source: ILO calculation based on United Nations Population Division: World population prospects: The 2006 revision, Population database, 2007 update, in Report IV Promotion of rural employment for poverty reduction, International Labour Conference, 97th Session, 2008.

Rural employment as a framework concept is generally based on the notion of “location” to delimit urban and rural areas. The concept may encompass specific components whose statistical definition and measurement require adaptation to fit the rural environment. The rural/urban dichotomy for employment may be enriched with other cross-classifications like sex, age and level of education, status in employment, agricultural/non-agricultural, small/large holdings, formal and informal. Rural employment is a subset of total employment that is measured as within the production boundary of the System of National Accounts (SNA). A wider concept of total work goes beyond total employment. It is defined to include also all activities of unpaid household service work and volunteer work, which may be measured within the SNA general production boundary. Hence rural work is a subset of total work and represents all market and non-market production performed in rural areas

An urban/rural classification may define or delimit both urban and rural areas, or urban areas first and the latter by default. The classification may be defined on the basis of population in physical spaces with or without access to key services<sup>5</sup>. In many countries the criterion may be population size or population densities, which are standard determinants of rurality. Rural areas are defined as those with low numbers of people living on any given area of land (rural population density is rural population per designated size land area). Local administrative units may contain combinations of urban and rural populations. Several criteria may be combined (cities, municipalities, metropolitan areas) to define urban areas; defining rural areas by exclusion. Determining the criteria will affect the classification and the resulting statistics. More detailed combinations of other measurement criteria might include number of cities by size or number of inhabitants, degree of urbanization, proximity of urban centres to each other, etc.

## Rural employment and informal employment in agriculture

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Important overlaps potentially exist between rural employment and informal employment in agriculture. The latter is a significant component still to be measured to achieve useful national and international development strategies that support decent work. The link between high informality in the rural areas and inappropriate or inadequate national legal and institutional frameworks to govern and support rural economies is basic. Dialogue and capacity building with the social partners (Employers and Workers organizations) to address particular issues of rural development clearly will enhance that process. If we are to more fully assess the position and contribution of all productive activities in rural areas, of informal agricultural and non-agricultural employment, the approach to capturing informality in rural communities should be done in a coherent way. These actions will help create the context in which inclusive labour market policies for both urban and rural areas can be developed and implemented.

Statistical measurement of informal work since the 15th International Conference of Labour Statistics Resolution regarding measurement of informality, has moved from measuring only the concept of informal sector in urban areas (for practical purposes) towards rural non-agricultural informal activities, to measurement of informal employment inside and outside the informal sector for both urban and rural areas. Current thinking recognizes the need to address also informal agricultural activities. Their data collection requires special considerations. Labour inputs from agriculture as

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<sup>5</sup> US Department Of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, [http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/what\\_is\\_rural.shtml](http://www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/what_is_rural.shtml) accessed Feb. 2011.

compared to labour market descriptions of agricultural activity are separate yet important measures to assess the relevance not only of agriculture but of the percentage of the rural population gaining its living from work of different types, in the agricultural sector.<sup>6</sup> An FAO rural development strategy report rightly draws attention to its impact:

*“ ...Private decision makers—e.g., farmers, households, first-handlers, input suppliers—all require information to inform their livelihood strategies, such as agricultural production or rural nonfarm work activities.”<sup>7</sup>*

## Challenges tackling rurality in basic labour statistics

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The initial research in public websites of some National Statistical Offices also helped to identify relevant statistical rural time series and related variables. However, the case of countries that presented information and statistics on a dedicated website were few. Annotated meta-data regarding the rural/urban classification scheme used was not always explicit or made available in a language other than the national one, which would be considered normal practice for many nationally managed websites. Further organizational contacts and collaboration may be established to achieve the largest consolidated dataset by topic, country, year, and descriptive characteristics, to enable users to perform useful analysis. Within the ILO itself, other datasets, for example relating to adult and child rural labour, and ILO Regional databases may be harmonized.

To develop and build capacity for labour force surveys that exploit the rural-urban disaggregation the Department of Statistics should pursue its technical cooperation activities. This will assist countries to enhance their capacity to collect relevant rural and urban labour statistics. To facilitate and enhance the monitoring and analysis of rural development, the current shortage of basic indicators with an urban/rural breakdown for many countries may be problematic. Suggested indicators could be:

- Employment in rural/urban areas (based on applied classification)
  - By sex
  - By age-group (or) minimally for youth/adult
  - By level of education
  - By status in employment
- Unemployment in rural/urban areas (based on applied classification)
  - By sex
  - By age-group (or) minimally for youth/adult
  - By level of education
  - Discouraged workers and above variables
- Working time -Hours actually worked in rural/urban areas (based on applied classification)
  - By sex

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<sup>6</sup> ILO... Manual on Surveys of Informal Employment and Informal Sector sponsored by the Delhi Group (in draft Chapter 4).

<sup>7</sup> FAO Rural Development Strategy Report, 2009, Para. 20.

- By status in employment
- Informal employment in rural/urban areas
  - By sex
  - By age-group (or) minimally for youth/adult
  - By sector
- Rural Wages or Income
  - By sex
  - By sector
- Other topics:
  - Rural Underemployment
  - Rural/urban migration, etc.

## Ways forward for rural labour statistics

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Bridges between international agencies may be further enhanced so that we collaborate to integrate statistical capacity building that focuses on rural areas and missing data. Further statistical work may be devoted to the development of an internationally agreed definition of rural, for the further development of data collection methodologies. Practical ways to integrate the rural/urban classification into national labour statistics systems, into existing labour force surveys and other administrative sources, through related questionnaire development need to be explored.

Many national, international and inter-agency initiatives exist to address rural development, for example: the joint FAO/ILO rural employment project; the focus on compilation of statistical information of rural women and men and characteristics of smallholder agriculture through surveys of labour force and living standards and agricultural censuses; regional workshops to engender social statistics in the agricultural sector. Future statistical capacity building and investigation could address categories of agricultural employment (status in employment and informal/formal), with forestry and fishing separately disaggregated. One ILO concern is to improve labour statistics for fishers (including on fatalities in the fishing sector) in promotion of ILO Conventions regarding all persons working on fishing vessels, those fishing from land, other fishing sector workers in processing and marketing jobs, as well as workers considered self-employed whose pay is based on a share of the value of the fishing catch. They are a large percentage of all fishers. This would be another basis for collaboration with FAO and its global State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture Reports. Also informal/formal employment and the wider concept of work statistics (within and beyond the SNA border) as inputs to farming activities need to be explored further and relationships between income from informal and formal agricultural and non-agricultural employment and of agricultural households in conjunction with household income and expenditure statistics are important.

Further work to capture and assess all work activities in rural areas from the widest possible context would contribute to understanding the effects of developing the rural workforce, of formalizing large-scale rural, informal sectors, etc. The productive activities of persons and households in rural areas and working in agriculture heavily affect the well-being of the population of countries. This sector has tremendous impact on their capacity to progress towards meeting many of the individual indicators under the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. The contribution of workers in rural employment and within informal employment in rural areas needs to be reflected in statistical measures.

Employment statistics and indicators for women, men and children who work in rural areas help to describe and understand the work they perform in both farm and non-farm jobs and their labour-related characteristics. They are a requisite tool to support national development plans and to ensure that economies (both developing and industrialised) progress in a more sound and balanced manner towards the achievement of Decent Work.

Beyond rural employment statistics is the concept of rural work statistics as seen in the example for India above, comprising rural employment plus other work activities carried out in rural unpaid household service and rural volunteer work. To more fully assess the position and contribution of all productive activities in rural areas, of formal and informal agricultural and non-agricultural rural employment, statistical collection should be done in a fully comprehensive and coherent way; so that more-inclusive labour market policies may be developed and implemented. In order to further national statistical capacities and to account for the many rural specificities, the ILO may work towards developing appropriate definitions and targeted impact indicators of **Decent Rural Work**.

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