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Pacific Statistics Methods Board Meeting Summary Report and Recommendations

30–31 October 2018
Tanoa International Hotel
Nadi, Fiji

Prepared by the
Statistics for Development Division (SDD) of the
Pacific Community (SPC)

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The October 2018 meeting of the Pacific Statistics Methods Board (PSMB) was chaired by its Deputy Chair, Epeli Waqavonovono, until the Chair, Vince Galvin, was able to join the latter part of the meeting.

<p>Participants (detailed list attached)</p>	<p>The following Board members attended:</p> <p>Melanesia – Epeli Waqavonovono, Fiji</p> <p>Polynesia – Viliami Konifelenisi Fifita, Tonga</p> <p>Small National Statistics Offices (NSOs) – Ipia Gadabu, Nauru</p> <p>Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) – Bruce Fraser</p> <p>Statistics New Zealand (Stats NZ) – Vince Galvin</p> <p>World Bank – Kristen Anne Himelein, Heather Moylan</p> <p>UN agencies – Stanley G. Gwavuya (UNICEF)</p> <p>Pacific Community (SPC) Statistics for Development Division (SDD) – Dr Ofa Ketuu, David Abbott, Michael Sharp</p> <p>Prof. John Gibson, University of Waikato, was invited to attend the meeting.</p> <p>Apologies were received from Brihmer Johnson, Federated States of Micronesia, and Carl Dominguez, Guam.</p>
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Summary of proceedings

(All papers and presentations referred to in this report are available online:

<http://sdd.spc.int/en/news/latest-news/104-newsletter/201-pacific-statistics-methods-board-psmb-meeting>)

Agenda item 1: Current standard regional HIES methods and rationale for the HIES methods experiment in RMI

Michael Sharp (SDD-SPC) gave a presentation on the history of Household Income and Expenditure Surveys (HIES) in the Pacific, current survey methods, associated challenges, and the reasons for the HIES experiment being conducted in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI HIES experiment).

Discussion

HIES produce useful data for a multitude of users and purposes. However, there are challenges such as survey costs, new data demands and appropriate introduction of new technology. The following issues were highlighted:

- CAPI (computer-assisted personal interviewing) – some PICTs are using CAPI successfully, noting that the system validates survey processes, enables monitoring of enumerators, and is much less onerous for enumerators and respondents. The cost of tablets is less than the cost of printing questionnaires. However, functions such as monitoring and data back-up are unavailable in areas with no internet access. Satellite phones are an option for these areas provided their use is carefully managed to prevent excessive data downloads (and thus high charges).

- Non-standard units (NSUs) – in PICTs, many food items are sold in heaps or baskets, or similar imprecise amounts, with the quantity also affected by season. This has implications for data relating to caloric intake and household spending. Different methods are used to define NSUs for HIES purposes, e.g. Fiji collects market price data on a monthly basis (weighs market heaps, bundles, etc.). Another method of assessing quantities is to capture photos of food items together with a standard-size product (e.g. market heap of taro beside a matchbox or coke can).
- Food away from home, meal participation, acquisition vs consumption, seasonality, food list and ceremonial events all vary for different Pacific cultures. It was suggested that measuring direct consumption (rather than food acquisition) is a more accurate way of assessing nutrition.
- Enumeration areas (EA) – EAs vary across PICTs, affected by topography and rural-urban migration. The definition of ‘who is a current household member’ also varies (Tonga’s definition requires a household member to have resided there for the last 6 months). Some areas are affected by the absence of workers, such as migratory/seasonal workers.
- Diary vs recall methods – households tend to record fewer transactions in the second week of diary-keeping compared to the first week. There are discrepancies between reported expenditure on alcohol and tobacco between diary and recall methods.
- Imputed rent – Imputed rent is a problem when there is no market value. The World Bank uses people’s own estimates of what their place would rent for to establish imputed rent, which may produce an overestimation but is at least consistent, but may not be appropriate in the Pacific context. For the Pacific, the question could become – what would it cost to replace your house? – though this question would be difficult for urban apartment dwellers.

The RMI HIES experiment is examining several of these issues. Field work will end in November and results and conclusions will be presented to the Board in 2019 for endorsement. In addition, because several PICTs are conducting HIES in 2019, SDD plans, if possible, to release preliminary results early in 2019.

Establishment of HIES Subcommittee – The meeting agreed to form a subcommittee to examine the issues raised as part of reviewing the RMI HIES experiment (see below).

Recommendations

The PSMB:

- i. noted the history of household income and expenditure surveys (HIES) in the Pacific region;
- ii. noted the advantages of the current regionally standardised HIES methodology, which is tried and tested and provides data that meets user needs, and stressed the importance of all Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) having comparable data based on harmonised questionnaires and collection procedures that follow recommended best practice;
- iii. noted the key challenges in conducting HIES under the regionally standardised methodology in the Pacific region;
- iv. noted the HIES methodological experiment that is currently being conducted in the Republic of the Marshall Islands (‘RMI HIES experiment’);
- v. agreed that PSMB will review the results of the RMI HIES experiment at its third meeting scheduled for April/May 2019 to enable an informed recommendation to be made to PICTs on the optimal methodology for conducting HIES;
- vi. noted that preliminary results from the RMI HIES experiment will be released at an interim meeting earlier in 2019 (the Secretariat will advise details in due course).

Agenda item 2: Living Standard Measurement Survey (LSMS) Methodology

Heather Moylan (World Bank) described the ‘big picture’ of the LSMS programme. LSMS uses integrated multi-topic questionnaires and surveys are geo-referenced. There is no standard LSMS. Rather, survey

design is driven by the policy needs of each country; e.g. LSMS ISA (integrated surveys on agriculture) provide data relevant to poverty and food security. LSMS modules are being updated to ensure data aligns with SDG indicators.

The programme collaborates with NSOs and provides technical assistance on survey design and implementation, capacity building and knowledge transfer. The programme also conducts research on best practice survey methods. The presentation included (a) the new FAO/World Bank guidelines on collection of food consumption data in middle- and low-income countries; and (b) how to best collect consumption data with CAPI (Survey Solutions). Specific recommendations (Annex 2) related to:

- diary and recall/length of recall
- seasonality, number of visits
- acquisition and consumption
- meal participation
- food away from home
- food list
- non-standard units

Discussion

Geo-referencing of surveys is complicated by the difficulty of measuring land plots in the Pacific due to land tenure issues and fear of land alienation. Survey Solutions has released a new mapping tool as an alternative to GPS. Self-reporting is also an option but tends to overestimate land area.

There is needless variation between census and HIES questions. Links between surveys could be improved by standardising census and HIES questions /using the same question to obtain the same information, such as 'type of building material'; or by matching household survey ID numbers for sequences of surveys.

Recommendations

PSMB noted:

- i. the new FAO/World Bank guidelines on collection of consumption data in LSMS, as endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission at its meeting in 2018;
- ii. how to best collect consumption data with CAPI¹ (as detailed in the presentation);
- iii. current challenges to CAPI use in PICTs, particularly lack of internet connectivity in remote areas.

Agenda item 3: Lessons from three decades of using data from household surveys and experiments on household survey methods in developing countries.

Professor John Gibson, University of Waikato, presented lessons from the university's extensive knowledge base on household survey methods in developing countries. He said surveys are less informative about poverty and hunger than commonly assumed. In addition, poverty and inequality become more difficult to measure as living standards rise. Problems with HIES include diary fatigue and lack of price surveys (urban prices cannot be used to approximate rural prices). The main lessons are that (1) poverty, hunger, and inequality estimates are sensitive to variations in survey design, e.g. a diary gives more accurate data for food consumption than recall; and (2) auto correlations are low.

To better measure poverty and hunger, surveys should use harmonised designs, e.g. 7-day food recall; and redeploy interview resources to allow the same households to be observed 2 to 3 times (non-adjacent) within a year. Finally, surveys should not rely on a CPI for price information.

¹ Computer-assisted personal interviewing.

Discussion

There was extensive discussion of the biases produced by different survey methods and the disadvantages of using unit values as if they were prices. Professor Gibson said unit values can be used to measure quality, but do not replace price surveys ('Most surveys in the Pacific do not collect prices and are therefore wasted effort'). An option is to use the expert knowledge of the people being surveyed to get prices of items. The time taken for a traditional market price survey for 18 fresh products and 18 food store items was four hours. Household interviews and photos of products could provide the same information in much less time.

The Chair concluded the PSMB needed further guidance on these issues and extended an invitation to Professor Gibson to become a visiting member of the Board. The SDD Director suggested that a subcommittee of the Board could take the work forward before making a recommendation to NSOs.

Recommendations

PSMB noted:

- i. the lessons learned from Papua New Guinea and other parts of the world and their relevance to the Pacific, including that more surveys do not necessarily mean better measurement of poverty and hunger;
- ii. the disadvantages of using unit values for food consumption items in HIES and other surveys in place of prices collected through price surveys, and recognised the need to build-in price surveys when collecting HIES data to enable analysis of welfare/poverty, particularly for rural areas, and for policy decisions;
- iii. issues for HIES design and data collection processes and agreed to refer the issues to the HIES Subcommittee (see below) to consider what advice should be provided to NSOs.

Agenda item 4: Household statistics model for Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) – a way forward.

Bruce Fraser, ABS, presented for discussion a model for improving the collection of household data in the Pacific. Features include (1) optimising collection schedules, with HIES to follow immediately after a census; (2) developing standard field operating guides and training materials; (3) developing standard area sampling infrastructure; (4) considering a standard weighting methodology; and (5) developing standard estimation and reporting tools. The model emphasises good knowledge management, including post-survey evaluations, and incorporating learning from surveys across countries. The long-term goal would be continuous collection, which would avoid survey set-up costs and maintain capability and knowledge.

Discussion

There was interest in the integration of censuses and HIESs. SDD has made some progress on producing guidelines for harmonising and standardising methods and procedures from HIES to HIES. The guidelines will improve data processing efficiency and enable rapid population of indicators. To optimize survey schedules, SDD has collated a 5 year collection plan for countries to agree on, but funding is a problem.

Sampling is a challenge in the Pacific region, given PICT geography and variability within communities. There is a need to consider 'hard to reach' groups. The World Bank has discussed a training course for countries but considers that an experts group, including NSOs, is first needed to provide recommendations and training slides. The slides could be targeted to specific surveys. SDD also supports countries on sampling and has a World Bank-funded project to develop guidelines for sampling in small island states by mid next year.

In addition, SDD is working on data documentation frameworks. UNICEF also supports data documentation and is developing templates.

The meeting agreed to establish a sampling subcommittee to assess sampling procedures, and the other recommendations of the presentation (1–5 above), to enable the PSMB to provide information to NSOs on best practices.

Recommendation

PSMB:

- i. noted the recommendations of the presentation and agreed that these should be progressed by a Sampling Subcommittee led by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Agenda item 5: Resourcing the Methods Board (World Bank perspective)

SDD Director, Dr Ketuu, gave a brief summary of the presentation for the Board's reconsideration. The PSMB requires resources to support (1) its face-to-face meetings, and (2) PSMB-commissioned work and research.

The World Bank is looking at funding PSMB work, including research and administration, but is unable to fund face-to-face meetings. (Only member countries of the World Bank are eligible for funding.) Its financing targets the SDD business plan, which in turn supports the Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy. However, under the proposed framework, World Bank financial support for PSMB-commissioned research is not anticipated to start until 2020.

Other development partners, including Australia and New Zealand, have expressed interest in the Board's work and will be approached for support. Some countries may also have relevant bilateral funding.

Tonga said that PICT ministers need to be more aware of the impact of statistics for development. Ideally, governments should commit to funding statistical activities locally, given their need for the evidence that the sector produces.

The Director noted that the proposed Pacific Data Hub will provide an information resource for NSOs and governments. There is also a page for PSMB on the SDD website to disseminate material to NSOs.

Recommendations

PSMB agreed:

- i. to adopt the World Bank's proposed framework for resourcing PSMB to ensure it can deliver on its responsibilities;
- ii. that the Secretariat will prepare a draft three-year budget for PSMB based on the agreed work plan, circulate it for endorsement and share it with potential donors;
- iii. that SPC's Statistics for Development Division (SDD) will manage and coordinate all financial resources earmarked for PSMB.

Agenda item 7: Identification of topics for future consideration by the Board: Gauging country needs

The Chair (Vince Galvin) opened a discussion of NSOs' requirements of the PSMB and the agenda for its meetings in 2019.

- The meeting had discussed HIES extensively, particularly as several PICTs have upcoming HIES. To work towards resolving some of the questions raised in its first and second meetings, the Board is setting up three subcommittees (HIES, Sampling, and Poverty measurement) so members can examine the issues in detail between meetings before providing advice to NSOs.
- The idea of a 'Statistics Helpdesk' for NSOs was proposed. NSOs could submit requests for help, with the aim of getting a quick response, e.g. Nauru wants to run a MICs but needs to know who to contact, how to write up proposals, etc. Many of these questions have been answered elsewhere

and it would be useful to be able to access the information in one place or be referred to the right contact or source. One suggestion was a mailing list open to all NSOs. However, this will not provide an archivable and searchable database of responses. The Chair offered to do a first draft of possible solutions to circulate for everyone's comments, with the helpdesk to be an item on the next agenda.

- At the first PSMB meeting, Fiji raised the issue of a suitable framework for collecting tourism statistics to answer questions such as 'Who benefits from the tourism industry?'. It was noted that one role of the PSMB is to 'harness the power of partners'. Issues, such as the tourism question, could be extended to synthetic panels based on partner networks.
- At the first PSMB meeting, representatives agreed they would canvass the priorities of their subregional NSO constituents. This consultation is important for informing the PSMB's work along with information from channels such as SDD and the TYPPS review.

Further comments

- Decisions on survey procedures must include consideration of data documentation.
- The PSMB has to marry technical expertise with pragmatic considerations, e.g. assessing diary vs recall and whether a concurrent trial is feasible. Technical working groups need to produce workable, affordable solutions.
- At its second meeting, the PSMB has begun to address issues in an organised way and has formulated recommendations for resourcing the work required. It is important to maintain a focus on priority issues and to identify the resources available to resolve them.

Recommendations

PSMB:

- i. agreed that the immediate focus of PSMB should be on HIES issues, given the large number of HIES to be conducted in the region in the next 2–3 years;
- ii. agreed that the Chair will prepare a concept note for setting up a process to respond to queries from national statistics office (NSOs), noting that responses should be archivable and searchable.

Establishment of subcommittees on HIES, Sampling, and Poverty measurement

The meeting agreed on the membership and aims of the proposed subcommittees.

Recommendations

PSMB:

HIES Subcommittee

- i. endorsed the establishment of a HIES Subcommittee of the PSMB to examine issues specific to HIES as raised during the meeting, such as CAPI, food away from home, meal participation, acquisition vs consumption, seasonality, food list, ceremonial events, non-standard units, prices, concurrent conduct of surveys using diary or recall methods, and household revisits, as part of reviewing the results of the RMI HIES experiment;
- ii. agreed that the members of the HIES Subcommittee will be Dr Viliami Fifita (NSO representative), Kristen Himelein (World Bank) Michael Sharp (SPC-SDD), and Professor John Gibson (as a visiting member of PSMB), with the UN representative and ESCAP as co-opted members;
- iii. agreed that the Secretariat will develop terms of reference for the HIES Subcommittee for the PSMB to approve out of session.

Sampling Subcommittee

- i. endorsed the establishment of a Sampling Subcommittee of the PSMB to examine issues specific to sampling that were raised during the meeting;

- ii. agreed that the members of the Sampling Subcommittee will be Bruce Fraser (ABS), Kristen Himelein (World Bank), Taggy Tangimetua (NSO representative), Bertrand Buffiere (SPC-SDD), and Professor John Gibson (as a visiting member of PSMB), with UNICEF and ESCAP as co-opted members;
- iii. agreed that the Secretariat will develop terms of reference for the Sampling Subcommittee for the PSMB to approve out of session.

Poverty measurement

- i. agreed to establish a working group to review how poverty is measured in the Pacific, with the group to examine monetary and non-monetary poverty measurement relating to PICT national policies and the SDG indicators;
- ii. agreed that the members of the working group will be Vince Galvin (Stats NZ), Dr Viliami Fifita (NSO representative), Kristen Himelein (World Bank), Stanley Gwavuya (UNICEF) and David Abbott (SPC-SDD);
- iii. agree that the working group will recommend a course of action at the next meeting.

Agenda item 8: Other business

The World Bank requested the PSMB to accept its resignation from the Board as it cannot provide funding for an organisation of which it is a member. It can however be an observer.

Recommendation

PSMB:

- i. agreed to the World Bank's request to resign from PSMB membership and to become an observer (noting that the World Bank cannot be a member of any organisation for which it provides funding).

Acknowledgement of Epeli Waqavonovono's service

Recognising this was the last PSMB meeting for Epeli Waqavonovono, who is retiring from the position of Fiji Government Statistician, the Board thanked him for his important contribution to its work and noted that, in future, his valuable knowledge and experience could be called on as necessary as a visiting member of PSMB.

Next PSMB meetings

PSMB:

- i. noted that an interim Board meeting will be held early in 2019 to consider the preliminary results of the RMI HIES experiment (the Secretariat will advise details in due course);
- ii. noted that the Secretariat proposed the following dates for the next meetings of the Board: 16 and 17 April 2019 in Auckland; and 28 and 29 October 2019 in Noumea.

PSMB outcome

The meeting accepted the draft recommendations (Annex 1), noting they would be presented to the meeting of the Pacific Statistics Standing Committee the next day.

Annex 1: Summary of Recommendations

The Pacific Statistics Method Board (PSMB):

Agenda item 1: HIES in the Pacific and the way forward

- i. noted the history of household income and expenditure surveys (HIES) in the Pacific region;
- ii. noted the advantages of the current regionally standardised HIES methodology, which is tried and tested and provides data that meets user needs, and stressed the importance of all Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs) having comparable data based on harmonised questionnaires and collection procedures that follow recommended best practice;
- iii. noted the key challenges in conducting HIES under the regionally standardised methodology in the Pacific region;
- iv. noted the HIES methodological experiment that is currently being conducted in the Republic of the Marshall Islands ('RMI HIES experiment');
- v. agreed that PSMB will review the results of the RMI HIES experiment at its third meeting scheduled for April/May 2019 to enable an informed recommendation to be made to PICTs on the optimal methodology for conducting HIES;
- vi. noted that preliminary results from the RMI HIES experiment will be released at an interim Methods Board meeting earlier in 2019 (the Secretariat will advise details in due course).

Agenda Item 2: Living Standard Measurement Survey (LSMS) methodology

- i. noted the new FAO/World Bank guidelines on collection of consumption data in LSMS, as endorsed by the UN Statistical Commission at its meeting in 2018;
- ii. noted how to best collect consumption data with CAPI² (as detailed in the presentation);
- iii. noted current challenges to CAPI use in PICTs, particularly lack of internet connectivity in remote areas.

Agenda Item 3: Lessons from three decades of using data from household surveys and experiments on household survey methods in developing countries

- i. noted the lessons learned from Papua New Guinea and other parts of the world and their relevance to the Pacific, including that more surveys do not necessarily mean better measurement of poverty and hunger;
- ii. noted the disadvantages of using unit values for food consumption items in HIES and other surveys in place of prices collected through price surveys, and recognised the need to build-in price surveys when collecting HIES data to enable analysis of welfare/poverty, particularly for rural areas, and for policy decisions;
- iii. noted issues for HIES design and data collection processes and agreed to refer the issues to the HIES Subcommittee (see below) to consider what advice should be provided to NSOs.

Agenda Item 4: Household statistics model for Pacific Island countries and territories (PICTs): A way forward.

- i. noted the recommendations of the presentation and agreed that these should be progressed by a Sampling Subcommittee led by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Agenda Item 5: Resourcing the Methods Board

² Computer-assisted personal interviewing.

- i. agreed to adopt the World Bank's proposed framework for resourcing PSMB to ensure it can deliver on its responsibilities;
- ii. agreed that the Secretariat will prepare a draft three-year budget for PSMB based on the agreed work plan, circulate it for endorsement and share it with potential donors;
- iii. agreed that SPC's Statistics for Development Division (SDD) will manage and coordinate all financial resources earmarked for PSMB.

Agenda Item 6: Identification of topics for future consideration by the Board: Gauging country needs

- i. agreed that the immediate focus of PSMB should be on HIES issues, given the large number of HIES to be conducted in the region in the next 2–3 years;
- ii. agreed that the Chair will prepare a concept note for setting up a process to respond to queries from national statistics office (NSOs), noting that responses should be achievable and searchable.

Establishment of HIES Subcommittee

- i. endorsed the establishment of a HIES Subcommittee of the PSMB to examine issues specific to HIES as raised during the meeting, such as CAPI, food away from home, meal participation, acquisition vs consumption, seasonality, food list, ceremonial events, non-standard units, prices, concurrent conduct of surveys using diary or recall methods, and household revisits, as part of reviewing the results of the RMI HIES experiment;
- ii. agreed that the members of the HIES Subcommittee will be Dr Viliami Fifita (NSO representative), Kristen Himelein (World Bank) Michael Sharp (SPC-SDD), and Professor John Gibson (as a visiting member of PSMB), with the UN representative and ESCAP as co-opted members;
- iii. agreed that the Secretariat will develop terms of reference for the HIES Subcommittee for the PSMB to approve out of session.

Establishment of Sampling Subcommittee

- i. endorsed the establishment of a Sampling Subcommittee of the PSMB to examine issues specific to sampling that were raised during the meeting;
- ii. agreed that the members of the Sampling Subcommittee will be Bruce Fraser (ABS), Kristen Himelein (World Bank), Taggy Tangimetua (NSO representative), Bertrand Buffiere (SPC-SDD), and Professor John Gibson (as a visiting member of PSMB), with UNICEF and ESCAP as co-opted members;
- iii. agreed that the Secretariat will develop terms of reference for the Sampling Subcommittee for the PSMB to approve out of session.

Poverty measurement in the Pacific

- i. agreed to establish a working group to review how poverty is measured in the Pacific, with the group to examine monetary and non-monetary poverty measurement relating to PICT national policies and the SDG indicators;
- ii. agreed that the members of the working group will be Vince Galvin (Stats NZ), Dr Viliami Fifita (NSO representative), Kristen Himelein (World Bank), Stanley Gwavuya (UNICEF) and David Abbott (SPC-SDD);
- iii. agree that the working group will recommend a course of action at the next meeting.

Visiting member of PSMB

- i. welcomed Professor John Gibson, University of Waikato, as a visiting member of PSMB.

Change in World Bank membership status

- i. agreed to the World Bank's request to resign from PSMB membership and to become an observer instead (noting that the World Bank cannot be a member of any organisation for which it provides funding).

Acknowledgement

- i. recognising this was the last PSMB meeting for Epeli Waqavonovono, who is retiring from the position of Fiji Government Statistician, the Board thanked him for his important contribution to its work and noted that, in future, his valuable knowledge and experience could be called on as necessary as a visiting member of PSMB.

Next meetings of the Board

- i. noted that an interim Methods Board meeting will be held early in 2019 to consider the preliminary results from the RMI HIES experiment (the Secretariat will advise details in due course);
- ii. noted that the Secretariat proposed the following dates for the next meetings of the Board: 16 and 17 April 2019 in Auckland; and 28 and 29 October 2019 in Noumea.