

**Economic** The importance of foreign trade and the degree of concentration on a few export commodities; the proportion of economic activities covered by large units; the relative size of agriculture.

These determinants of what sort of structure would eventually be appropriate appear so numerous that a very large number of structures would have to be considered. But the various characteristics are themselves associated — thus small countries are generally more dependent on foreign trade, especially one or two exports, and, where the main source of foreign exchange is dynamic (e.g. oil, tourism or manufacturing), they tend to be highly urbanized and to have large government sectors. The accounting structure devised for Trinidad may not be very different from what would be needed for Libya — or for Bermuda or Singapore — since they will in each case start with the need to document the income flows generated by the key sector, especially how they are transmitted (via the government or otherwise) to the other parts of the economy.

In India, Indonesia and Brazil, on the other hand, the main concern may be rather with the consumption levels of the poor, especially in rural areas, so the highest statistical priority may be needed for documenting these and for showing how much of the proceeds of agricultural production in different regions are syphoned off by landlords, moneylenders, marketing agencies etc. This points to priorities for regional statistics, possibly to be woven later into national data, which are, however, of limited meaning for countries so large and diverse.

It would be helpful if statistical agencies, such as the United Nations Statistical Office, focused attention on the typology of statistical needs, and the consequent pattern of priorities in data collection, rather than on presumed common needs. No attempt seems to have been made to organize case studies on what sort of mutation of the SNA might be found appropriate for various types of country (when the statistics for each sector had been developed to a level where they could be defensibly linked together into aggregates).

### The International Economy

by Dudley Seers

More information was now clearly required about the operations of the international economy. The expansion of the multinational companies has rendered conventional trade statistics partially obsolete. A growing proportion of transactions that cross national boundaries are internal to the company concerned. Moreover, the political power and economic weight of the MNCs are giving rise to

growing concern. Detailed information was needed on these corporations (including their branches and affiliates in various countries) and on their transactions.

The conference was informed that the United Nations is now studying the possibility of compiling data of this kind. A register of the structure and branches of the MNCs was being considered. Data may be collected either directly by the UN Statistical Office, or through national governments. A system of foreign trade matrices was a starting point.

Information about the marketing channels of developing countries' export commodities, including trade margins at the various stages, was of vital importance for the countries concerned, and indeed to others as well. Similarly, governments of developing countries are highly interested in the marketing structure for their imports, a field of statistics virtually untouched so far by international organizations. Additional requirements were raised by the pressure for indexation of commodity prices. For this and other purposes unit values were rarely satisfactory measures and there was a need for more precise identification of import and export prices.

There are many difficulties: the familiar problem of nominal prices declared for customs purposes, especially by MNCs,<sup>1</sup> distorts the value of trade statistics for economic analysis. Moreover, it is not easy to evaluate the relative importance of MNC operations in the domestic market. It was agreed that much has to be done to improve the quality of these statistics of less developed countries. One possibility is the matching of trade unit values, as reported by both trade partners. Tanzanian experience in checking the wholesale prices of commodities exported and imported, by mobilizing all types of supplementary information, was mentioned as another example of what could be done.

UNCTAD was initiating some work on commodity export and import prices for specified groups of countries but true 'trade' prices were difficult to identify when international transactions took place between two affiliates of the same company, in a vertically integrated organization. This was a problem which governments found difficult to solve: many were weak and had no legal authority to contend with it. The challenge of new data collection had to be faced at an international level, and as a beginning the UN could prepare a comprehensive list of prices of commodities at various levels of processing.

<sup>1</sup> See paper by Reginald Green to be published in *IDS Bulletin*, vol. 7, no. 3.

The first steps should be selective and experimental. A small number of primary commodities produced by 'developing' countries should be selected for the study of marketing channels. Various techniques and data sources could be used, and the reliability of the results tested. The limited number of producing (exporting) countries facilitates the task for most commodities.

Another subject discussed was population statistics. The World Fertility Survey was mentioned as a highly expensive undertaking, the objective of which is to explore the factors determining the level of fertility. Apart from the intrinsic importance of the data collected, this Survey provides easy access to funds and expertise to build up survey capability in many countries. But the outstanding priority attached to fertility was definitely biased. The study of mortality, morbidity, poverty, living conditions of the population, etc. were of a higher degree of priority; nevertheless resources available for these purposes get much less external support.

### Censuses and Sample Surveys in Less Developed Countries

by *Nanjamma Chinnappa*

Changing attitudes towards national development objectives and policies in less developed countries require a reappraisal of the data needed to help formulate, monitor and evaluate these policies. This demands a critical examination of the relevance, adequacy and reliability of current statistical data and of the tools used to collect and analyse these data.

The main sources of data that are used by governments and by economic researchers are official statistics and statistics collected through surveys.<sup>1</sup> Official statistics are incidental to the process of administration and are collected continuously by various government departments and institutions. They do not cover all the areas on which information is needed for guiding policies, and even in the areas for which they are available the data tend to be incomplete, inconsistent (because uniform concepts and definitions are not specified), biased (because they are affected by the primary purpose for which they were collected — e.g. revenue) and often out-of-date because of the low priority given to their compilation. Improving official statistics depends on the importance given by government departments to this function, and the education of the public. These factors change slowly in developing countries, and often independent surveys are required to confirm or show the shortcomings in

official statistics, to plan their improvement, and to supplement them.

Most nations therefore depend on censuses and sample surveys that are designed specifically to meet their data needs. Censuses and sample surveys are periodic exercises in data collection, compilation and analysis, the basic difference between them being the coverage of the universe to be studied. Whereas a census implies collection of data from all the units in that universe, a sample survey is a study of a part of that universe which is a sample selected specifically for the purposes of the survey. This difference in scale results in substantial differences in the data coverage and in the approach to planning and executing censuses and sample surveys. Censuses are the only means of providing data for every single unit in a universe or by very small breakdowns. Sample surveys are often preferable to censuses from considerations of cost, feasibility, accuracy, and timeliness of results, and have the important advantage of providing estimates of the precision of the estimates if random sampling techniques are used. In choosing between a census or a sample survey one needs to weigh these factors, and the basic question whether information for every single unit or by detailed breakdown is absolutely necessary for policy decisions. However, censuses and sample surveys are not necessarily alternative tools for data collection. They are often complementary and draw on each other in many ways. A sample survey conducted in conjunction with a census helps in collecting additional data on items that need special investigation techniques or more probing than can be afforded in a large-scale census. Intercensal sample surveys help in making census data up-to-date. Post census sample surveys are used to measure the accuracy of census results. A census often provides the best sampling frame for designing efficient sample surveys, and is used in improving estimation procedures and to calculate raising factors to be applied in estimation from such surveys.

### Organizing a survey

Organizing a survey is most often an expensive, time-consuming and demanding exercise, whether it be a census or a sample survey. All the steps in its execution need to be foreseen, carefully planned and provided for. Planning and executing a survey as a part-time activity of researchers or government personnel with other commitments often results in an unfinished survey or unusable data, thus defeating the very purpose of the exercise.

It is wise to provide adequate spare funds, time and research capacity in budgetting for a survey to meet the needs of flexible objectives and unforeseen problems that might be encountered. The

<sup>1</sup> The term 'surveys' in this paper when used by itself includes both censuses and sample surveys. The terms schedule and questionnaire are used interchangeably, and so are the terms enumerator and investigator although they refer to different entities.