COVID-19 and the Labour Force Survey in Belize

“Covid-19 impact on labor force surveys and other household surveys in Caribbean countries” Webinar
June 3, 2020
Presentation Outline

- Overview – Belize Labour Force Survey
- Impact of COVID-19
- Alternative Data Collection Method for LFS
- Challenges
- Opportunities
Overview – Belize Labour Force Survey

- Belize conducts its Labour Force Survey **twice yearly** – April and September
- Sample size: **2,800 households**
- Duration: **4 weeks**
- Data is collected using **CAPI, via face to face interviews**
- Interviewers work in **teams** of four plus one supervisor
- Quality and progress are monitored in the field and in office, as data is synced to the servers continuously, upon completion of interviews.
- Data cleaning and processing is automated
- Results are **published within two months** of the reference periods (June, November)
Impact of COVID-19

• Prior to COVID-19, Belize was in the final stages of preparations for the 2020 Population and Housing Census

• No April 2020 LFS scheduled – key labour force indicators to be obtained from census

• September 2020 LFS scheduled as usual, as census field work was to be completed by the end of July 2020

• **Early March 2020:** Census 2020 postponed

• **Late March 2020:** First confirmed COVID-19 case detected in Belize
Impact of COVID-19

• **April 2020**: National state of emergency declared
  o Restricted movement between communities and districts
  o Closure of businesses and government offices
  o National curfew imposed
  o Social distancing requirements and limitations to numbers of persons allowed in one place

• **May 2020**: Government offices and some businesses reopened, restrictions to movement between communities lifted, last remaining COVID-19 patient tests negative.
Impact of COVID-19

- **June 2020:** Relaxation of some social distancing requirements
- Despite loosening of restrictions, country remains in a state of emergency
- There is considerable uncertainty about possibility of face to face surveys for the rest of 2020 and possibly 2021.
- With the country emerging from a near economic standstill, government departments and government funded agencies face severe budget cuts
Alternative Data Collection Method for LFS

• September 2020 LFS – data collection by CATI
• Sample size: 3,000 households
• Adjustments required:
  o Sample frame with telephone numbers
  o Shortening of questionnaire
  o Setting up of infrastructure for data collection by telephone
  o Revision of training material with a focus on telephone interviewing
  o Monitoring of quality and progress remotely
Alternative Data Collection Method for LFS

• **Option #1** – Constructing sample frame using administrative data from telephone companies

• Issues encountered:
  o Difficulty in obtaining data required from companies
  o Sample frame would be at the person level rather than household level
  o Issues of bias, coverage
  o Comparability of indicators to existing series
Alternative Data Collection Method for LFS

- **Option #2** – Use computer programming to create a frame consisting of all possible telephone numbers for Belize, then using an automated process try to contact each number and eliminate non-existent numbers.

- **Issues encountered:**
  - Requires extensive programming, steep learning curve for IT department
  - Sample frame would be at the person level rather than household level
  - Issues of bias and coverage
  - Comparability of indicators to existing series
Alternative Data Collection Method for LFS

- **Option #3** – Develop our own sample frame by conducting a listing exercise, during which telephone and email contact information will be collected
  - Closest approximation to existing LFS sampling methodology
  - Provides most updated sample frame with assurances as to quality of data contained in the frame
  - Using a listing exercise, in which we have experience and expertise, allows for control over timeline of entire process and for better planning

- Listing scheduled to start first week in July.
- Training for LFS in August
- LFS to be conducted as scheduled in September, results published November
Challenges

- Possibility exists that the country could revert to lockdown conditions at any time, if new COVID-19 cases are detected, jeopardizing listing exercise. *Preparations underway to conduct listing as quickly as possible, utilizing present window of opportunity.*

- Lack of experience in data collection by CATI. *Technical assistance being obtained from ILO and PRASC, and guidance in training of telephone interviewers being obtained from UNICEF based on their MICS6 pilot.*

- Expected higher than usual non-response rate. *Sample size to be increased and a contingency plan for follow ups in the field for no contacts and households with no telephone access.*
Challenges

• LFS questionnaire needs to be shortened to facilitate shorter interview times. *Non-essential sections removed, focus on economic activity module and questions required to obtain key indicators. Addition/amending of questions to obtain COVID-19 related indicators.*

• Managing workplace social distancing requirements in a call center setting. *Interviewers will work from home, utilizing GSM-compatible tablets for making calls and capturing data.*

• Controlling for quality in a work-from-home setting. *To be determined.*
Opportunities

• **Building capacity** in a new modality of data collection.

• Possibility of conducting **other short surveys** by telephone, to capture pertinent and relevant indicators on the impact of COVID-19 on the country.

• **Cost savings/efficient use of limited resources** in times of financial constraint.

• In the event that funding constraints prevent the conduct of the census as planned in 2021, possibility of an alternative method of collecting the data required.

• **Continued production of crucial statistics** for monitoring the socio-economic conditions of the Belizean people, even in the face of major resource constraints.
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