

THE 'TIME USE SURVEY' AS AN OPPORTUNITY LOST

Relevant for: Indian Economy | Topic: Issues Related to Poverty, Inclusion, Employment & Sustainable Development

The [all India Time Use Survey, 2019](#) has just been published by the Government of India. As a survey that has covered the entire country for the first time, the National Statistical Office needs to be complimented for accomplishing the task.

The “Time Use Survey, or TUS, provides a framework for measuring time dispositions by the population on different activities. Its primary objective is to measure participation of men and women in paid and unpaid activities... TUS is an important source of information on the time spent in unpaid care-giving activities, volunteer work, unpaid domestic service producing activities of the household members. It also provides information on time spent on learning, socializing, leisure activities, self-care activities, etc., by the household members”.

Data | [92% Indian women take part in unpaid domestic work; only 27% men do so](#)

The data collection was done for one day — normal or other day in a 24-hour time diary, beginning at 4 a.m. and till 4 a.m. the next day. In developed countries where literacy is high, time use is recorded in a 24-hour time diary by the respondents themselves, using 10-15 minute time slots.

In India, where literacy is low, the time diary was filled in by interviewers in 30 minute time slots through face-to-face interviews. The International Classification of Activities for Time-Use Statistics of the United Nations Statistics Division, was used for classification of activities.

Two recent developments which have pushed up the demand for TUS globally are the commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) by 2030, and the path-breaking Resolution of the 19th International Conference on Labour Statistics, on [“Statistics of Work, Employment and Labour Underutilization — International Labour Organization 2013”](#). The Government of India is fully committed to the SDGs and has also indicated its inclination to implementing the second. TUS data are also required for understanding and monitoring major socioeconomic concerns of countries. Somehow, both these developments have not been incorporated in this first time use survey.

Time use data are needed for implementing not only the SDG 5.4 on unpaid work, but also for implementing the SDG-1 to the SDG-10. Even for the SDG 5.4 — considered to be the most important SDG for measuring and valuing unpaid domestic services and unpaid care by women and men, and reducing unpaid work through public services and infrastructure — the Indian TUS data are not adequate. Unpaid work is usually valued using the input method, i.e. valuing the labour input in unpaid work using suitable prices (minimum wages of workers, housekeeper’s wages, opportunity costs or specialised wages). However, this valuation is not adequate, because it values only the labour input and leaves out the capital and technology used. Satellite accounts of unpaid work, however, takes into consideration capital/technology while computing the accounts. Satellite accounts of unpaid work use the principal functions concept, which can be compared with the national accounts functions. Under this approach, unpaid work is presented in terms of this classification of the functions, similar to the classification of the functions under the national-accounts. These accounts would be comparable with the national income accounts, and measure the correct contribution of unpaid work to the GDP.

Comment | [Reset rural job policies, recognise women’s work](#)

This accounting requires information on the assets of a household that includes assets used in domestic services, vehicles used in travel and commuting, and consumer durables, etc. The accounting also requires wage rates prevailing in different locations. Unfortunately, this information is not collected by this TUS in the background questionnaire. In the absence of this information, valuation will not be feasible in satellite accounts. Since there is no data collected on the ownership of the assets by gender, valuation by gender will not be feasible.

The ILO's Resolution — referred to above — presents a new definition of work, new forms of work and a new labour force status classification. It defines “work” as “any activity performed by persons of any sex and age to produce goods or provide services for use by others or own use”. “Work” is divided into five categories: employment (production of goods and services for pay, profit or barter); own use production of goods and services by households; unpaid trainee work, volunteer work; and other work (compulsory work performed without pay to produce goods/services for others). Unpaid domestic services and unpaid care are now formally recognised as “work” for the first time.

Clearly, the Resolution cannot be implemented without time use data. Several countries have initiated its implementation, and the ILO has also undertaken pilot studies in several countries. It was a good opportunity for India to implement the Resolution. However, the Standing Committee on Labour Force Statistics that designed the time use survey decided to keep the Resolution out and conducted an independent TUS. The TUS does not even have employment as one of the objectives of the TUS.

Experts have always argued that Indian Employment/Unemployment Surveys, or EUS, tend to under-report informal workers, due to the nature of informal employment. Being frequently intermittent, scattered, temporary, short term or unstable, it is frequently not reported accurately by the EUS. Again, women frequently view work as a part of household work and under-report it. Also, the EUS are not equipped to collect data on multiple jobs performed by people, the time spent on work (i.e. intensity of work), the scattered nature of work, subsistence work, and work performed under simultaneous activities. The TUS, which collects comprehensive information on all human activities, provides improved estimates of the workforce as well as shed light on important characteristics of the workforce. The TUS can thus provide critical information to add the richness of the EUS. The Expert Committee on the 62nd Round of the NSSO on EUS therefore recommended that a national TUS should follow an EUS.

A TUS collects data only for one or two days per person in a week, while according to the ILO, “a person is a worker if she/he has spent at least one hour on work in the reference week”. As informal work is frequently intermittent and irregular, the TUS information on one day's work (for less than one hour) or non-work cannot qualify the person to be a worker or non-worker. It is quite likely that the person reporting as a non-worker on one day may be working on other days, or one reporting work may not work for one hour totally in the week. Thus, the TUS cannot provide information on the workforce/employment status of persons. It is necessary, therefore, to draw the TUS sample (which is always smaller) from the same sampling framework that is used by the labour force survey (EUS), with some common units. The TUS can complement the labour force survey (LFS) information. The independent TUS cannot provide estimates of the workforce/labour force.

In short, the Indian TUS has missed two important opportunities — of implementing the SDG 5.4 and the ILO's important resolution.

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END

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