

Some thoughts on the immediate and longer-term impact of COVID-19 on Stats SA's household survey program

Solly Molayi
Statistics South Africa

Seminar: Collecting social data: Adapting to the Covid-19 pandemic
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CAPI



CATI



CAWI



Multimodal Geo-Statistical Frame

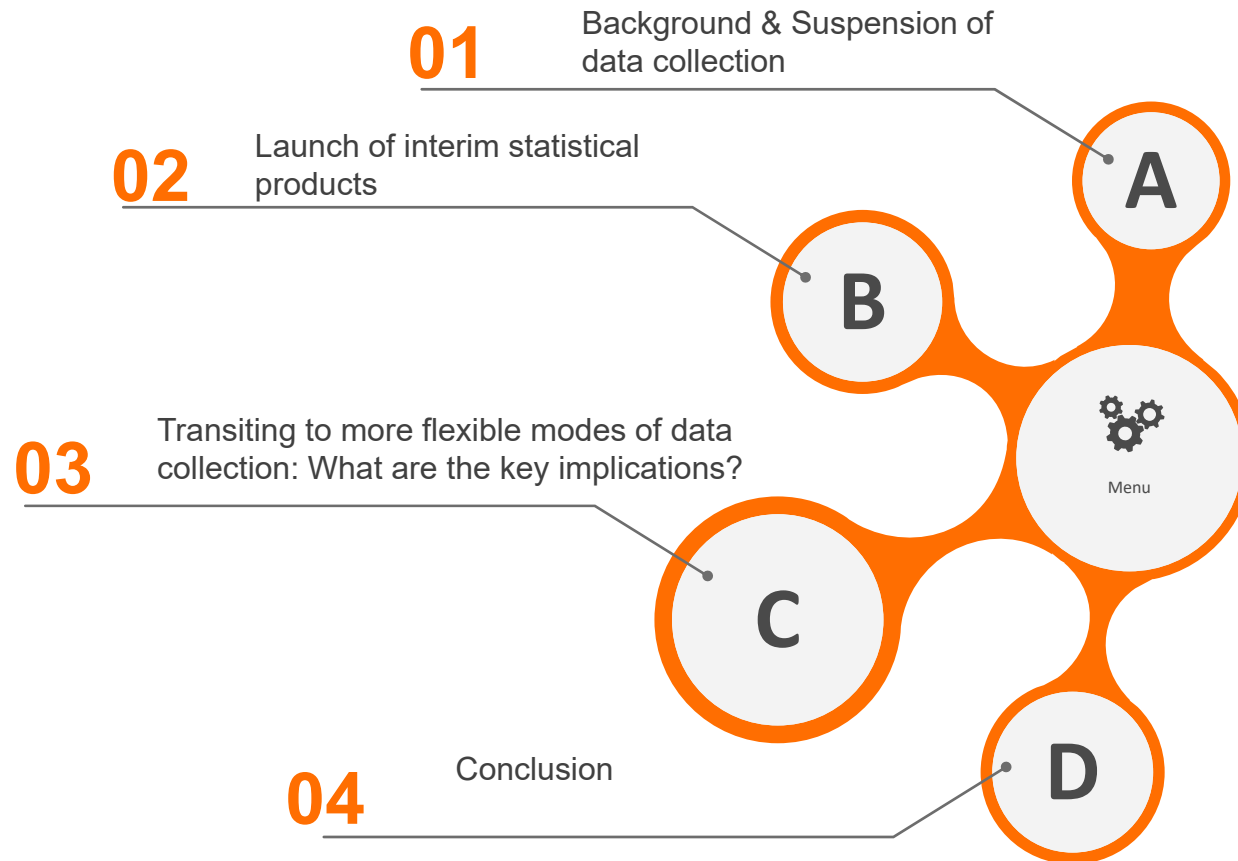


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Background

- Stats SA's statistical outputs rely heavily on regular household-based surveys (e.g. QLFS, CDCs), user-paid surveys (e.g NHTS), ad hoc surveys (DHS) and, of course, the decennial census.
- Its mandate is to provide relevant, reliable, timeous, accurate and quality statistics.
- Stats SA as National Statistical Office (NSO) has, however, not been exempt from the massive disruptions caused by COVID-19 as it continues to spread across South Africa and the globe.
- COVID-19 is: disrupting operations and planning; challenging the standard data collection methodology (face-to-face); affecting the production of data; and forcing a review of the complete Statistical Value Chain beyond this year.



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Stats SA Surveys

Abbr.	Full Name	Frequency	Timing
QLFS	Quarterly Labour Force Survey	Quarterly	Jan-Mar; Apr-Jun; Jul-Sep: Oct-Dec
GHS	General Household Survey	Annual	Jan - Dec
DTS	Domestic Tourism Survey	Annual	Jan - Dec
GPSJS	Governance, Public Safety and Justice Survey	Annual	Apr - Mar
NHTS	National Household Travel Survey	Ad hoc	Jan-Mar
CS	Community Survey	Inter-censal	March / October
Census	Census	Decennial	October 2021



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Suspension of data collection

- The pandemic and the implementation of lockdown regulations had far-reaching implications for Stats SA's social and labour surveys (QLFS, GHS, DTS, GPSJS) which depend on face-to-face data collection.
 - **GHS and DTS data collection suspended** in March 2020, after commencing at the end of January 2020.
 - **Start of GPSJS suspended:** scheduled to start with fieldwork training at the end of March 2020, and with fieldwork at the beginning of April 2020.
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Suspension of data collection (2)

- **NHTS data collection trimmed:** NHTS data collection scheduled for eight weeks stretching from January to end of March 2020.
 - A mop-up period was planned for the week of 23-27 March 2020, this had to be cancelled following the suspension of all fieldwork on 19 March (implementation of the national lockdown).
 - All face-to-face data collection is presently suspended and it is not clear when, face-to-face data collection could start again, and what conditions would be imposed to facilitate it.
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Delayed publication of official statistics

- With the suspension of data collection, Stats SA's ability to publish official statistics was and is still impacted by the pandemic and lockdown regulations.
- The publication schedule for social statistics have already been revised twice.
- Temporary closure of ISibalo House (Stats SA head office) due to positive COVID-19 cases is a regular occurrence, as staff are constantly testing positive for the virus and the buildings needing deep sanitisation.
- Revised publication dates for affected social surveys:

Survey	Date
General Household Survey 2019	August 2020
Quarterly Labour Force Survey Quarter 2	11 August 2020
GPSJS – Governance	30 October 2020
Domestic Tourism 2019	30 October 2020
GPSJS – Victims of Crime	30 November 2020
National Household Travel Survey	30 January 2021
Domestic Tourism Bi-Annual 2020	28 February 2020



Launch of interim statistical products

- Traditionally in household-based surveys data is collected by fieldworkers visiting respondents.
- The current COVID-19 pandemic exposed Stats SA over-reliance on face-to-face data collection and with long turn-around times.
- Since need for interim data could not be satisfied from available surveys, Stats SA launched online surveys to gauge the impact of the pandemic on households.

Wave	Focus	Date
Wave 1	Health behaviour and perceptions	19 April 2020
Wave 2	Employment and income related issues, including hunger	4 May 2020
Wave 3	Education, including home schooling, as well as how people generally spent their time	17 June 2020

- These online surveys use a non-probability sampling - convenience samples
- Respondents chose to respond to these surveys are not representative of the entire South African population.
- Their results cannot be generalised to the entire South African population.

Transition to more flexible modes of data collection

- The present crisis has highlighted the need to adopt new data collection methods and processes, and to diversify data collection modes to ensure continuity of a household-based survey programme in the organisation.

But, what are the key implications?

- **Short-to-medium term:**
 - ✓ Revised enumeration of 2020 surveys (QLFS, GHS, GPSJS) using telephonic interviews.
 - ✓ Revise questionnaires to facilitate the new data collection methodology (CATI/CAWI) - changes may lead to a break in series (high probability).
 - ✓ Usage of previous sample files (telephonic contact details previously collected) to create a frame for telephonic interviewing of respondents.
 - ✓ Updated quality assurance mechanisms and tools.
 - ✓ Review training and publicity approaches and plans.
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Transition to more flexible modes of data collection (2)

- ✓ Review data collection for the 2021 survey program and beyond.
 - ✓ Procure/develop and test IT systems to support new data collection methodologies.
 - ✓ Update established processes and procedures across the Statistical Value Chain.
 - ✓ Reallocate and repurpose resources in a virtual environment.
 - ✓ Expand use of alternative data sources and techniques to fill data gaps.
 - ✓ New philosophy concerning human resources – management and monitoring productivity.
 - ✓ Communicate the proposed changes to both internal and external stakeholders.
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Transition to more flexible modes of data collection (3)

- **Long term:**
 - ✓ Probably requires a review of the entire Statistical Value Chain.
 - ✓ Need to embrace complementary data sources – e.g. admin data.
 - ✓ Establish a suitable frame to facilitate the multi-modal data collection approach:
 - Delay with issue of coverage (issues of frame coverage – telephone numbers)
 - Update, verification and maintenance of the newly proposed survey frame
 - ✓ Offers households an opportunity to choose their preferred method of being enumerated (mixed-mode data collection).
 - ✓ Options to redesign collection infrastructure.
 - ✓ Expand and repurpose existing surveys.
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Conclusion

- Considering the challenges experienced, we need to develop and define a framework for the establishment of a multi-mode approach for household-based surveys.
- The organisation has already initiated a process of developing a framework and/ or procedures for the establishment of a suitable frame to facilitate the multi-modal data collection approach.
- Redesign and build questionnaires, systems, data collection methodology, training, and publicity approach that aligns to the integrated multi-mode collection approach
- Proactive role in communication with stakeholders to identify key needed indicators.
- Continuous development of the statistical production infrastructure, in line with the latest developments of technology.



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Thank you



Statistics South Africa
ISibalo House,
75 Koch St, Salvokop, Pretoria,
0002



Solly Molayi : (083) 4407035
Niel Roux: 082 902 7919



Sollymol@statssa.gov.za
NielR@statssa.gov.za



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Department:
Statistics South Africa
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

