

SM signs an MOU with US Census Bureau for capacity building on CAPI census

SM is adopting digital technology for data collection during its next Housing and Population Census, and will be using CSPro software as a data entry platform during interviews. This software, developed by the U.S. Census Bureau (USCB), has proved to be a proficient tool for collecting data in censuses worldwide.

An MOU has been entered into between the USCB and SM at the beginning of the year to build SM's capacity in

- developing the Computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) application for collecting census data on tablets, and
- census data processing, tabulation and dissemination.

The partnership will focus on transferring skills through a series of technical assistance missions, as well coaching and mentoring the professional staff working on the census project.

A first mission was fielded from 24 February to 6 March 2020 by two USCB experts to finalize the CAPI applications for the Housing and Population Census, and determining the operational controls for monitoring progress of fieldwork. The experts also trained a broader group of SM staff on an overview of CSPro and addressed specific problems on the CMPHS CAPI application.

The next mission is planned for May 2020 and indeed, SM has more to gain from the future missions

SM signs an MOU with the Mauritius Police Force, Traffic Management and Road Safety Unit on the New Road Crash Data Management System

SM signed an MOU with TMRSU and MPF on 3 March 2020 in the presence of Hon. A. Ganoo, Minister of Land Transport and Light Rail. The MOU specifies the roles and responsibilities of each party in relation to the iMAAP Road Crash Data Management System (RCDMS), an improved system for the collection, storage, analysis, reporting and management of injury crash data. The aim is to ensure the quality and timeliness of the data collected.

Statistics Mauritius is responsible to check all entries in the database for completeness and consistency, and to compile and disseminate statistics derived from the database.

Change in Chairmanship of the Statistics Board

The Statistics Board welcomes a new Chair, Mr. Gilbert Gnany, since February 2020, in replacement of Mr Patrick Yip.

Mr Gnany has a wide experience in the field of statistics, economics and financial matters. He is currently the Chief Strategy Officer of the MCB Group Ltd and is also the Chairman of the Economic Commission of Business Mauritius.

During his career, he worked, amongst others, as Senior Advisor on the World Bank Group's Executive Board and had been the Economic Advisor to the Minister of Finance. He was also a member of the IMF Advisory Group for Sub-Saharan Africa (AGSA). Mr Gnany was chair of the Statistics Board from September 2011 to March 2015.

During his tenure (June 2018 to January 2020), Mr Yip was committed to upholding public trust in official statistics and protecting the professional independence of data producers in Mauritius. He provided constructive advice on the on-going design of the National Strategy for Official Statistics focusing on the enhancement of the scope, quality and credibility of official statistics to create a better informed society. Mr. Yip also advocated the extensive use of technology for more productivity and efficiency, more specifically in data collection.

His commitment and invaluable support as well as advice throughout his tenure is much appreciated.

Involvement on SM in monitoring the Covid-19

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19, Statistics Mauritius and Ministry of Finance Economic Planning and Development (MOFEPD) worked out a dashboard comprising important international and national economic and social indicators that would enable informed policy decisions by government. The evolution of these variables provided a snap shot of how the pandemic was impacting on the Mauritian economy.

Among the indicators were the arrival of tourists, imports and exports, number of infections and deaths due to COVID-19, Semdex, and interest rate among others. Based on the availability of information and with collaboration with stakeholders from various government ministries and departments, the list was updated and submitted to MOFEPD on a daily basis.

COVID-19 affects the business of the Office

The confinement period which started on 20 March 2020, took us by surprise. We were not prepared to run our business away from the office. After the initial 2-day period of dismay, we settled in and started working from home by email and phone mostly.

a) Dissemination

The publication programme was amended and arrangements were made for timely posting the statistical releases that would be available as well as for updating the data catalogue on the National Data Archive of Mauritius (NADA <http://nada.statsmauritius.govmu.org/index.php/home>)

b) 2021 Housing and Population Census preparation

The census preparations were hit, particularly with regard to procurement of tablets and census publicity services, census mapping and field staff recruitment activities. Nevertheless, the census team is working from home and is communicating with the USCB experts on the CAPI application and the server set up. Other tasks are ongoing such as the questionnaire wording in English, Creole and French; design of the Pilot Census; preparation of instruction manuals; and tabulation plan.

c) Household Surveys

Concern on the welfare on field staff of the Continuous Multi Purpose Household Survey was expressed even before the lockdown and mitigation measures adopted. By 19 March (announcement of confinement), 46% of the 880 selected households had been interviewed. Phone interviews continued during the lockdown for 27% of the households. The remaining 27% could not be interviewed either because their telephone numbers were not available or in some cases respondents were unwilling to participate by telephone.

Another attempt to reach the remaining households will be made after the confinement. Else estimates for the first quarter of 2020 will be based on a reduced sample with appropriate weight adjustments.

d) Price collection

The compilation and dissemination of Consumer Price Index (CPI) has also been disrupted by COVID-19. With the lockdown, price collection has become increasingly difficult. Issues and challenges are, among others (i) increased number of missing items in sampled outlets, (ii) temporary closures of retail outlets and (iii) restrictions on movement of people.

Alternative modes of price collection are being adopted, namely searching prices online, newspapers, and personal shopping experience of staff.

e) Social Division Statistics

Most of the data required for the social statistics come from administrative sources. With the sudden lockdown, it was no longer possible to continue the data collection, resulting in delays of most statistical releases. Furthermore, the 2020 Survey of Inbound, Outbound and Domestic Visitors which started in January 2020 and targeted mostly tourists, had to be stopped since it no longer meets its objectives.

As no source data were available for continuity of many social statistics, staff in the social division worked on the review and harmonization of their respective digests of statistics instead.

