

A Statistical Innovation: 1-2-3 Surveys

A Method for Measuring and Analysing the Informal Economy

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the Informal Economy

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Street vendors selling baskets and bananas in central Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, 2009.
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In 2017, IRD launched a pilot project to identify and analyse the impact of its research on societies in the Global South. The chosen approach was based on *ex-post*, i.e. “after the fact”, case studies.

The studies selected for this project are representative of the IRD’s major scientific fields of expertise, with sustainable development as an underlying issue and partnership-based research as the approach used. These impact analyses were inspired by methodological approaches developed in the agricultural research field by Inrae (Asirpa) and Cirad (Impress). These studies were chosen for their proven impacts in relation to research activities conducted by IRD and its partners, which have been reported by the scientific community.

Within this general framework, the investigative work consisted in identifying the various stakeholders and elements involved, and highlighting the interactions that contributed to the transition from research to societal impact. This article examines the context, the stakeholders’ contributions to the research, the research products, the parties who created the conditions for the appropriation and transformation of the research outcomes, and the impacts generated.

The “impact pathway” mapped out in this way and the associated “timeline” are key instruments for characterising stakeholder networks and the processes that generate impacts. These stakeholders are divided into broad categories: political, institutional, environmental, economic, social health, educational, cultural, capacity-building, and academic.

Each impact identified and described has been documented on the basis of interviews with stakeholders who contributed to the impact pathway.

To find out more about the approach used for these studies, you can consult the methodological guide in the Multidimensional Analysis of the Impacts of Research and resulting innovation on Development in the Global South (Miriades) published in the “Chemins d’impacts” collection.

Thank you to everyone who has helped to forge closer links between research and society, and to highlight the diversity of these reciprocal contributions.

Research evaluation and programming mission

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Summary

The methodology developed through the *1-2-3 surveys* is mainly aimed at meeting a twofold statistical and economic challenge: to measure a phenomenon that cannot be measured – the informal economy – and to understand its functioning and dynamics. Various national and regional projects, launched from the early 1990s, have helped to strengthen this innovative system and expand its use. They are the result of demands – expressed or latent – from the authorities in the countries studied, and more specifically from the National Statistical Institutes (NSIs). The challenges are considerable given the enormous weight of the informal economy in developing countries (DCs), even though there is a lack of reliable statistical data on the subject. The informal economy is nevertheless the main source of household income, particularly for the poorest people in these countries. It is a central theme directly related to four of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Decent Work (SDG8), Poverty (SDG1), Inequality and Exclusion (SDG10) and Governance (SDG16).

Among the many countries where *1-2-3 surveys* have been implemented, Madagascar, Vietnam and Peru were chosen to illustrate the development of this methodological approach. These countries are on three different continents and have very different economic and political situations. But they are also countries where IRD-Dial teams have been on assignment and have been able to develop and make practical use of the potential of this survey and analysis system.

In all three countries, the scientific projects on the informal economy were conducted in partnership with the respective NSIs. This strategic option is crucial because it ensures that the results are recognised and integrated into the official

data system. Firstly, this made it possible to carry out large-scale surveys that were representative at the country level. Secondly, this partnership helped to institutionalise this research instrument (inclusion of the survey in the national statistical information and monitoring system). However, collaborations with research centres or universities in the countries studied were also set up for the analytical stage, aimed at deepening knowledge by using the statistical data produced with the NSIs. Lastly, among the stakeholders involved, regional and international institutions played a key role in providing technical and especially financial support. These institutions also contributed to supporting and strengthening the credibility and reputation of the teams, the methodology used and the analyses conducted on the informal economy.

A statistical survey and analysis system for the informal economy based on 1-2-3 surveys was thus gradually refined and reinforced. The use of this system has provided official, reliable and relevant statistical data that constitute public assets. These data have been used to empirically validate a number of major findings on the informal economy in the countries studied: the enormous weight of informal employment, the long-term (non-transitory) nature of this phenomenon, the prevalence of job insecurity, the weak link with the formal economy, the large proportion of informal units in GDP and their significant contribution to state revenue, and lastly the reasons for non-registration, which have more to do with ignorance and the complexity of the law and procedures, than with a deliberate desire to evade the regulations.

The data have thus formed the basis not only of numerous academic publications, but also of official reports or policy briefs with operational recommendations.

In addition to the academic works, the IRD-Dial researchers involved in the projects placed special emphasis on the dissemination of the results and their use among different types of national and international stakeholders. This emphasis on communication strategy (through organising and participating in public conferences, expert meetings, collaboration with the media) has been fundamental to ensure that knowledge is effectively utilised to inform policy debates and decision-making. Key milestones in this regard were their participation in the Delhi Group (a United Nations-mandated city group that defines norms and standards for measuring the informal economy) and the three major international conferences on the informal economy co-organised by IRD researchers in 1997 and 2009 (in Africa) and in 2010 (in Vietnam).

Lastly, training courses on measuring and analysing the informal economy (regional, national and international teaching modules or workshops

attended by various types of actors; supervision of PhD students or young researchers) are other factors that have increased the impact of the 1-2-3 survey. In addition to the skills that they acquire during the training, these trainees become stakeholders who can promote the benefits of the methodology and the analytical results. A perfect example is the production of a documentary film on the informal economy in Vietnam by a PhD student working on the subject.

Beyond the direct results of the 1-2-3 survey system (the output already mentioned), its societal impact can be broken down into five dimensions: economic, academic, institutional, social and political, and in terms of capacity building.

The economic impact is visible through shifts in policy on the informal economy following the dissemination of survey results. These include consideration of the contribution made by the informal economy in terms of added value, the introduction of measures to support informal units, and the revision of repressive policies against them. From an academic perspective, the results from the first waves of surveys together with



Handcarts used to transport goods in Antananarivo, Madagascar, 2013.
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the consolidation of survey and analysis methodologies, have opened up new thematic areas of research (such as the analysis of transitions or mobilities or new themes such as governance or insecurity). Looking at the institutional dimension, strengthening the credibility and legitimacy of NSIs through the use of a robust, relevant and reliable research instrument is a major positive outcome. The institutional strengthening of bodies such as Afrisat (the Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub-Saharan Africa) and the African Union falls into the same category. The availability of an effective method of measurement and analysis, standardised across the continent, enables them to achieve the objective of harmonising statistics and gives greater visibility to their actions. From a socio-political point of view, the recognition of a category of actors – those involved in the informal economy – and their weight, role and contribution to the economy of countries and societal debates, is a significant advance in terms of governance. Lastly, the impacts in terms of capacity building in the countries studied are significant. The expansion in use of the 1-2-3 survey methodology has created a pool of expertise that promotes South-South Dialogue and

collaboration. There has even been a rarely observed transfer of knowledge from the South to the North (from African countries to France, with Insee using the survey in Mayotte). The partnerships have led to a strengthening of methodological and analytical knowledge in NSIs and to competent managerial staff being trained to work in senior positions. However, since the beginning of the 1990s, successive generations of students, researchers and managers have also been introduced to an integrated approach (from the field to the dissemination of results to the general public), an approach that could be called the “1-2-3 survey school”. This approach now provides a suitable tool for monitoring several key indicators of the SDGs, particularly those relating to employment, poverty, inequality and governance/participation.

Background

The concept of informality made its first official appearance in 1972 in a report by the International Labour Office (ILO). However, it took a long period of trial and error to define “informality” and to find the right method to measure and analyse it. The two processes are obviously linked: first, to understand and study a phenomenon, its boundaries need to be demarcated; second, to arrive at an operational definition, a minimum understanding of the rationale at work is necessary. By its very nature (and this is one of its main characteristics), the informal economy is difficult to understand. Any attempt to measure and analyse it could therefore be considered an impossible task.

A theme central to development issues

The need for reliable information on the informal economy has become increasingly important for national accountants and statisticians, for the academic circle of social scientists working on developing countries, and more broadly for the development community: policy makers, public policy institutions, international institutions, civil society organisations, etc. By the 1980s, when precise measurements were lacking, some components of the informal economy were well known: individual or family microenterprises at one end (ranging from street vendors, small retail traders or cheap restaurants, to small home repair or sewing workshops), and undeclared jobs in larger enterprises at the other. This multifaceted reality raises many questions. What proportion of the population is engaged in fragile micro-businesses? What are the characteristics of the activities and individuals who are locked into them, apparently excluded from the overall economic

dynamics? How do these businesses work and what are their links with other segments of the economy? What are their constraints and main difficulties? What is their relationship with the state and what public policies would allow them to prosper? These questions about the informal economy concern all developing countries. We can nevertheless examine the specific characteristics that exist at a national or continental level.

The issues related to these questions appear all the more important because the weight of informality in the least developed economies is significant, and there is a lack of reliable quantitative knowledge on the subject: the theme of informality, which is central to development issues, has long been a terra incognita. However, it plays a decisive role as work is the main source of income for households, especially the poorest, most of which are involved to some degree in the informal economy. It is linked to issues of inequality, exclusion, poverty and governance. The informal economy is a cross-cutting theme that touches on at least four Sustainable Development Goals (1, 8, 10 and 16).¹

Challenges that are in line with the IRD's missions

What is the best way to understand the informal economy? The challenges that this subject raises are in line with the missions assigned to IRD researchers. The first researchers in the Dial research unit, created in 1990, set themselves a threefold mission: to produce first-hand data to inform public policy where it is lacking (in other words, to measure the unquantifiable in order to feed analyses and inform decisions); to participate in strengthening the scientific capacities of institutions in the Global South; and to develop high-quality research on major development issues (CLING and ROUBAUD, 2006). In many thematic areas, measuring and analysing the informal economy, based on the 1-2-3 survey system, is an emblematic example of what was called the “Dial approach” at the time, both because of its significant contribution to scientific knowledge and because of its continuity (*Dialogue*, Dial newsletter, October 2010).

1. Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere. Goal 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. Goal 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries. Goal 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Innovation and the timeline of its spread

The 1-2-3 survey is an innovative statistical methodology. It aims to identify, measure and analyse the informal economy while focusing more generally on the labour market and household living conditions. It bridges the gap between a new conceptual definition of the informal economy and a statistical strategy to measure it, which also includes analytical and institutional components. This tool is innovative in terms of its ability to capture the phenomenon in its entirety: it is a survey with a specific approach (the specific nature of the units surveyed, the indicators monitored and the types of analysis that result from them). Previously, surveys were conducted among businesses,² an approach that only identified the “visible” part of informal activities. By leaving out itinerant or home-based activities, these surveys greatly underestimated the size of the informal economy and presented a biased (magnified) picture. By contrast, the 1-2-3 survey starts with households to identify both informal units or enterprises and informal jobs (so-called mixed household-enterprise surveys) across all its components for the first time.

A specific system for monitoring the informal sector – resulting in the 1-2-3 survey – was designed by François Roubaud in 1986 in response to a request from the Mexican government. After an initial trial in Mexico, followed by trials in Peru and Cameroon in the early 1990s, and after a consolidation phase within the framework of the Madio project (an IRD project carried out in partnership with Instat between 1994 and 1999) in Madagascar, this method has now been implemented in many countries in Africa, Latin America and Asia (Figure 1). It is also recommended internationally (ILO, 2013).

2. See CHARMES J. 1990. “Une revue critique des concepts, définitions et recherches sur le secteur informel”, in TURNHAM D., SALOME B., SCHWARZ A. (eds.). *Nouvelles approches du secteur informel*, Paris, OECD, 11-52.

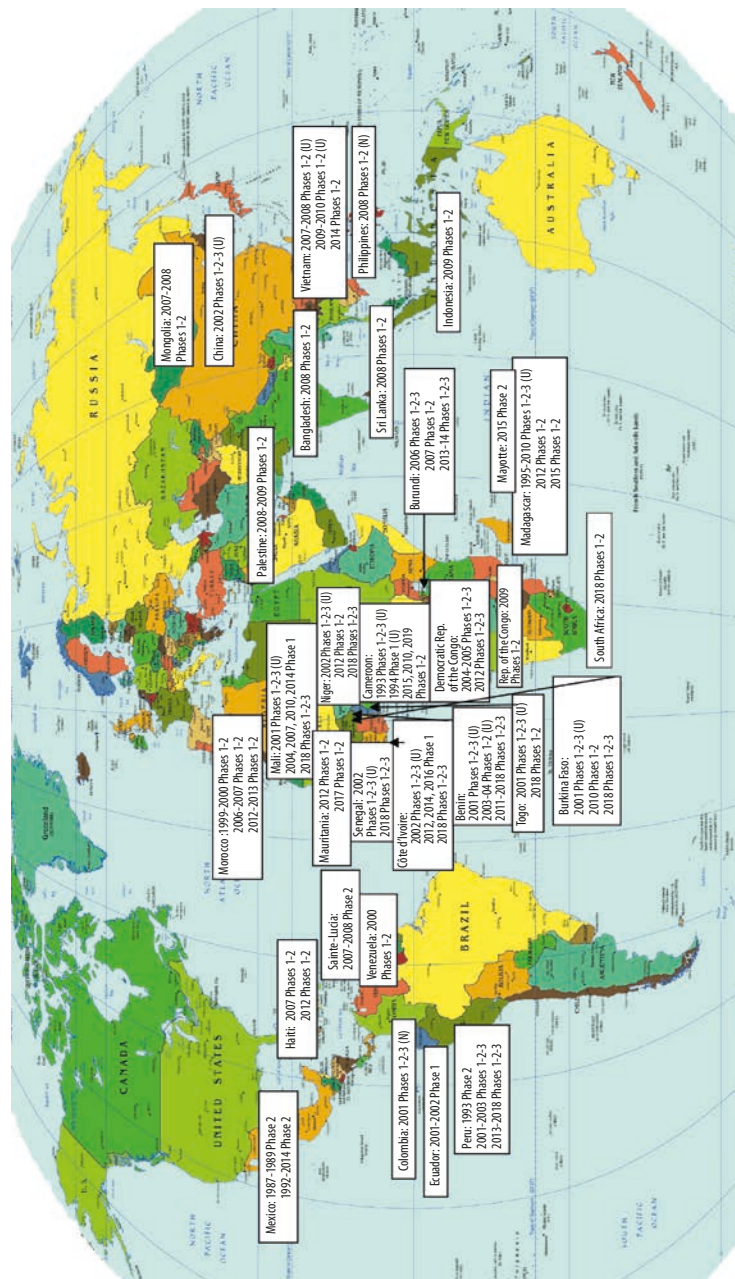


Figure 1
1-2-3 surveys and their derivatives around the world.
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It should also be noted that the system has gradually been expanded to include three components: the statistical survey itself (the *1-2-3 survey*), the analysis methodology, and the institutional arrangements for the use and dissemination of the results. The aim is to ensure that the results can be effectively utilised and applied in countries to inform public policy decisions and democratic debate.

Of the many countries where the survey has been conducted, three were chosen to illustrate this case: Madagascar, Vietnam and Peru. The rationale behind this choice was that they are located on three different continents and have very different economic and political situations (a poor country, a lower middle-income country and an upper middle-income country; countries where the state of democracy, the policy of transparency in particular, and the awareness and ability of NSIs are not the same).³ The impacts of the implementation of the *1-2-3 surveys* therefore differ depending on the context.

Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world. Since independence, it has experienced a prolonged economic recession and recurrent socio-political crises. Despite this, the country has natural and human resources. However, the many changes in economic strategies and political regimes have failed to reverse its regressive momentum. In such a situation, it is essential to monitor and analyse the dynamics of the informal economy, in which the vast majority of the population works.

Vietnam is a case study that is the exact opposite. It has one of the fastest economic growth rates in the world, a rapid international integration process and an outstanding record in poverty reduction. In 1986, Vietnam made the transition from a centrally planned economy to a “socialist-oriented market economy”. A more egalitarian approach to controlling inequality and strengthening social cohesion is a stated policy objective.

Peru is a semi-industrialised emerging country that, after experiencing a recessionary phase in the late 1990s, has performed well economically over the last decade, driven primarily by its mining industry. Since 2015, growth has slowed down due to various challenges (economic, political and climatic). However, the country continues to face one major challenge: a persistent level of inequality and poverty.

3. Peru, where the media play a significant role and the NSI is relatively well known, is the most advanced in this respect, while Vietnam, where information is under tight political control, is at the other end of the spectrum.

These countries were also chosen because they have each hosted IRD researchers on long-term assignments to work on projects to measure and analyse the informal economy (among other things). The impact of the implementation of the 1-2-3 survey is therefore more marked in these countries. The fact that researchers have an in-depth knowledge of national institutions and how they operate also means that impacts can be monitored more effectively.

Actors' contributions

The groundwork for the research programme on the informal economy in these three countries was laid in 1993 in Peru, from 1995 in Madagascar and from 2006 in Vietnam. The project configurations were generally the same, but the situations differed depending on the country: in addition to the socio-political and economic contexts, the institutional environment, local dynamics, operating methods and abilities of national organisations and stakeholders (technical managers, decision-makers, researchers) were different, as were the programme time frames.

Partnerships and initial objectives

In all three countries, the projects were launched mainly in partnership with their national statistical institutes: National Institute of Statistics and Informatics (Inei) in Peru, Instat in Madagascar, and the General Statistics Office (GSO) in Vietnam. This privileged partnership arises from the need for support from these institutions in measuring employment and the informal economy and from the specific nature of Dial's mission. The objective is to invest in the implementation of specific official statistical surveys that leverage the skills of professional statisticians, which should be strengthened if necessary.

However, as the objectives were not limited to generating data but also included an important analytical component, collaborations with university researchers or research centres were also developed in all three cases.⁴

⁴. Collaborations were developed in particular with: the Economics Department of the Pontifical Catholic University of Peru (PUCP) and the Development Analysis Group (Grade) in Peru, the University of Antananarivo in Madagascar, and the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences (Vass) in Vietnam.

Lastly, the work was carried out with the support of or in coordination with regional or international institutions. At the regional level, the programme in Peru was linked to a project of the Andean Community of Nations (CAN),⁵ the Madagascar programme was extended to a larger programme conducted at the African level by Afrisat,⁶ while the Vietnamese programme was linked to a project on measuring the informal sector in Asia, launched by Escap.⁷ In all three cases, the regional projects adopted the 1-2-3 survey methodology. More broadly, at the international level, the ILO and UNDP were partner organisations, while the projects were funded through bilateral (SCAC/MAE-France, DFID) and multilateral (European Union and World Bank) cooperation agreements.

Respective role of each institution

IRD researchers were the driving force behind the methodology. In each country, the IRD team provided technical support⁸ for adapting the generic methodology to the country's specific context, for training managers, for implementing the survey, and for analysing and disseminating the results.

The NSIs are responsible for the statistical operation: after a method appropriation and adaptation phase (adjusting certain questions and possibly adding specific questions or modules), the NSI is responsible for implementing the survey (collection in the field and first results). The NSIs are at the centre of the process: they are responsible for collecting data requests before implementation (from the potential users of the data) for the subsequent initial analysis and reporting of the results. However, in most cases, the various phases of the survey process (preparation, fieldwork and results) are conducted in collaboration with other institutions (in close partnership with IRD researchers during their assignment).

5. The development of informal sector statistics in the countries of the Andean Community of Nations is consistent with the Presidential Directive of the Act of Carabobo (Venezuela), signed by the Andean Presidential Council in June 2001.

6. At the request of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (Waemu), a series of surveys on the labour market and informal sector were carried out in 2001 and 2003 in seven African capitals by national statistical institutes under the joint supervision of Afrisat experts and IRD economists (source: Fiche d'actualité scientifique, No. 2018, January 2005).

7. Escap: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.

8. Technical support can take several forms: either by offering upfront training and advice, guidance or suggestions (on methodology, organisation, etc.), or by initiating a partnership with national officials or researchers on issues, themes or reports during a mission (short or long term) or assignment, or by being involved at the end of the process to finalise and validate the work or documents.

In some cases, the research centres were involved in adapting the questionnaire to fit the local situation, but they were mainly involved in the subsequent analysis of the results in conjunction with the NSIs.

The regional bodies provide an institutional framework and support, coordinated with the activities of IRD researchers, allowing them to obtain funding under regional programmes. To some extent, they provide and guarantee the credibility and legitimacy of the 1-2-3 survey as a harmonised research instrument that can be applied by all interested countries in the region.

Finally, donors participate in discussions aimed at adapting the methodology or providing guidance on specific questions considered to be priorities for the analysis. More importantly, however, donors play an essential role in providing financial support, which not only ensures that the survey operations can be carried out but also strengthens the credibility and reputation of the 1-2-3 method.

Each institution has its own role (with varying degrees of emphasis/distinctness), and while such collaborations are not without difficulties, it was possible to implement them and develop synergies.

Country-specific framework and contexts

In Peru, the goal of the project was to integrate the measurement of the informal economy into the system of national accounts, avoiding an overly sectoral approach in order to quantify its weight in the economy as a whole and understand its relationship with the rest of the economy. As a result, the work undertaken went beyond the scope of labour market and microenterprise specialists. Accordingly, research on the informal economy was used as an input into thinking about social protection, policies to increase competitiveness, tax policies, etc.



Potato sellers, Yungay district, Ancash, Peru, 2015
© IRD/R. Matta

In Madagascar, the work was part of the Madio (Madagascar-Dial-Instat-Orstom) project, whose objective was to study the conditions for the success of the dual (economic and political) transition process which unfolded in the country in the early 1990s. In 1996, one of the first findings was that, although the informal sector could play a role in cushioning the shock of the crisis, it is typified by extremely precarious working conditions and jobs (Fiche d'actualité scientifique, May 1996). Based on this finding, the aim was to identify the conditions for the growth in informal activities that are compatible with an exit from precariousness.

In Vietnam, the request came from the GSO, which sent a delegation to France in 2003. The members of this delegation asked Insee for support in measuring the informal economy, a request that Insee delegated to Dial, which set up the collaborative project. In Vietnam, the interest in the informal economy stems primarily from concerns about trends in inequality. Vietnam is experiencing a high rate of economic growth with significant positive effects on poverty reduction. However, this raises a number of questions: Does this rapid growth also benefit those in the informal economy? Are these people marginalised or do they benefit from the spill-over effects of the formal sector?

Research topics

In addition to describing the informal economy (its weight, the characteristics of activities, their links with the informal sector), it is important to identify its causes, its dynamics and the underlying logic. These topics have been the subject of considerable academic and political debate. For example, is the informal sector a residual component disconnected from the rest of the economy, consisting of activities created by default based on a subsistence logic (as a survival mode) because the formal economy is unable to create enough jobs (the “dualist” approach hypothesis)? Or is informality the result of the fact that formal enterprises are looking for cheap products and labour that only the informal ones can provide (the “structuralist” school)? Or, lastly, is “entry into informality” a deliberate choice to escape regulation and circumvent the costs of legalisation linked to registering the activity (the “legalist” approach)?

To provide answers and define policies, it is necessary to know which of these hypotheses prevails, or more precisely, since informality is a multidimensional phenomenon, it is necessary to identify the types of activities or jobs that fall under each of the approaches mentioned above.

Knowledge base

The international statistical community has reached a consensus on the definition of the informal economy. It is structured around two key concepts: the informal sector on the one hand and informal employment on the other (Husmanns, 2004). Broadly speaking, the informal sector is defined as all individual enterprises that are unregistered and/or operate on a very small scale (often with fewer than five employees) (ILO, 1993). Informal employment includes all unprotected employment in the informal or formal sector (lack of social security coverage or employment contracts, etc.) (ILO, 2003).

These internationally agreed definitions have provided a formal and harmonised framework for reliable, relevant, in-depth analysis and comparison. However, initiatives to analyse the informal economy started without waiting for these resolutions on these definitions. The first efforts to measure and analyse the phenomenon (including the IRD's work) have helped to substantiate the suitability of the standard definitions adopted. Furthermore, despite these important conceptual advances, confusion continues to reign in the academic community and more broadly in the development community. This is supported by a number of publications that purport to deal with informality in developing countries, but in which there are as many definitions as there are authors.⁹ The summary published by the ILO and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on the links between the informal economy and trade openness stresses that the lack of a consistent definition in the analyses and of comparable data across countries seriously undermines the general lessons that can be drawn (Bacchetta et al., 2009). This is also illustrated, for example, by the most unrealistic estimates that were put forward on the weight of informality in Vietnam¹⁰ before the IRD project was set up using a rigorous and appropriate measurement method.

9. See *Dialogue* (2010): “Examples include recent publications by GUHA-KHASNOBIS and KANBUR (2006), PERRY et al. (2007), GUHA-KHASNOBIS et al. (2007), JÜTTING and DE LAIGLESIA (2009), BACCHETTA, ERNST and BUSTAMANTE (2009), [...]”

10. See CLING et al. (2010). *The Informal Sector in Vietnam: A focus on Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City*. Hanoi: Editions The Gioi. Some excerpts: “[...] Significant growth in the size and importance of the informal sector which employs approximately 70% of the non-agricultural labor force” (JENSEN and PEPPARD, 2003); “Women are also believed to represent around 70% to 80% of the workforce in the informal economy” (UNDP, 2006); “How many household enterprises in Vietnam in 2004: 9.3 or 3.4 million?” (NGUYEN VAN DOAN, 2008).

Research products

Following its first implementation in Mexico in the late 1980s, the methodology of mixed surveys using an approach based on households and enterprises (or production units) gave rise to *1-2-3 surveys*. The name derives from the fact that the system consists of three nested surveys that provide information on employment, especially informal employment (phase 1), on production units in the informal sector (phase 2), and on household consumption, poverty and demand in the informal sector (phase 3).

The first output from this multi-country, multi-continental “programme”, conducted over a very long period of time (from the early 1990s to the present day), is the availability of a relevant, reliable and harmonised methodology (supporting sound comparative approaches). The system around *1-2-3 surveys* includes not only the original statistical survey methodology (survey method, questionnaire, survey manual) but also the analysis methods (a generic framework or standard reports, policy briefs, etc.) and the institutionalisation of the dissemination of the results (more or less standardised dissemination method and medium, introduction of systematic meetings or conferences addressed to various audiences, etc.).

1-2-3 surveys: know-how and public assets

After an initial partial experiment in Mexico (1986, 1989), the *1-2-3 survey* was applied for the first time in its entirety in Cameroon in 1993 (ROUBAUD, 1994).

The methodology was then refined in Madagascar, where the survey was introduced in 1995 and is still in use today. Strengthened by this success, use of the 1-2-3 survey has become widespread in recent years. In Africa in 1997, the first seminar on the informal economy was launched with the creation of Afrisat (with regional coverage). Since then, the 1-2-3 survey has been implemented on three continents.¹¹ It was implemented in Mayotte, a French overseas département, in 2015. The 1-2-3 survey was designed to act as a generic framework with a flexible structure, which respects a certain number of common characteristics but whose configurations in practice vary according to the needs and specific structure of the existing information systems in the different countries.¹²

These series of surveys following the 1-2-3 survey methodology have resulted in the creation of databases available to the countries' NSIs. These databases are public assets that have been utilised – and can still be utilised – by various types of users, not only for the analysis of the informal economy but also, more broadly, for the study of various themes related to the labour market and the living and working conditions of the population.

In Peru

With the support of Dial and French cooperation (François Roubaud's assignment at the Inei), in 1993 the Inei conducted the first mixed survey to measure the weight of informal employment in a national accounting context. The Peruvian NSI continued to expand its work on the informal economy and since 2001 has included, on a permanent basis and on an infra-annual basis, the module developed by the IRD for monitoring informal production units in the main survey on the population's employment and living conditions (National Household Survey [Enaho]). As the Enaho is part of Peru's recurrent budget, the poverty and informality indicators have almost the same status as those for GDP and inflation. As a result, Peru has a unique tool that it has used to analyse the dynamics of the informal economy over a continuous period of almost twenty years. In 2014,

11. See also Figure 1. The countries included are Africa (Cameroon, Madagascar, Morocco, eight West African countries, Burundi, Tunisia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Comoros); Latin America and the Caribbean (Mexico, El Salvador, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Venezuela, Haiti, Saint Lucia); Asia (Bangladesh, China, Sri Lanka, Mongolia, Philippines and Vietnam). It should be noted that in line with the Dial programmes on the informal economy, a project on this theme, in collaboration with the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRI) in Brazil, started in January 2020, with two IRD researchers assigned to the project.

12. The decision to conduct 1-2-3 surveys is always made in relation to the national statistical system so that they complement other existing surveys (household and enterprise surveys). In some cases, the 1-2-3 survey was adapted and integrated into surveys that were already planned.

the Inei published its first edition of a comprehensive satellite account on the informal economy in Peru.¹³

Particular attention was paid to the quality of the primary data and to the dissemination of not only the reports but also the raw data from the survey, backed up by technical documents and quality technical reports (available online on the Peruvian NSI's website). This resulted in the Enaho winning the World Bank's first prize for statistical innovation in 2010, out of 177 projects submitted by 26 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.¹⁴

In addition to international recognition, the success of the Enaho survey is most evident in its recognition as a tool for public policy-making. Producing statistics creates a public asset: empirical data feeds into research, public debate and public policy.

In Madagascar

Initially limited to the capital, and after five years of successful operations (1995–1999) as part of the Madio project, Madagascar's 1-2-3 survey, conducted by Instat with the support of Dial researchers, was extended in 2000 and 2001 to the country's seven main urban centres. Subsequently, various national surveys were conducted using the same methodology in 2004 (phases 1 and 2), in 2006 (phase 1), then both phases in 2010 and 2012 (Enempsi), and most recently in 2015 (phase 1).¹⁵

Skills have been built up within Instat (Madagascar's NSI). Since 2000, surveys have been conducted in the field by Malagasy statisticians without any external technical support. Methodological knowledge is passed on between managers from one survey to the next, which leads to a capitalisation of knowledge. It should be noted that the senior statistician-economists who worked on the Madio project are now



Fruit and vegetable seller, suburb of Antananarivo, Madagascar, 2013.
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13. Inei (2014), *Producción y Empleo Informal en el Perú: Cuenta Satélite de la Economía informal 2007–2012*, Inei, Lima.

14. <http://www.bancomunDial.org/es/news/feature/2010/10/21/peru-mexico-brazil-caribbean-lead-region-data-tools-fight-poverty>

15. Note here that the surveys are routinely included in the scope of the national statistical information system. However, since 2001 and the end of the Madio project, the political instability in the country, with recurrent socio-political crises, has so far prevented the securing of regular and periodic funding to carry out this survey as part of a long-term, multi-year programme.

recognised at national and international levels as experts in survey statistics on employment, the informal sector and poverty. For example, one of them, now an advisor to the Instat Director General (Faly Rakotomanana), is called upon to support the implementation and analysis of surveys in various countries (notably Burundi, the Comoros and Mayotte). Another member, Julia Rachel Ravelosoa, is currently a senior economist at the World Bank in Madagascar and coordinates projects related to the informal sector, particularly on social welfare. Lastly, Éric Ramilison is an expert at Afrisat and provides, among other things, monitoring and technical support for surveys carried out in various African countries.

In Vietnam

The assignment of three IRD researchers (Mireille Razafindrakoto and François Roubaud, Jean-Pierre Cling/Insee hosted at the IRD, between 2006 and 2011) to a project conducted within the GSO led to the implementation of an initial survey in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in 2007 on employment (the LFS, the existing employment survey, was revamped) and the informal sector (HBIS¹⁶ survey) using the 1-2-3 methodology. In 2009, a second wave of surveys monitored employment, informality and living conditions in the country's two largest cities.

In particular, the analysis of trends was used to identify and quantify the impacts of the 2008 international financial crisis. In 2015, two other IRD researchers (Xavier Oudin and Laure Pasquier-Doumer) took over. They worked in partnership with the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences (Vass) as part of an international programme (NoPoor) to conduct a third wave of surveys, this time national and with the addition of specific qualitative modules (on social capital, for example).

It should be noted that the activities surrounding these surveys on employment and the informal sector helped to train six Vietnamese PhD students, who were hosted and supervised by the Dial researchers. All of them now have the title of Doctor of Economics after completing their theses using these waves of surveys at least in part.

In 2019, the GSO again asked Insee and the IRD to validate its new definition of the “informal sector” and to consider new, more regular surveys that could be applied to the whole of Vietnam. In this regard, an Insee-IRD mission was conducted in April 2019. In fact, in response to the Vietnamese Prime Minister's request in late 2017, the GSO submitted a number of proposals in early 2018 on measuring the non-observed economy. These proposals referred to the research programme conducted jointly with the IRD between 2006 and 2011. The GSO attached to its brief the work on the informal

16. HBIS: Household Business and Informal Sector.

sector in Vietnam published by the IRD/Dial team in partnership with the GSO in 2010, to highlight the success of this partnership. A meeting with the Deputy Prime Minister took place in May 2018, and the GSO was tasked with coordinating the preparation of a set of statistical, but also economic policy proposals at inter-ministerial level.

Major results

The surveys and resulting analyses yielded major results, providing new and crucial knowledge for understanding the informal economy. Key results include the following:

- The informal economy is not destined to disappear with the continued growth of the country: it is not a transient phenomenon that is expected to diminish gradually; on the contrary, it is well-established and will persist over time. Even in a fast-growing country like Vietnam, the formal sector does not have the capacity to absorb all the labour that enters the labour market each year.
- Informal units contribute to GDP (creation of added value) and to state revenue (since they often pay certain local taxes and do not recover VAT). Moreover, for most of them, the reason for non-registration is more the result of a lack of knowledge of the law or procedures (opaque and difficult for these actors) than a deliberate desire to escape public regulation or taxation.¹⁷



Fruit and vegetable sellers in a market in Hoi An, Vietnam, 2009.

© N. Altier

17. Extract from J.-P. Cling's speech at the 2013 AFD conference: “In Vietnam, people do not register, not because they do not want to comply with the law, or because registration is too complicated, but simply because nobody knows the registration thresholds. Governments should therefore design regulatory frameworks adapted to the economic reality (such as progressive taxation or simplified registration procedures), and then build real enforcement capacity (for example through better collaboration between customs and tax authorities, to fight ‘big’ informal, which represents a minority of actors generating large volumes of business.”

Academic publications

Publications in scientific journals have earned the 1-2-3 survey system the status of a reference method. Furthermore, 1-2-3 surveys have resulted in a large number of articles in scientific journals.

All publications featuring these surveys deserve to be counted regardless of the country, since even if the analyses do not relate to the three countries analysed here, they can be used by stakeholders or researchers in these countries if the topics are of interest to them.

We cannot, however, count those articles that draw upon data from surveys using the 1-2-3 methodology without naming it. Similarly, we do not count those articles that combine very specific thematic modules that piggyback on this survey instrument: various journal articles (more than 100¹⁸), three special journal issues (at least), seven books (at least) and many chapters in books.

Reports and documents disseminated

The documents made available to the public fall into several categories:

- Radio documents in Madagascar (working documents);
- Survey reports (initial findings produced by the NSIs);
- World Bank or ILO reports;
- Policy briefs (aimed in particular at decision-makers).

Although it is mainly the policy briefs that provide policy recommendations, the generic framework of the reports or initial findings systematically includes analyses leading to operational recommendations.

Various conferences

The international conference on “The Informal Sector and Informal Employment: Statistical Measures, Economic Implications and Public Policies” in Hanoi in May 2010 is particularly noteworthy. It was co-organised by the Vass, the IRD, the GSO and Molisa (Vietnamese Ministry for Labour) with the participation of several international institutions (the French Development Agency (AFD), the ILO, the UNDP and the World Bank). This conference followed a series of international

¹⁸. A full inventory of the articles would be required, but this is not without difficulty as the generic name for 1-2-3 surveys has been changed in many countries.

conferences initiated by François Roubaud and co-organised by Dial¹⁹. It sought to capitalise on the experience acquired in this field over the last 15 years in developing countries. It brought together researchers, statisticians, policy makers and project operators with the aim of fostering Dialogue between these different stakeholders. About sixty contributions from researchers from different continents (Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe) were presented, and about 200 participants attended the conference.

Training

Various types of training programmes, based on 1-2-3 surveys, have been created:

- Organisation of various regional, national or international training workshops for the implementation or analysis of 1-2-3 survey data (including workshops jointly organised with Afrisat or with Cefil-Insee);²⁰
- Development of a training module on the labour market and informal economy in developing countries: module included in Master's degree programmes (Iledes-Paris I; Paris Dauphine University, University of Marne-la-Vallée; University of Kent-Brussels);
- Thematic training sessions within the framework of summer schools in social sciences utilising data from 1-2-3 surveys (Tam Dao summer school in Vietnam; winter school in Madagascar: Tany Vao Madagascar);
- Training for trainees and PhD students hosted at Dial on the themes addressed in 1-2-3 surveys (if we count only the PhD students hosted at Dial, at least three or four Peruvians, six Vietnamese, and four Malagasy PhD students).²¹



Training of interviewers at the General Statistics Office, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, 2009.
© IRD/M. Razafindrakoto

¹⁹. “Interamerican Seminar on Measuring the Informal Sector”, Organization of American States/INE, Lima, Peru, August 1992; International Seminar “The Informal Sector and Economic Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa”, Afrisat, Bamako, Mali, 10-14 March 1997; International Seminar on the Informal Sector in Africa (SISIA) “Measurement Instruments, Analyses and Integration of Economic and Social Policies”, Bamako, Mali, 20-22 October 2008.

²⁰. Meetings such as the validation of the findings of the survey on employment and the informal sector – Ouagadougou Colloquium, 8-10 September 2004, Waemu Commission. [http://www.Dial.prd.fr/under/Research Areas](http://www.Dial.prd.fr/under/Research%20Areas). – Statistical surveys can be considered as falling under this heading.

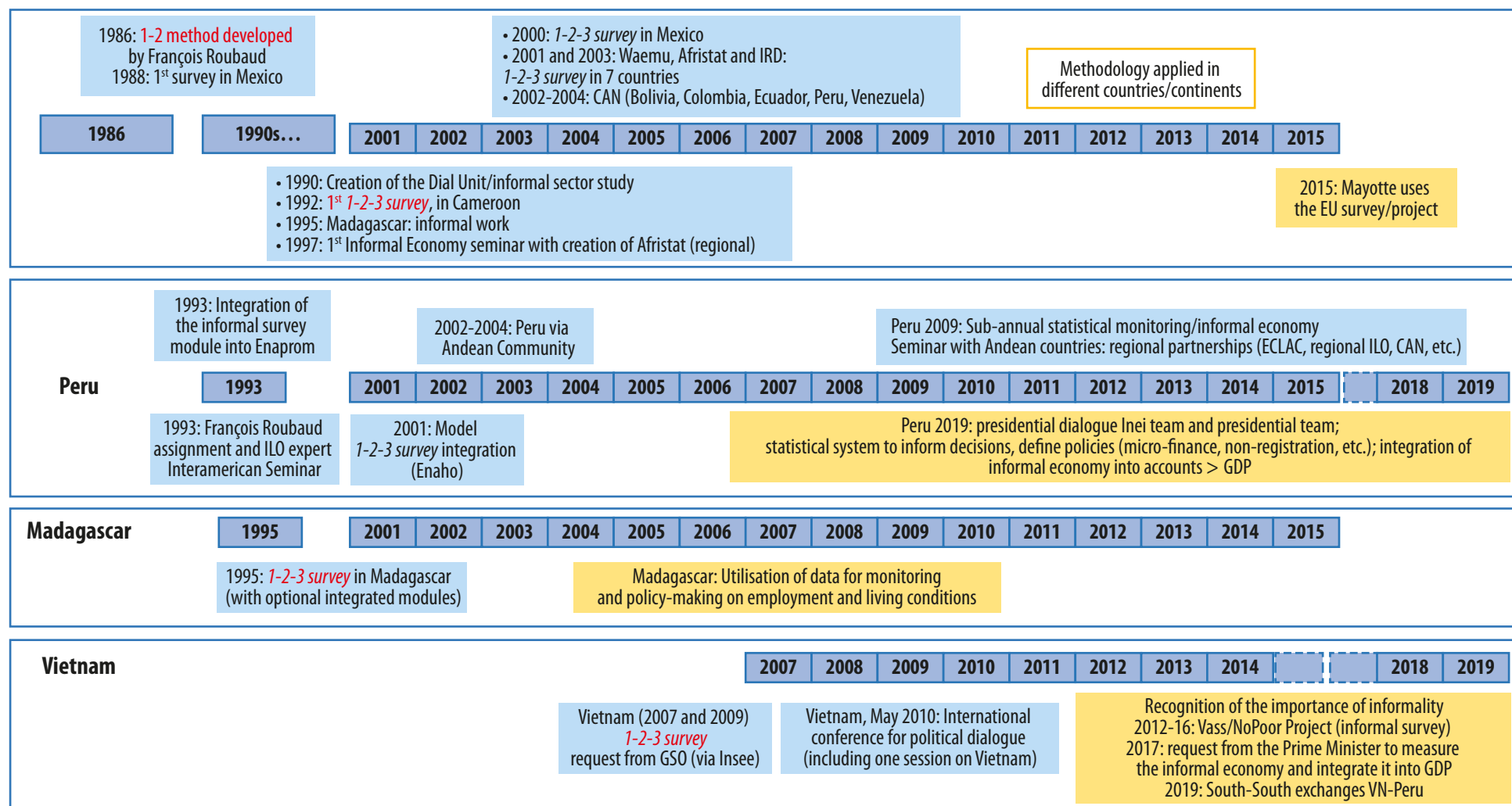
²¹. We are not counting the many French PhD students who have benefited from the availability of 1-2-3 survey data.

Timeline

A Statistical Innovation: 1-2-3 surveys

Work involving the IRD

Impacts



Circulation of knowledge and intermediaries

Various types of stakeholders acted as intermediaries for disseminating and consolidating the methodology and results, thus giving greater legitimacy and recognition of the process and the research work derived from it. These included managers, executives or researchers from partner institutions or donors; actors in regional or international projects, the press, strategic and influential interlocutors in national bodies, etc.

Relay points for disseminating results

The originality and importance of the themes addressed (informality, poverty and inequality, etc.) and the replication of the survey systems that provide real-time monitoring of phenomena of general interest (poverty, unemployment, underemployment) have obviously had an important bearing on the impacts obtained. The dissemination strategy was carried out in close association with the partner institutions (in this case mainly the NSIs), guaranteeing the sustainability of actions taken

Beyond the existing commonalities, the intervention methods had to be adjusted to the local situation (e.g. prevailing socio-economic conditions, role of the media, nature of the political regime). In Madagascar, the strategy focused on attracting the attention of the media so that they could play their true role of relaying information to civil society, which in turn would command the attention of politicians. The local NSI, which initially took a back seat, eventually took full ownership of the dissemination policy initiated by us. In Vietnam, where information is under close political control, dissemination undergoes a long,

hierarchical approval process. The strategy here involved mobilising strategic interlocutors (well-known personalities or donors) who acted as relays for disseminating the results to decision-makers or a wider audience. In Peru, the media play a much more significant role, and the NSI is a better known institution that enjoys a certain level of recognition. The dissemination of the work was thus part of the NSI's official policy of communication with the media.

Role of partners

The 1-2-3 survey was not an accredited method.²² IRD researchers trained their partners in this method as part of long-term collaborations. These partners in turn trained statisticians who disseminated the method. The dissemination and adoption of the methodology by the various national partners has led today to this methodology being adapted locally under other names.²³ It could be argued that accreditation could have slowed down adoption of the method by managerial staff or national institutions

Contribution to regional or international projects to promote the circulation of knowledge

Dial contributed by sharing lessons learned from the first 1-2-3 surveys, particularly from the phase involving the development of international norms and standards for analysing the informal economy (definition and measurement of informality). The researchers participated in the preparatory meetings for the 15th Conference of Labour Statisticians (1993), and in the reflections of the Delhi Group, mandated by the United Nations to refine and operationalise the concepts. They were involved in writing the reference manual on methods for measuring informality (ILO, 2013). Dial also contributed to various international projects on measuring the informal economy and related concepts or

²². The team behind the methodology sought to obtain accreditation for the 1-2-3 survey method, but this was not possible. It was pointed out to them that intellectual property legislation generally focuses on industrial property (which concerns innovations that can be industrially exploited) and copyright, and that copyright does not protect ideas or concepts.

²³. For example, the Integrated Regional Survey on Employment and the Informal Sector (ERI-ESI), which was conducted in 2017–2018 in eight Waemu countries with the support of Afrisat as part of the Waemu Commission's regional statistical programme, is a survey whose methodology corresponds to phases 1 and 2 of the 1-2-3 survey.

training, including: updating informal employment statistics worldwide by gender for the ILO (ILO/WIEGO, 2013), thanks in particular to its expertise on the use of employment surveys; participation in the Recap project (*Strengthening the Capacity to Devise and Analyse Decent Work Indicators*) carried out by the ILO in 2012 as part of a European Union call for tenders; on the analytical front, the international research project analysing the informal sector in Africa (*Unlocking Potential: Tackling economic and social constraints of informal entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa; 2009–2011*), funded by the World Bank, was based entirely on utilising phases 2 and 3 of the 1-2-3 surveys, while the utilisation of phase 1 resulted in a summary book on urban labour markets in Africa (De Vreyer and Roubaud, 2013); various components of the NoPoor project (financed by the European Commission under its seventh Framework Research and Development Programme [FRDP]), which covers some twenty countries, have used 1-2-3 surveys to carry out both methodological and analytical work based on a comparative approach; and lastly, coordination and participation in the inter-country programme *Integrating the Informal Economy into the National Accounts* (Iena), involving seven pilot countries.

In a similar vein, the Parstat programme (*Comparative analysis of the labour market and poverty trends in Africa, 2001–2004*) played a key role at the African and international levels. The aim of this regional statistical support programme was to improve statistics on employment and the informal sector in Waemu Member States through the implementation of 1-2-3 surveys. The results were to be used as a tool for steering the region's economies. This initiative, commissioned by the Waemu Commission with funding from the European Union, was entrusted to Afrisat, which, with technical support from IRD-Dial, was responsible for coordinating the activities carried out in each country by their NSIs.

Furthermore, in Latin America, collaboration with the Andean Community of Nations (CAN), with the support of French and then European cooperation once the conceptual and methodological foundations had been laid, had an impact on the countries of the sub-region (Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela). The aim of this partnership with a regional organisation was to promote South-South sharing of experiences, particularly between the NSIs of the countries concerned, with Peru's Inei playing a pivotal role, but also to harmonise concepts, definitions, classifications and labour market indicators that take informal employment into account. All this work was integrated into the 2000–2004 community statistical programme, with the CAN Secretariat of Statistics organising, with the support of French cooperation, eight meetings

of government experts in informal sector statistics (from June 2000 in Caracas to January 2004 in Lima), and the publication of a summary work (Herrera et al., 2004). More recently, as a continuation of South-South cooperation, the Inei (in association with IRD researchers) helped to facilitate a workshop in Argentina on informality and national accounting (within the SOCIEUX+ project, 8–12 May 2017).

Collaboration is ongoing between IRD researchers and AFD, the OECD Development Centre, the ILO and PARIS21, using 1-2-3 surveys to analyse poverty, social protection, the adequacy of training for employment and, more broadly, to promote “statistical literacy” (the ability to use statistical data to study phenomena and inform decisions). The full significance of these various objectives becomes apparent in the context of the SDGs and the “data revolution”.

Circulation of knowledge through specific outputs for communication

The circulation of knowledge was supported by various communication tools/outputs.

A documentary film was made on the informal sector in Vietnam: *Saigon informel : les travailleurs de la zone grise* [*Informal Saigon: workers in the grey zone*] (26 minutes, directed by Axel Demenet, Vincent Doubrere, Jean-Yves Ricci; scientific advisor: François Roubaud). This film, co-produced by the IRD in 2016, highlights and builds on the research results of this IRD programme in Vietnam. It was co-directed by a researcher who completed his thesis in this area. The film describes the working conditions of informal sector workers by combining the experiences of those involved and interviews with scientists. It aims to raise awareness among the general public and the authorities of an often ignored issue that concerns all developing countries. This film has been the subject of several screenings and debates in France (notably as part of the Jean Rouch International Festival in 2016), in Vietnam, but also in Madagascar and Côte d'Ivoire. This documentary is also a teaching aid, used during training sessions in the Global North and the Global South. In particular, it was screened at the French Institute of Madagascar (IFM) on 12 December 2017 during the IFM/IRD conference series entitled “Science in Pictures”.

Speeches from a conference on the informal sector at AFD are available on the internet: Mireille Razafindrakoto and Jean-Pierre Cling, “*Quelle politique pour le*

secteur informel ? [What policy for the informal sector?]”, on the ID4D website (Ideas4Development.org), 30 October 2013.

Various radio and television programmes have also served as a channel for conveying the methodology and results. The most recent was the participation of François Roubaud and Mireille Razafindrakoto in the programme “*Sept milliards de voisins*” [*Seven Billion Neighbours*] on RFI, on 22 January 2019. The theme of the programme was informal employment in developing countries.

The same is true of the many popular articles. For example:

– ROUBAUD F., “Fiscaliser le secteur informel : est-ce souhaitable, est-ce possible ? [Taxing the informal sector: is it advisable, is it possible?]”, May 1997, *Onudi-Challenge*, Madagascar, June 1997, p. 4;

– ROUBAUD F., “Le travail urbain en Afrique sub-saharienne : l’informalisation de l’économie, le chômage et l’emploi [Urban labour in sub-Saharan Africa: the informalisation of the economy, unemployment and employment]”, *Dialogue*, 4, Dial, December 1995: 5-8;

– Marchés tropicaux : article on Cameroon entitled “Économie et informel : une interview de François Roubaud [Economy and Informal: an interview with François Roubaud]” (VIRGINIE GOMEZ: 76-79), 12 January 2001;

– Numerous IRD scientific fact sheets, including: *Emploi et marché du travail : les premières données statistiques disponibles pour sept capitales africaines* [*Employment and the labour market: the first statistical data available for seven African capitals*], fact sheet no. 218, January 2005;

– ROUBAUD F., “L’économie informelle est-elle un frein au développement et à la croissance économique ? [Is the informal economy a brake on development and economic growth?]”, *Regards croisés sur l’économie*, 14, special issue, 2014, *Lumières sur les économies souterraines* : 109-121.

Initial impacts

Economic impact

Overall, the results on the weight and structure of the informal economy and the underlying rationale have led to a revision of viewpoints (and preconceived ideas) and therefore of global policies (on employment, on the fight against poverty, etc.). They have also resulted in certain stakeholders in the formal sector changing their behaviour and strategies.

Consequently, in addition to the precariousness of living conditions and the marginalisation of actors in the informal economy, three major findings (the predominance of the informal economy, its non-transient nature and its contribution to the economy), which tend to be confirmed in most of countries, are now increasingly considered when trying to understand the informal economy. They have led to a change in the viewpoints that previously condemned this segment of the economy a priori.

As a specific example of impact, speeches (by policy-makers, leaders of entrepreneurial groups,²⁴ etc.) have been delivered echoing the results of the surveys on the weight of informality and emphasising the point that policies must take this into account. The decisions taken in Vietnam (following the first surveys) to institutionalise measuring informality (and include it in the official missions

²⁴. See in particular the film *Zana-bahoaka* in Madagascar. See also the programmes on the informal sector on RFI, for example (on Peru, Madagascar and Africa more generally, etc.).

of the GSO) is another example. Lastly, at the level of the development community (measures advocated by the ILO, UNDP or the World Bank), there has been a gradual paradigm shift from the 1990s to the present day: from policies that were essentially focused on formalisation and largely repressive, there has been a shift to a more pragmatic approach, accepting that support can be given to the informal sector without necessarily forcing it to formalise. The results from the *1-2-3 system* are among the elements that have contributed to these changes.

Data from *1-2-3 surveys* can be used to revise GDP (which includes only part of the informal economy).²⁵ In this respect, thanks to cooperation with the IRD, Peru is the first developing country to regularly publish a comprehensive breakdown of the informal economy in the national accounts. These results have provided researchers and public policy makers with a valuable tool for measuring the relative importance of the informal economy in GDP and for gaining detailed knowledge of its characteristics. This has contributed to improving the link between statistical research and public policy. The demand from policy makers and researchers for this information has motivated the Inei to periodically update the satellite account of the informal economy (new versions in 2017 and 2018 covering the periods 2007-2016 and 2007-2017).

The knowledge gained from surveys on the informal economy helps to define public policies for the protection of workers, support for microenterprises (training adapted to needs, access to credit) or incentives for formalisation.

For example, in **Madagascar**, the *1-2-3 survey*, renamed Enempsi (National Survey on Employment in the Informal Sector) in 2012, was widely used to develop the PNEFP (National Employment and Vocational Training Policy) by the Ministry for Employment, Technical Education and Vocational Training (MEETFP) with support from the ILO and Unesco.

In **Vietnam**, the recognition of the importance of the informal sector in 2011 led to its inclusion for the first time in the Ministry for Labour's National Employment Strategy. The government is focusing on providing benefits for the "formalisation" of productive units, through access to credit or a better market location (see Vass publications in 2017). The new Enterprise Law of 2017

²⁵ It is worth noting that the Vietnamese Prime Minister's request to the GSO to improve how the non-observed economy is measured can be attributed to the desire to revise GDP upwards, which is probably underestimated due to the fact that the informal economy is only partially included. This concern has a twofold objective: increasing the size of GDP, thereby attracting additional foreign financing without worsening the debt ratio; and increasing tax revenues by formalising the informal sector (which requires identifying informal units beforehand).

introduced support and incentives for formalising sole proprietorships (adoption of a formal microenterprise status): tax incentives, accounting training, etc. These measures are part of the government's 2017 target to double the number of formal businesses in Vietnam from 500,000 to 1 million by 2020.

In **Peru**, the Ministry for Labour's Sectoral Strategy for the Formalisation of Work 2018-2021 was approved by a ministerial resolution (RM No. 071-2017-TR) published in the Official Gazette on 7 March 2018. This new strategy prioritises actions with a focus on segments where there continue to be high levels of informality. It proposes five specific objectives relating to the improvement of employability and labour productivity, the conditions that stimulate the formal labour cycle, the strengthening of regulatory capacities, the culture of formalisation, and knowledge management. On reading the summary, there is a fairly extensive appropriation of recent debates on the concepts and measures of informality, as well as intensive use of the results of the *1-2-3 surveys* adopted and adapted by the Inei and of the satellite account of the informal economy.

Social and political impact

The informal sector has entered public debate (Peru): debates on the reality and extent of informality have been sparked and a category of actors (the "informal") has been socially recognised.

Social recognition of a category of actors (the "informal")

In view of the results on the weight of the informal sector, the authorities can no longer ignore the existence of this sector or adopt an attitude of ignorance – or even contempt – towards it or limit themselves to repressive policies. By highlighting the predominance of informal actors, they have been given a voice, a way of making themselves heard, to compensate for their atomisation and strengthen their bargaining power. The recognition and appreciation of skills acquired in the informal sector is also a means of avoiding the marginalisation of informal workers.

In Vietnam, for example, informal entrepreneurs were completely ignored by the government before the implementation of the *1-2-3 survey* (HBIS) in this country. No policy was envisaged for informal sector actors apart from measures banning

their presence in certain streets of major cities.²⁶ Following the publication and dissemination of the results on the weight of the informal sector (the informal sector accounts for 11 million jobs, i.e. half of non-agricultural jobs in Vietnam in 2007; all sectors taken together, 80% of jobs are informal), the authorities were forced to change their attitude by recognising the widespread existence of informal units and put in place a policy to support them.

Emergence of the informal sector in public debate and policy-making

Data and analyses on the informal sector help to fuel the debate on this issue. It is therefore easier to discuss and consider public policies for protecting workers, for supporting microenterprises (credit, training, access to the market, etc.) or for incentivising formalisation (debate on the taxation of the informal sector, Madagascar).²⁷ In this regard, the organisation in Peru of a session of “academic Dialogues with the President” on the informal sector is a symbolic result. Following the 2016 presidential elections, the new President of the Republic, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, made reducing informality one of his main economic policy axes. His Minister for the Economy and Finance, Alfredo Thorne, proposed lowering VAT in order to reduce the informality rate. This proposal was widely debated in the media, where analysts developed various arguments for and against such a measure without, however, providing any rigorous insight. It was at this point that, at the request of President Kuczynski on 7 November 2016, the 3rd Presidential Academic Dialogue entitled “Are modernisation and informality compatible?” took place at the presidential palace, organised by the Economic and Social Research Consortium (CIES), an institution that brings together the main Peruvian research centres (which later became the Poverty Commission). These Dialogues are a tool for bringing together policy makers and researchers and are intended to facilitate exchanges of information and the presentation of research results to officials invited by the President’s office. On this occasion, nine experts on the labour market (including Javier Herrera, an IRD researcher) and the Ministers and Vice-Ministers of the Economy and

Labour were invited to meet. The experts’ presentations were subsequently published by the ILO in 2017.²⁸

Institutional impact

The institutional impact is the strengthening of the credibility of the national statistical institutes, thanks not only to the skills acquired but also to the mobilisation of (appropriation/institutionalisation) of an efficient and relevant tool: (i) for monitoring employment and living conditions among the population; (ii) making available reliable and relevant data on the informal sector (public goods, response to user demand); (iii) providing inputs for preparing national accounts, with the inclusion of satellite accounts of the informal economy in the national accounts (objective achieved in the case of Peru).

It should be noted here that this result on institutional credibility has been particularly significant for Instat in Madagascar. Statistical production has been used for economic analysis, and this know-how has itself resulted in knowledge transfer through the dissemination of results. The effort to make good use of the results of Madio surveys (economic studies, public presentation, creation of a journal, etc.) has paid off, generating a real virtuous circle: the results of surveys produced in real time and the thematic analyses that result from them generate interest and provide fresh resources for new surveys. Not only has Madio succeeded in creating a strong demand for its products, but the expression of this demand is itself a powerful motivating factor for managers and reinforces the trust between the institution and the users.

The intense policy of dissemination and utilisation of results agreed to by the project corresponds to a deliberate methodological choice. It is based on the observation that the decline of African national statistical institutes is partly attributable to the inability of statisticians to respond to demand in a timely fashion and with the required quality. However, in a context of extreme scarcity of resources and where the “statistical culture” of decision-makers is limited, statisticians are challenged to prove the fundamental interest of the outputs they provide.

26. An official from the Ministry for Planning and Investment (MPI), in charge of business promotion policies, replied in an interview in 2007: “We do not have specific policies regarding informal units since for us this category of activities does not exist (has no legal existence).”

27. See *Madagascar Tribune*, 28/12/2013, as well as various publications such as *Onudi-Challenge* in 1997 and the article by GAUTHIER et al. (2001).

28. ILO 2017. *On informality and productivity: brief reflections for the case of Peru* Lima: ILO, p. 89.

Capacity building

The skills of management staff, researchers and other actors (e.g. decision-makers, civil service executives, civil society) participating in training workshops or benefiting from educational programmes (theses and masters) have been strengthened.

We have already emphasised that skills have been built up at national level in the various countries: the managerial staff who were responsible for implementing the survey system have acquired experience and methodological and analytical expertise that they can pass on to others. However, beyond technical skills, the use and practical application of the survey and analysis system also helps to raise awareness of the importance of an approach and analysis method that attaches considerable weight to the way in which statistical data are produced and presented to the general public. More specifically, it is a question of favouring an approach that anchors its analyses firmly in the field while taking into account national contexts and data collection imperatives at the beginning, and the expectations of decision-makers and the general public at the end. Would it not be fair to say that this approach (found in the Dial approach mentioned above), which has been used to train a large number of researchers (in the Global North as well as in the Global South), has in a way “set the standard” and that we could therefore speak of the “1-2-3 survey school”?²⁹

The skills acquired have also been used to gain access to high-level positions of responsibility. For example, among the senior statistician-economists that IRD researchers were able to train as part of the Madio project on the 1-2-3 survey and its derivatives (in addition to the nationally and internationally recognised experts mentioned above), one became Minister for Finance and another became Secretary General of the Ministry for Planning and the Economy.

29. The *School of Governance, Peace and Security (GPS) in Africa*, which adopts the same approach (and most often uses 1-2-3 surveys as a support survey for its thematic modules), supports this. See AUC-IRD/Dial. 2018. “Monitoring Governance, Peace and Security. The GPS-Shasa initiative: instruments and methodology”, Dial Working Document, no. 2018-10.

Widespread impacts

At the academic level (and in relation to central development issues)

Opening up new analytical fields for research

The existence of reliable data opens up the possibility of studying economic phenomena previously considered elusive, for example: individual or intergenerational transitions or mobilities (sectoral: formal/informal or entry/exit from the labour market) and monitoring/evaluation of the impact of specific measures or policies on different categories of the population.³⁰

By way of illustration, in the Economic Research Review 2007-2011 and Agenda for 2012-2016 published by the Peruvian Economic and Social Research Consortium (CIES), a non-governmental organisation that brings together almost 50 academic institutions, the authors pointed out in the chapter on employment research that, in the case of informality, there is now a body of work focusing on measuring informality and studying its causes. They then emphasised the need to better understand the interactions of the informal sector with the rest of the economy and the dynamic processes of transitioning to formality (CIES,

30. Dial's work on microfinance institutions (MFIs), to analyse the profile of beneficiaries and measure the changes brought about by the funding granted, falls within this area. An analysis carried out in Madagascar showed in particular that MFIs only reach the richest part of the informal sector and that the impacts were mixed (source: *Sciences au Sud*, 24, April 2004).

2012:197-198).³¹ This concern was addressed by the preparation and publication in 2014 of the satellite account of the informal economy 2007-2012 by the Inei with the support of the IRD.³²

Five years later, in the Economic Research Review 2011-2016 and the Agenda for 2017-2021 published by the CIES, the chapter devoted to the labour market is entitled “Employment and Informality”. This is a direct result of the work on the issue of the informal economy that has dominated the debate. Moreover, the authors propose nine research questions that should be developed and for which they consider that the satellite account of the informal economy is the tool to illustrate these questions and explain them more fully.³³

Opening up new thematic areas for research

Innovative thematic modules can be piggybacked onto existing surveys: the availability of a reliable and flexible survey methodology provides the opportunity to piggyback thematic modules on topics that are innovative or little-explored (network survey, corruption survey, subjective well-being, etc.) or to study the interactions between various dimensions of well-being according to the characteristics of individuals (e.g. informal sector and corruption, insecurity and dynamics of informal microenterprises, etc.).

At the institutional level

Institutional strengthening of regional or continental organisations (such as Afrisat or the African Union)

Much of Afrisat’s legitimacy and credibility rests on its support for the implementation of 1-2-3 surveys. At the same time, in the Strategy for the Harmonisation of Statistics in Africa (Shasa), led by the African Union Commission and involving all the continent’s NSIs and sub-regional institutions, one of the twelve Specialised Technical Groups (STGs) focuses on measuring employment and the informal sector. To achieve the ambitious goal of building an African economic union, it is important to use the same statistics to monitor a number of key indicators, including those on employment and the informal sector. The 1-2-3 methodology

addresses this need for harmonisation, providing a turnkey tool that contributes to the objective of harmonisation and strengthening regional institutions.³⁴

Initiating intercontinental South-South collaboration

A team from the GSO in Vietnam made a study visit to the Inei in Peru in 2019. Since the Vietnamese team was looking for examples of practical experience to respond to their Prime Minister’s request (see above), IRD researchers connected, encouraged and facilitated the discussions between the two countries’ NSIs. Over time, the Peruvian institute has certainly developed expertise that it can share regarding measuring and integrating the informal economy into the national accounts.

Transfer and expanded use of an instrument for monitoring the SDGs

The expansion in use of the 1-2-3 survey methodology to various countries is illustrated by the deployment of this tool in a French *département*, namely Mayotte. This type of transfer of methodology from the Global South to the Global North is particularly rare and deserves to be highlighted.

Moreover, this 1-2-3 methodology, launched in the 1990s and refined and strengthened over the years, now provides a response to a global challenge: that of having a relevant, reliable instrument that complies with international standards for monitoring a certain number of indicators for several of the SDGs (in particular, SDG8 on employment, SDG10 on inequality, SDG4 on education, SDG5 on gender equality and SDG1 on the eradication of poverty).

31. CIES. 2012. La investigación Económica y Social en el Perú. Balance de la investigación 2007-2011 y agenda 2012-2016.

32. INEI. 2014. Producción y empleo informal en el Perú. Cuenta Satélite de la Economía Informal 2007-2012.

33. CIES. 2017. Balance de Investigación en Políticas Públicas 2011-2016 y agenda de investigación 2017-2021 : 469-470.

34. African statisticians, at a meeting organised by the AU in 2011, approved the proposal for a common methodology to measure employment. This methodology, which is used for the harmonisation of statistics (AU Shasa Project), is based for the most part on phase 1 of the 1-2-3 survey, with some minor modifications.

Impact pathway

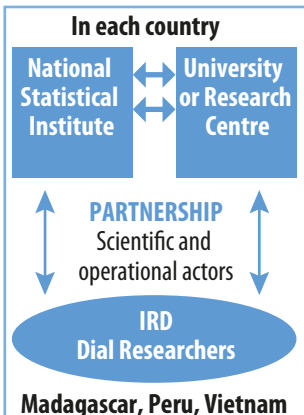
A Statistical Innovation:

1-2-3 surveys

BACKGROUND

- 1972: Official appearance of the concept of informality in an ILO report
- Enormous weight of informality in the economy of developing countries
- Data gaps on the informal economy: need for measurement and analysis tools
- SDGs and monitoring indicators: measuring, analysing and monitoring the informal economy in relation to employment, poverty, inequality and governance

Latent Demand
to understand a sector,
the main source of income
for (poor) households in
developing countries (lack of reliable,
relevant and standardised methods)



International Partners
ILO
UNDP

Donors
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (FSP)
World Bank
European Union
DFID (UK cooperation)

Actors' contributions

1-2-3 survey system
Statistical
Survey methodology
(system, questionnaire, manual)
+ **Analysis methods**
(reporting framework, types of analysis)
+ **Institutional arrangements**
(for dissemination and standardisation)

Official statistical surveys
(Collection, analysis,
dissemination of results)
Stat. data = public assets

A reference method
scientific publications

Operational
recommendations
Informal sector support measures,
incentives to formalise, etc.
(Policy Brief)

Training
Workshops, summer schools
(Tam Dao VN, Tany VAO Mada)
Master's courses, theses Training of
partners (14 PhD students from the
Global South, a dozen continuing
education workshops, etc.)

Research products

IRD
(dissemination of results)

National statistical institutes (NSIs)
"Pioneering" NSIs (Mexico, Peru, Madagascar,
Cameroon, etc.) > relay to other NSIs

Insee
(relay, Cefil training, support)

Regional Partners
Andean Community of Nations, Afristat and Waemu

Delhi Group
(norms and standards
on measuring informality)

ILO, UNDP, PARIS21, AFD
World Bank (relay, survey or
research project funding,
dissemination/promotion)

Activities/products for
dissemination to a wide audience
(conferences, documentary film)

NGO
e.g. GRET in Africa (data requester and user)
and Think Tank in Vietnam

Circulation of knowledge
and intermediaries

Economic impact

- A paradigm shift in understanding the informal economy leads to a wider revision of policies (on employment, on the fight against poverty, etc.): from essentially repressive policies to more pragmatic measures to support the informal sector (which is not obliged and/or does not have the means to formalise)
- Implementation of adequate public policies on the informal economy: protection of workers, support to micro-enterprises (training, credit) or incentives to formalise (Madagascar – taxation; Vietnam)
- Revision of GDP (which only includes part of the informal economy)

Institutional impact

- Institutional strengthening of National Statistical Institutes
Strengthening *credibility and legitimacy* of SNIs:
 - Mobilisation (appropriation/institutionalisation) of a tool for monitoring the population's employment and living conditions
 - Availability of reliable and relevant data on the informal sector (public goods, response to user demand)
 - Inputs for preparing national accounts (with the inclusion of "satellite accounts of the informal economy in the national accounts" in Peru's case)

Social and political impact

- Entry of the informal sector into public debate (Peru)
- Raising awareness and fuelling debate on the reality and extent of informality
- Social recognition of a category of actors (the informal)

Capacity building/capitalisation

- Consolidation of knowledge, skills, approach/method of analysis (the 1-2-3 survey school: from the field to the general public) for students, researchers, decision-makers, management staff, civil society, etc.

Initial impacts

Academic impact
Opening up new fields of research
A reliable and flexible survey methodology
that also serves as a support survey
for thematic modules on innovative or little
explored topics (networks, corruption,
governance, security, etc.)

Institutional impact
Institutional strengthening of
regional organisations
(Afristat and AU)
1-2-3 survey = basis for common
methodology to measure employment
for the African Union's Statistical
Harmonisation Project Shasa)

Capacity building/ transfer
Expanded use of the 1-2-3
survey methodology in other countries
South-South collaboration
Use of the method in Mayotte (France)
South-North transfer
1-2-3 System = a tool
for monitoring indicators on various SDGs
(including SDG 8, SDG 10, SDG 4,
SDG 5, SDG 1)

Widespread impacts

Appendices

Interviews conducted

Alexandre	Berthon-Dumurgier	AFD, France
Jean-Pierre	Cling	Insee, France
Javier	Herrera	IRD, Associate Researcher at Inei-Peru
Nancy	Hidalgo	Inei-Peru
Stéphane	Lagrée	Vass Consultant
Thang	Nguyen	CAF (Centre for Analysis and Forecasting), Vass, Vietnam
Thi Thu Phuong	Nguyen	CAF, Vass, Vietnam
Ida	Rajaonera	Instat-Madagascar
Faly	Rakotomanana	Instat-Madagascar, Associate Researcher at Dial
Éric	Ramilison	Afrisat
José Luis	Roble	Inei-Peru
François	Roubaud	IRD
Constance	Torelli	Insee, France

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACN: Andean Community of Nations

AFD: Agence française de développement (French Development Agency)

Afrisat: Economic and Statistical Observatory for Sub-Saharan Africa

Asirpa: Public agronomic research impact analysis

AU: African Union

Cefil-Insee: Insee Training Centre

CIES: Consorcio de Investigación Económica y Social (Economic and Social Research Consortium)

DCs: Developing countries

Dial: Development, Institutions and Globalisation, UMR Leda

DFID: Department for International Development, United Kingdom

ECLAC: Economic Commission for Latin America

Enaho: Encuesta Nacional de Hogares (National Household Survey), Peru

Enaprom: Encuesta Nacional de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples (National Multipurpose Household Survey)

Enempsi: Enquête nationale sur l'emploi dans le secteur informel (National Survey on Employment in the Informal Sector), Madagascar

ERI-ESI: Enquête régionale intégrée sur l'emploi et le secteur informel (Integrated Regional Survey on Employment and the Informal Sector)

Escap: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

FRDP: Framework Research and Development Programme

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

Grade: Grupo de Análisis para el Desarrollo (Development Analysis Group)

GSO: General Statistics Office, Vietnam

HBIS: Household Business and Informal Sector

IBGE: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics)

Iedes: Institut d'études du développement de la Sorbonne (Institute of Development Studies of the Sorbonne)

Iena: Integrating the Informal Economy into the National Accounts

IFM: Institut français de Madagascar (French Institute of Madagascar)

ILO: International Labour Office

ILO: International Labour Organization

Impress: Impact of research in the South

Insee: Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques (National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies)

Inei: Instituto Nacional de Estadística e Informática (National Institute of Statistics and Informatics), Peru

Instat: Institut national de statistique de Madagascar (National Institute of Statistics of Madagascar)

IRD: French Research Institute for Sustainable Development

Leda: Laboratoire d'économie de Dauphine (Dauphine Economics Laboratory)

LFS: Labor Force Survey

Madio: Madagascar-Dial-Instat-Orstom

MAE: Ministère des Affaires étrangères (Ministry for Foreign Affairs), France

MEETFP: Ministère de l'Emploi, de l'Enseignement technique et de la Formation professionnelle (Ministry for Employment, Technical Education and Vocational Training), Madagascar

Molisa: Ministry for Labour, Vietnam

NoPoor: Research project to strengthen knowledge for better anti-poverty policies

NSI: National statistical institute

OECD: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Orstom: Institute of Scientific Research for Development in Cooperation, France (ex-IRD)

Parstat: Comparative analysis of the labour market and poverty trends in Africa

PNEFP: Politique nationale de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle (National Employment and Vocational Training Policy), Madagascar

PUCP: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (Pontifical Catholic University of Peru)

Recap: Strengthening the Capacity to Devise and Analyse Decent Work Indicators

SCAC: Service de coopération et d'action culturelle (Cooperation and Cultural Action Service)

SDG: Sustainable Development Goals

Shasa: Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa

UFRJ: Federal University of Rio de Janeiro

UMR: Unité mixte de recherche (Joint Research Unit)

Ummisco: Mathematical and Computer Modelling of Complex Systems Unit

Unesco: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

Vass: Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences

VAT: Valued Added Tax

Waemu: West African Economic and Monetary Union

WTO: World Trade Organization



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