Survey on access to African government microdata for social science research

Lynn Woolfrey
DataFirst, University of Cape Town

2010 IASSIST Conference: Social data and social networking: connecting social science communities across the globe, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, June 1-4, 2010
Sources of African survey microdata

- **International/US survey projects**
  
  Some provide access to microdata via project websites
  
  E.g. Afrobarometer
  

  Demographic and health surveys of USAID funded
  
  Macro International
  
  [http://www.measuredhs.com/accesssurveys](http://www.measuredhs.com/accesssurveys)

  World Values Survey
  

- **Private sector survey projects**

  These may provide data for research on payment, but usually only for specific clients
Sources of African survey microdata

- **Universities and other research institutions**
  In SA a few university based survey projects place their microdata in the public domain eg Wits university’s Demographic Surveillance System microdata [http://web.wits.ac.za/academic/health/PublicHealth/Agincourt](http://web.wits.ac.za/academic/health/PublicHealth/Agincourt) and UCT’s 2008 National Income Dynamics Study (NIDS) microdata [http://www.nids.uct.ac.za](http://www.nids.uct.ac.za)

  These are also available from UCT’s research data centre (RDC) at DataFirst [http://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za](http://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za)

  The SA government has also established the South African Data Archive (SADA) for the sharing of survey microdata [http://www.nrf.ac.za/sada](http://www.nrf.ac.za/sada)

*RDCs and data archives have not been established in other African countries*
African national statistics offices

- Most microdata collected in Africa is official data
- Microdata used in-house by govt statisticians
- Survey findings provided to the public as aggregated data and reports
- Originally colonial records offices to collect population statistics for administrative purposes – not seen as a vital component of governance

Underfunded by colonial administrations - NSOs still reflect this characteristic today
NSOs: off-site data sharing

Some NSOs use established data sharing projects to disseminate their microdata eg IPUMS (Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Kenya, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal, SA, Tanzania, Uganda)

https://international.ipums.org/international

On-site data sharing?
Survey method

Survey aim: to examine the availability of microdata from official surveys undertaken by African NSOs (on-site data sharing practices)

Survey dates: March-April 2009

- A request for microdata was sent to NSOs in 53 African countries
- Contact details were obtained from NSO websites
- Data requested via: email, fax online forms
- Requests were in the language of the country
- Personal contacts were avoided
Survey results

1. **No websites** (8 NSOs) - Angola, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Libya, Mali, Somalia and Zimbabwe

2. **No contact** - emails returned, faxes uncontactable (8) - Benin, Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Rwanda and Sudan

3. **No response** (25) - Algeria, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Cote d’Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia and Zambia

4. **No policies** – NSOs contacted but had no policies in place to share microdata (2) - Mozambique and Sao Tome y Principe

5. **No follow-up** – NSOs agreed to send data but run into logistical problems (3) - Malawi, Namibia and Uganda

6. **Onerous access requirements** – the Mauritian NSO required payment ($129.45) and a visit to the country to obtain the microdata files (1)

7. **Payment required** for microdata – Ghana ($320 for panel study data) and Senegal ($902 per dataset) (2)

8. **Good microdata access** – NSOs in Botswana and Kenya emailed microdata files and documentation; The Nigerian Bureau of Statistics provided microdata from their website via their NADA catalogue; Statistics SA provided microdata from their website via their NESSTAR server (4)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No Website Access</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No Contact</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>No Reply</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>No Policy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>No Follow-up</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Onerous Access</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Access with Payment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Good Access</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey results: data sharing practices

On-site data sharing

- Some African NSOs share microdata using proprietary software
  eg Statistics SA uses NESSTAR

- or the free National Data Archive (NADA) software developed by the International Household Survey Network (IHSN) to assist data management in developing countries
NSOs in 13 African Countries have acquired the NADA application to manage and share their microdata

- Ethiopia, Gambia, Ghana, Lesotho, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia

The survey showed that despite the availability of this tool, on-site data dissemination by NSOs is hampered by several obstacles
Obstacles to data dissemination

The political will of governments is vital for any decision-making regarding information management (James, 2001:156)

Lack of government appreciation of /commitment to data curation in African countries

- **No established data dissemination policies**
  Decisions on access are ad hoc. Sometimes informal contacts will lead to access

- **Confidentiality concerns**
  An overly bureaucratic approach to data sharing is often justified by the need to ensure data confidentiality
Obstacles to data dissemination (2)

- **Inadequate technological infrastructures**
  NSOs’ data management infrastructures are weak

- **Skills shortages at NSOs**
  Low salaries, high turnover. Also a problem of lack of resources

- **Poor Producer-User Communication Channels**
  NSO websites are not being used optimally for data discovery and data sharing. Email and faxes are not reliable modes of contact
Conclusions

Awareness of the value of data usage and data sharing at Ministerial level in African countries is required to lead to:

- Use and reuse of survey microdata as a national asset
- Allocation of resources to NSOs for effective data management, including data sharing
- Establishment of dedicated institutions for the curation of microdata in each country (survey data archives, research data centres)
lynn.woolfrey@uct.ac.za
http://www.datafirst.uct.ac.za