

months of leaving the last household. The data are thus immediately available for policy analysis, an enormous improvement over previous practice, where survey results were in most countries available only years — in some cases many years — after the end of the survey.

To the extent that it is possible to tell from internal evidence, the LSS data are typically of good quality, although the breadth of the survey clearly carries some price in terms of depth and in the ability to monitor subpopulations. For example, the agricultural modules typically do not produce the sort of reliable harvest estimates that could be obtained from sample crop-cutting in an agricultural survey. But this was by design, and in many applications is offset by knowing the farmer's other activities, his and his parents' education levels, his migration history, ethnic group, and so on. The retrospective questions appear to have worked well, so that, for example, it is possible to use the fertility questions to construct reasonable estimates of changes in infant mortality over time, [see Benefo and Schultz (1993) for estimates for Ghana and Cote d'Ivoire].

Like most surveys, the LSS surveys are designed to collect data, not to experiment with survey methodology, so that it is difficult to use their results to come to general conclusions. The surveys have certainly been expensive relative to most established surveys in LDCs, with costs per household per year ranging between \$100—\$200 at 1990 prices, although it could be argued that high costs reflect the set-up costs of a new product.

One lesson from these surveys is that in countries where economic development is slow or non-existent, as in much of Africa, and where survey measures of living standards are error prone, as in Africa and elsewhere, measures of change, at both individual and aggregate levels will be dominated by measurement error. Over short periods, living standards in agriculture are variable in any case, so that short panels of a year or two are unlikely to give useful measures either of income dynamics or of the change in living standards, except possibly in the most rapidly developing countries. This is even true for "straightforward" concepts such as household size; in West Africa there is a great deal of genuine mobility among both adults and children — see particularly Ainsworth (1992) — but even here there appears to be a good deal of measurement error.

A second lesson is that it is very difficult to maintain new surveys in the field for any length of time. In the Ivorian case, personnel changes in the World Bank led to a loss of interest, and the survey ceased after 1988 apparently without leaving any permanent enhancement of Ivorian survey capability. This was particularly unfortunate because, in the face of collapsing world prices, procurement prices of cocoa and coffee the main cash crops in Cote d'Ivoire — were cut by a half, the first such cut since independence. Had the panel been in place, the survey could have observed the process of adaptation as smallholders reacted to the cuts, but the opportunity was lost.