

necessarily worse than the more invasive and detailed recall surveys. The problem cannot be attributed to imputation biases in the survey data along the lines discussed above [see Bouis and Haddad (1992) and Subramanian and Deaton (1992)]¹; the latter paper also rules out functional form problems. However, it is possible, as Bouis argues, that there is a very high income elasticity of food wastage and of food gifts to servants, relatives, and even animals, thus reconciling the purchase data with the intake data.

Finally, there is an excellent discussion of the quality of international trade data by Rozansky and Yeats (1994) who look for inconsistencies (a) across different sources, particularly the U.N., the Fund, and the Bank, (b) between trading partners, comparing recorded imports of *A* from *B* with recorded exports from *B* to *A*, (c) between trade totals over commodity groups and their component sums, and (d) across revisions of SITCs, for those groups not affected by the reclassifications. The results are far from encouraging, and by all criteria, trade data from LDCs show more and greater discrepancies than data for OECD countries, with discrepancies apparently worsening over time. To take just one example, comparisons under (b) show that only 2-3 percent of US or French trade gets "lost", compared with more than 50 percent for South Africa (not surprisingly), Venezuela, Seychelles, and Bahrain. The IMF's estimate of Venezuela's 1982 exports is 20 times larger than that compiled by the UN.

1.3.3. Some implications

The news from this section is dismal. National income and growth comparisons across countries are plagued by conceptual index number problems, and by immense practical difficulties. Many frequently used data from LDCs are of poor quality, or only pretend to exist, having their only reality in the mind of bureaucrats in New York or Washington. And while the Penn World Table, which provides probably the best and certainly the most heavily used set of national income data, has provided a great step forward in producing data at a common set of prices, it cannot be better than the raw (and uncorrected) data from the individual countries on which it is based.

What then should be done? Researchers should obviously be encouraged to be critical of the data, and to take every opportunity to explore the consequences of measurement error for their analysis. However, when the data are of such low quality that it is difficult to establish any results — as with much of the official macroeconomic data for Africa — it is difficult to pinpoint specific problems, or to know where to press for improvement. It is also clearly sensible to press for more resources to be devoted to data collection, and it would be a notable improvement if international agencies were to advertise their data more precisely, so that, for example, projections and estimates were