

Agricultural Employment Trends in Latin America: Are There New Requirements for Statistics?

Monica Rodrigues

United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
Santiago, Chile

Email: monica.rodrigues@cepal.org

Abstract: Labour statistics – especially those referred to highly seasonal or fluctuating activities, such as agriculture, or to highly heterogeneous areas with low survey coverage, such as most rural areas – have some important limitations as inputs for policy formulation. Different statistical sources (household and labour surveys, sector and population censuses) are frequently used to obtain information on agricultural and/or rural employment. Because they have different aims and they are based upon different questions, at different times and covering different periods, the inferred figures can vary widely. Limited or inadequate spatial coverage can raise additional problems: some household surveys only cover urban areas and in the case of censuses and surveys reporting rural areas, the definitions of “rural” vary from country to country and are being increasingly questioned nowadays.

The limitations of traditional statistical sources on agricultural and rural employment seem even more evident when considering the current requirements of data for the formulation of development policies. Placing emphasis on local/focalized policies implies that specific information on regions and agents are now required, while the need for monitoring and comparing policies at the national and supranational level demands standardized and replicable data. In that sense, agricultural censuses usually bring very detailed information on producers, which can also be disaggregated to a very low level, but they can not be easily standardized among countries. On the other hand, household surveys are more uniform and systematic, but small groups of agents, activities and regions, which can be of interest for policy matters, are not represented in them. Finally, most sources have problems dealing with some employment issues extensively present in the agricultural sector, such as child work and multi-activity.