Computer Assisted Personal Interviews in the Context of Agricultural Surveys: Key Features and Preliminary Ideas for Further Development

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The empirical evidence of the advantages of using Computer Assisted Personal Interviews (CAPI) in household surveys is growing and an increasing number of countries are now using such platforms on multiple types of devices. Both hardware and software options are expanding and increasingly low costs of portable computing power makes the adoptions of these new techniques very attractive even for less developing countries. A recent evaluation by Economic Development Initiative (EDI) has convincingly argued for the added benefits of administering personal interviews using ultra-mobile personal computers (UMPC) (Caeyers et al, 2009) particularly in terms of improved data accuracy. The application of CAPI in agricultural surveys appears particularly promising for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the complexity of agriculture makes CAPI an ideal instrument to facilitate the collection of agricultural data and to reduce inconsistencies. On the other hand, the notoriously poor quality of agricultural data offers an opportunity for CAPI to bear greater rewards in terms of improved data quality. Data quality can be enhanced by the use of 'report-based' validations which allow the interviewer to make informed assessments of the data plausibility, based on accepted norms and standards.

The approach makes use of the FAO FARMAP data model and hierarchical coding system. This provides a comprehensive framework which can be adapted to suit a wide range of farming systems, allowing the survey designer to set up a range of templates based on knowledge of the areas to be surveyed. The coding system provides a logical taxonomy for farming activities, inputs and outputs which, in turn, provides the survey designer with the option of specifying the level of disaggregation and details required.

The presentation will draw from EDI extensive experience with developing computerized surveys, as well as from an on-going collaboration with the Living Standards Measurement Study – Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA) project, to show some of the key attributes of EDI's latest applications, report of the on-going experience with the Uganda National Panel Survey (UNPS) and present some features of a computerized agricultural survey currently under development.

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