



*Using an m-survey approach to collect periodic data
on household vulnerabilities and shocks*

Background

Born out of client demand for real-time household data following the food price crisis of 2008-09, the Listening to LAC (L2L) project is **rigorously testing the reliability and validity of using cellular phones to conduct household surveys** in the region. The ultimate goal is to bridge the gap between authorities and citizens: to give policy makers the information they need to make rapid, informed policy responses following crises.

L2L recently completed a pilot phase in Peru and Honduras. After an initial face-to-face interview with each participating household, the L2L team asked ten monthly questions pertaining to themes associated with shocks, vulnerability and coping strategies: (un)employment, food security, illness, violence, and education. After anonymization, all data will be publicly available online.

Providing Innovation and Public Goods

The Listening to LAC project aims to provide a number of key public goods to the larger community. To our knowledge, L2L is the first mobile phone survey to use a **statistically valid (random) sample** – many cellphone applications employ crowd-sourcing or other techniques that achieve useful, but not statistically representative results. Devising a replicable survey methodology from which policymakers and researchers can make inferences about the general population is one of the central pillars of L2L.

L2L also tested the **effect of incentives** on attrition rates in a scientifically rigorous manner, randomly assigning households to one of three incentive levels. Determining if and how much incentive is necessary to solicit responses will be crucial as L2L is scaled up throughout the region (and world).

Finally, L2L rigorously tested the **reliability and attrition rates of different survey modes**: SMS (text), Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR), Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI), and face-to-face interviews. Knowing which type(s) of survey works best will be immeasurably useful for governments, the Bank, and development partners seeking to conduct statistically rigorous mobile phone surveys.

Future

The **potential for scale-up is enormous**. By deploying surveys via mobile phone, Listening to LAC aims to provide greater information agility for policy makers and avoid data-entry delays and inaccuracies. The availability of close-to-real-time data will enable faster diagnoses of poverty and vulnerability, and help policymakers, the Bank, and other donors know instantly the conditions on the ground. Armed with such information, authorities will be able to detect early warning signs so they can prepare for and respond to future crises more effectively.