
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Committee on Statistics

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Strategic direction of the Committee on Statistics:

Proposed future work

**Strategies for the development of statistics in the Pacific
Island region – the Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy¹**

1. Introduction

The 22 island countries and territories making up the Pacific island region represent an enormous diversity in physical geography and culture, languages and social-political organization, size and resources endowment. Spread over an area of thirty million square kilometers of the Pacific Ocean, and stretching from the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas in the north-west Pacific Ocean to Pitcairn in the south-east, lie some 7,500 islands of which only around 500 are inhabited, providing home to 9,8 million people. Ranging in population size from 6,7 million people in Papua New Guinea to a resident population of 53 people (fifty-three, this is not a typo) on Pitcairn Island, 10 island countries and territories have populations of less than 100,000 people, of which 5 are smaller than 20,000.

Notwithstanding such small population sizes, the political reality is that we are dealing with 15 independent countries and 7 territories, all of which rely on a national or territorial statistical service to facilitate effective and efficient government and governance. Given ESCAP's request for me to speak about future strategies for the development of statistics in the Pacific Island region, it is useful to keep such diversities and demographic basics, like population size, in mind.

2. Key challenges

Reflecting population size are the varying sizes of public administration, not quite a perfect correlation in that small countries and territories of the "P" group in ESCAP invariably have larger numbers of public officials/capita compared to our colleagues from the Asia region; but notwithstanding the smallness of their national statistical agencies, ranging

¹ This document was contributed by Mr. Gerald Haberkorn, Manager, Statistics for Development Programme Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Noumea, New Caledonia. It has been reproduced without formal editing. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations.

from 170+ in PNG to one officer, Government statistician and Chief Electoral officer in unison in both Niue and Tokelau, all agencies are required to run regular population and housing censuses (or maintain population registers), regular household and establishment surveys, and compile and produce regular statistical outputs covering a broad range of demographic, economic and social data and development indicators, and statistics pertaining to communication and transport, energy and environment, gender and culture, as well as start addressing growing challenges in the area of climate change and food security.

My presentation tabled at the 1st session of this Committee in January 2009, highlighted the broad range of challenges faced by all countries², with somewhat different nuances emerging in the views of NSOs and their development partners. According to statistical agencies, *capacity issues* (linked to staffing matters – not enough, not enough skills needed, high turn-over, and to the delivery of quality and timely outputs) and the *lack of political support* (budget/resources constraints) emerged as the two top constraints, ahead of a few references to institutional constraints, such as lack of statistical plans and dated legislation.

The prevailing view amongst providers of statistical development support to NSO, saw *a low national demand for statistics*, and *statistical leadership and the failure to anticipate/create demands for statistics* as the two most critical bottlenecks to advancing development of statistics across the region.

While these challenges remain as valid today as they were several years ago, some small but significant developments have taken place over the past two to three years, with statistics having come “off age” in many parts of our world.

3. Recent Developments – growing political awareness and recognition of statistics

It has become politically acceptable to speak of statistics and the development of statistics in particular, and do so in the same meetings and venues where economic development, health, the state of fisheries, climate change and food security are discussed, largely but because it has become politically essential, given a growing awareness that development policy and technical and financial assistance to implement such policy were flying on auto-pilot at best, or blind in most cases for too long.

The Millennium Development Goals, and associated activities, illustrate this situation quite nicely. When ratified in 2000 by some 180+ governments in New York, an ambitious 15 year programme saw the halving of many rather dreadful development indicators by 2015 to the doubling of more positive indicators over the same period. Commendable and ambitious, but also a bit scary to humble workers at the coalface of development, who more often than not, not always knew exactly what countries were meant to halve or double, given both (i) the rather sad state

² The statistical agencies of the three French Pacific Territories (French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna) fare much better with ongoing support from France, with the United States of America also continuing to provide some support to statistical activities in American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands, and Guam.

of development indicators at the time, and (ii) not much commitment by national governments and the international community to do something tangible about it.

Much progress has been made since, is being made at the moment and will be made over the next decade – possibly not in time to reach most goals and targets in 2015, but, I am certain, enough to document both success stories and failures by the end 2016, with quality and timely statistics in sectors that lacked such benchmarks in 2000.

At **regional** level, Heads of Governments including the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand Leaders emphatically acknowledged in their **Pacific Plan**, the importance of quality and timely data and information as essential to informed decision-making, calling for an *upgrade and extension of national and regional information systems and databases across all sectors*". A *Regional Statistical Benchmarking study* was commissioned by the Forum Secretariat (in association with SPC) in 2007, implemented in 2008, with its recommendations endorsed by Forum Economic Ministers Meeting and the SPC Ministerial meeting in 2009. To help strengthen the implementation of its various recommendations, ADB assisted SPC in the development of a coherent long-term regional statistical strategy and implementation plan that would assist PFTAC and SPC in providing a wider range of services in the future. Following extensive consultations with SPC and PFTAC, as well as country visits to Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu, the consultants produced a comprehensive report entitled "A *Pacific Island Region Plan for the Implementation of Initiatives for Strengthening Statistical Services through Regional Approaches, 2010-2020*". This report was tabled, discussed extensively and endorsed by the 3rd Regional Conference of Heads of Planning and Statistics held in Noumea 12 – 16 July.

At **national level**, noteworthy recent developments have taken place in some countries, *walking the talk* of statistics:

- solid political and financial support in Vanuatu, facilitated by a very committed Minister of Finance (and Statistics), which saw a recent budget increase of 40% to the National statistics office, the establishment of statistical outpost in provincial government headquarters, all facilitated by a long-term statistical development plan;
- Strong political support in Samoa and Tonga, and growing support in PNG, with prime ministers in Samoa and Tonga, and the National Executive Council of PNG recently endorsing the development of *National Strategies for the Development of Statistics* (NSDS), jointly undertaken by a PARIS21-SPC partnership.
- And long-term statistical master plans developed in Vanuatu, Marshall Islands, Cooks Islands, Niue and Tokelau, and drafts of such plans in place for FSM, Kiribati, Nauru and Guam.

And **internationally**, statistics is becoming a politically acceptable discussion point (beyond standard complaints of never having the exact data available that are needed at the spur of moment) and receiving the attention of development partners, bilaterally and multilaterally/regionally. AusAID has shown the way in the Pacific region, with the introduction of its

bilateral *Partnerships for Development*, with statistics featuring prominently in many, and its long-term funding support to the SPC Statistics for Development programme and the implementation of the *Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy*³.

4. Strategies for the development of statistics in the Pacific Island region

With the *Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy* recommending the implementation of various strategic, thematic and operational priorities over a 10 Year period, advocating a mix of national and regional initiatives over distinct 3 phases, and with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's Statistics for Development Programme entrusted with coordinating the implementation of this *Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy*, it recently developed a *Pacific Statistics Strategy Action Plan*. Incorporating all of this strategy's objectives and priorities, this plan outlines:

- six key strategic objectives guiding statistical development in the Pacific Island region over the next decade;
- specific activities to be undertaken to achieve these objectives during Phase 1 (2011 – 2014);
- the purpose as well as the importance of each activity, and what would be missed by not implementing each activity,
- expected outcomes of each activity,
- activity costs, and
- potential partnerships with other statistics providers and agencies with distinct comparative advantages.

To oversight the implementation of the *Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy*, and assist SPC in coordinating the implementation of the *Pacific Statistics Strategy Action Plan*, the 3rd Regional Conference of Heads of Planning and Statistics at its meeting in July 2010, decided to establish a *Pacific Statistics Steering Committee*⁴, comprising of six Pacific Island Government Statisticians and 4 representative of key financial (AusAID, ADB) and technical partners (UNFPA, on behalf of UNDAF, and the University of the South Pacific). At its inaugural meeting in Noumea, 18 – 19 November 2010, this committee reviewed and endorsed the *Pacific Statistics Strategy Action Plan, Phase 1*, a summary of which is appended in Annex 1 for your information⁵.

³ This refers to *A Pacific Island Region Plan for the Implementation of initiatives for strengthening statistical services through regional approaches* (Len Cook & Masasso Paunga, July 2010).

⁴ The establishment of such a committee was recommended by both the Regional statistical benchmarking study and the Cook & Paunga report. SPC provides the technical secretariat, with PFTAC advising the committee on macro-economic matters.

⁵ A final and edited version of this will be posted in early 2011 on the PRISM website.

Annex 1:

Summary of Pacific Statistics Strategy Action Plan, Phase 1 (2011 – 2014)

Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy – Regional Initiatives for Strengthening Statistical Services through Regional Approaches

Strategic Objective / Activity Focus	Associated Activity
<p>1. PICTS are undertaking key statistical collections as scheduled</p> <p>Provision of technical assistance and professional capacity development pertaining to a regular programme of population and housing censuses represents a key strategic and operational priority In Phase 1 of the <i>Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy</i>.</p>	<p>1.1 Census Support</p> <p>Technical and training support to countries participating in the 2010 World census covering pre-enumeration activities (preparation of plan and budget; census cartography, household listing, questionnaire development, pilot census, develop data processing system; training of field staff) and post-enumeration technical support (data processing, tabulation, analysis, reporting, dissemination)</p> <p>1.2 Household Survey Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional program of Demographic and Health Surveys, and Household income expenditure surveys (same type of technical / training support as with censuses)
<p>2. PICTs are producing the agreed core set of statistics across sectors</p> <p>This second strategic programme objective intends to deliver both process and product outcomes, benefitting users of social and economic statistics. This two-pronged approach is essential to start closing the gap between available (and timely) data and unmet demands.</p> <p>Key Sectors will be defined by an agreed-upon set of priority statistics for all countries in line with the Pacific Plan, such as the <i>National Minimum Development Indicator</i> database (NMDI) being developed by SPC.</p>	<p>2.1 Improved statistical processes to ensure ready access to quality and timely statistics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redevelop/upgrade/develop administrative databases/management information systems across key sectors. • Focus on <u>4 priority areas</u> recommended by the <i>Ten-Year Pacific Statistics Strategy</i> : economic statistics, vital statistics/registration, health and education statistics. <p>2.2 Improved statistical products</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic/strategic focus of process will be guided by an agreed-upon set of priority statistics for all countries, such as the <i>National Minimum Development Indicator</i> database. • Regular reports by countries on agreed upon set of statistics and indicators across sectors

Strategic Objective / Activity Focus	Associated Activity
<p>3. PICTS have their own capacity or are accessing regional capacity to undertake agreed core and some specialists statistical functions.</p> <p>A key bottleneck pertaining to the successful implementation of statistical collections and the regular compilation and publication of quality statistics, indicators and reports is the lack of national staff with required technical expertise and experience, including a lack of overall management capacity.</p> <p>A long-term commitment to training and staff development is essential to the success and sustainability of other statistical strategic objectives. Given regular staff turn-over/losses at national level, greater strategic attention needs to be paid to regional capacity building and engagement.</p>	<p>3.1 Training focus on improving statistical products and processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional attachments in Noumea • Formal sub-regional/ technical training and workshops • One-on-one training through in-country technical collaboration on specific activity <p>3.2 Training and development of Pacific islands statistical specialists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop sustainable training and professional development strategy that is based on NSO skill audits and capacity assessments • Place greater strategic emphasis on developing a regional training strategy to develop regional specialists for national assignments . <p>3.3 Longer-term focus on investment in specialist resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuous access to needed technical skills, for preparation of high(er) end statistical outputs.
<p>4. Improve Data accessibility and Utilization</p> <p>To facilitate better and more user-friendly access to development statistics and information.</p> <p>As with 2nd strategic programme objective, intention is to deliver better process and product outcomes, benefitting users of social and economic statistics.</p>	<p>4.1 Increase transparency, accessibility and user-relevance of statistical information systems and databases across all sectors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign of PRISM architecture to enhance data accessibility: • Enhance system efficiency of SPC <i>PopGIS</i>: <p>4.2 Greater and more strategic statistical advocacy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop general statistical advocacy strategies for senior public officials highlighting the central role of statistics regarding a wide range of everyday public (and private) sector management activities and services delivery. • Assist statisticians to become better communicators.

Strategic Objective / Activity Focus	Associated Activity
<p>5. New and innovative statistical tools and systems have been introduced</p> <p>This objective addresses key elements of the <i>Pacific Plan</i>, in responding to an “upgrade and extension of country and regional statistical information systems and databases across all sectors”, and tackling issues like harmonization of standards.</p>	<p>5.1 Provide leadership in development of new statistical tools and systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and test new multi-indicator household survey allowing a more regular and efficient collection of key development indicators than conventional surveys • Strive for greater harmonization of standards and tools (e.g. use core set of census questions across region; common survey questionnaires; greater adherence to international classifications, or (where deemed more useful, develop and adhere to regional classifications) • Adoption of new technology for improved data collection and dissemination
<p>6. National and regional statistics governance is functioning effectively.</p> <p>This objective recognizes the importance of putting in place structures and systems to enable a smooth and sustainable operation of national and regional statistical systems and their governance.</p>	<p>6.1 Establish governance structures to guide <u>national</u> statistical development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop national statistical development plans, outlining statistical priorities, inclusive resources requirements, over a 10 year period; • Establish national <i>statistical advisory committees</i>, to advise on and monitor statistical operations and developments. <p>6.2 Establish governance structures to guide <u>regional</u> statistical innovation and development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set up of a regional <i>Statistical Steering Committee</i>, comprising of representatives of PICT NSOS and key financial and technical partners , with SPC providing secretariat function .