

AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS

TYPSS BRIEFING FOR HOPS MEETING – JULY 2013

Background

In May 2011 the ABS signed an agreement with AusAID to provide a program of technical assistance to assist the implementation of the Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy Action Plan (2011-14). A trilateral agreement was designed between AusAID, the ABS and the Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC) to help implement the Pacific Action Plan. The ABS plan has five components:

- A topic-based training and capability development strand, open to all PIC NSOs
- A program-based strand, with ABS working closely with Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu
- The implementation of the Pacific International Comparison Program (PIC)
- A leadership strand, training and mentoring from senior ABS staff
- A technical support strand which will involve regional bodies eg. SPC, PFTAC.

The ABS has been assisting the Asia and Pacific Region for many years. This assistance has included responding to requests for technical assistance from various National Statistical Offices (NSOs) in the Region and through participation and active leadership of Regional and Global Statistical organisations such as the United National Statistical Commission (UNSC), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Pacific Statistics Steering Committee (PSSC).

Since 2011, under the ABS “Program to Strengthen Pacific Statistics”, the ABS has delivered a number of key initiatives including the provision of technical assistance in CPI methodology both at a Regional and the bilateral level and continued the work on the production of the International Comparison Program. The ABS has also shared best practice knowledge and training on leadership and organisational development, Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, Dissemination and Government Finance Statistics.

The following provides an overview of selected key achievements under the TYPSS framework.

Key achievements

Objective 2: PICTS are producing agreed core set of statistics across key sectors

Government Finance Statistics

One of the key gaps in macroeconomic statistics in the Pacific region was the compilation of GFS. The ABS and IMF designed and delivered joint seminars on Government Finance Statistics to Pacific Island Countries in 2012 and 2013. The course was facilitated by experts from the IMF, ABS and the South African Reserve Bank. The ABS provided ongoing GFS support to the Solomon Islands with an in-country visit in 2012 and support to Vanuatu via email to assist with GFS work. Results include

- Solomon Islands (SI) have a preliminary set of cash-based **Government Finance Statistics (GFS)** tables for central government compiled in accordance with the *GFSM 2001* for 2008-2010.
- The Fiji MoF will compile a revised set of preliminary data for budgetary central government by mid-2013.

Pacific International Comparison Program

The primary objective of the Pacific ICP project is to facilitate the participation of the Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) in the International Comparison Programme (ICP). The ICP seeks to compare price levels and real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) globally, currently involving the participation of approximately 200 countries world-wide. A second objective of the project is to use the Pacific ICP as a means for building capacity in the closely related areas of Consumer Prices (CPI) and National Accounts. This will be the first time for many of the PICTs to participate in the ICP.

Following several data validation workshops held in the Pacific in 2012 and 2013, the key outcomes were

- An improved understanding of the importance of properly validating statistical data, and therefore greater attention to this aspect of the work of an NSO. This should improve the quality of the ICP results and other statistics produced by the NSO.
- The process of data validation has resulted in progressive improvement to the dataset, and provided tangible evidence of value of data validation.

Consumer Price Index

Two CPI workshops were held in 2012. The first *CPI Work Attachment* was attended by the bilateral countries as well as delegates from PNG and Timor-Leste. The second workshop was the *Prices Regional Workshop* attended by 20 participants from across the region. The purpose of the workshops was to strengthen the capacity of Pacific National Statistics Offices to produce Price Indexes in a reliable, timely manner using appropriate and sustainable methodologies. Results included

- Increased understanding and applying macro-economic statistical concepts by Pacific Statisticians when producing **Consumer Price Indexes** (CPI).

Civil Registration and Vital Statistics

ABS out-posted an officer to work on the Pacific Vital Statistics Action Plan. This initiative played a major role in increased training and coordination. Overall the following outcomes were achieved:

- An increased knowledge of the importance of birth and deaths data and how these can contribute to understanding progress against broader MDG outcomes
- An increase in collaboration within countries between the NSOs and the Health departments;
- Active participation across the region which has seen the Pacific leading the way in CRVS.

Objective 3: PICTS have their own capacity or are accessing regional capacity to undertake agreed core and some specialist's statistical functions.

The ABS has provided development in leadership and building organisational capacity through a variety of initiatives.

Leading a National Statistics Office - the objective of this course is to strengthen the role of the NSO in leading the Vanuatu National Statistical System. This workshop was held in Port Vila 20-22 June 2012. A total of 22 participants attended half from the VNSO the other participant from a variety of Government Departments.

Pacific Leadership Forums – three successful workshops held, in 2011, 2012 and 2013 with active participation by PICT statisticians leading to notable growth in engagement and understanding of roles and responsibilities

Leadership Mentoring – programs with Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands, conducted by senior ABS staff and based on needs of individual country. Fiji has utilised this program the most, resulting in

- completion of the first draft of supply-use tables in preparation for the proposed release of the three measures of GDP in 2013
- progress on legislative amendments
- an upgrade to the FBOS website which now prominently displays access to statistical releases on a regular basis
- draft MOUs with agencies for accessing administrative data.

Objective 4: Pacific national and regional statistics are accessible and are being utilized

- The Vanuatu Ministry of Tourism incorporated analytical technique of 'Indexing' in its statistical publication as a result of attending *Turning Data into Information (TDII) workshop*, making it easier to compare the rates of change in 'visitor arrivals' data across different countries of origin.
- The Turning Data into Information was attended by VNSO, Ministries, Government Departments and financial bodies. Success was achieved in building statistical capability and strengthening their collaboration.
- ABS officer collaborated with the SDP in presenting at their Regional Trade Statistics workshop on 'Maintaining Relationships with Key Data providers for International Trade Statistics – Customs'. With over 50 participants attending from across the region, the outcomes included: increased knowledge on the compilation and use of trade statistics and the importance of engaging with the key data providers such as Customs. A working group on International Trade Statistics in the Pacific Region was also formed.

Objective 5: New and innovative statistical tools and systems have been introduced

- Further collaborative work completed with SPC-SDP on the development of the best-practice Pacific Business Register Manual.
- Developed recommendations/implementation plan for improved system for processing information collected.

Challenges

ABS has continued to focus on providing statistical support and technical assistance, while also supplementing this with organisational development support of a non-statistical nature particularly with the bilateral countries.

The capacity of NSOs in the Pacific to absorb technical assistance is varied. The Mentoring Program has been useful in illustrating this, in so far as it highlighted the capacity differences between the bilateral countries. Apart from the differences in individual's leadership styles, there are also differences as a result of the variance in staff numbers, capacity of existing and new staff and the profile of the NSO within their broader government administration.

One challenge for the ABS in providing development support to Pacific Island countries is the limited capacity for the NSOs to participate and maintain the capacity development. Pacific Island NSOs are under resourced and frequently face a tight budget position allowing little room for growth or even the ability to support baseline statistical operations. Indeed, a large proportion of the main statistical indicators are solely reliant on external funding. Unless there is a coordinated funding process which allows the NSO to complete a whole cycle from development to dissemination Pacific NSOs will struggle to establish and maintain forward work programs.

The ABS will continue to balance providing direct statistical technical assistance and providing assistance into the strengthening of the organisational frameworks and practices to ensure that the NSOs function appropriately. There also continues to be fundamental gap for many of the NSOs in the organisational mechanisms that support staff and the Statistician to perform basic work functions. There is still a need for some targeted and simple support in basic organisational functions like human resources management, personal and workplace efficiency, and time tabling and work plan development.

Way forward

In the future, the ABS seeks to

- Continue to contribute to the direction of TYPSS priorities and progress, including through the PSSC
- Continue to provide technical and other assistance under TYPSS, and identify areas where there are gaps
- Strengthen relations with regional partners, SPC, StatsNZ and others
- Harmonise efforts in the Pacific region with StatsNZ through a proposed partnership agreement
- Strengthen management, monitoring and evaluation of program outcomes
- Continue to offer mentoring opportunities and assistance for senior management staff.