

SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY

REGIONAL MEETING OF HEADS OF PLANNING AND HEADS OF STATISTICS (HOPS)

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Session 7:

Reflections on the Future Directions of the Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy, 2011 - 2020

(Mr. Muagututia Sefuiva Reupena, 2010 – 2013 Chair of PSSC, Samoa Bureau of Statistics)

Background

It is now widely accepted that timely and reliable statistics on economic and social issues for Pacific Island countries (PICs) are critical for establishing the evidence-base on sound forward-looking policies need to be built. Statistics are therefore essential for planners and policy makers, as well as for development partners and the international development community as a whole. The impact of the global economic situation, the generally poor economic performance of many of the resource-poor and smaller PICs and the increasing diversion of development assistance from projects to budget support, make timely, reliable official statistics increasingly important to inform policy choices and decision-making.

However, in general, NSOs continue to be poorly resourced through national budgets. Few PICs have national statistics strategies to provide any form of funding leverage with finance ministries. Without a clear and documented strategy for statistics development NSOs are often unable to present a clear need for resources. Considerable NSO management time is therefore spent negotiating funding from development partners for regular (and usually mandatory) census and other critical surveys as there has been no real guarantee that the up-front funding necessary for such census/surveys would be available. As a consequence NSOs tend to be re-active to development partners' offers of funding rather than pro-active in planning ahead for the statistical needs of their respective countries.

A clear programme of census/surveys for each country with committed funding (based on the TYPSS programme) is needed including, *inter alia*, population, agriculture, household income and expenditure, demographic & health, labour/employment and business activity census/surveys. The programme would assist in demonstrating to national finance ministries that NSOs require additional resources to complete their work. It would also provide a basis for a forward donor commitment to meet all or part of the costs.

The value of coordinating and building statistics capacity and outputs across the region has long been recognised. The SPC's statistics programme has existed since the very start of the agency. More recently the Pacific Plan (2007) – see Box – the Cairns Compact (2009) and the Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy (TYPSS 2011- 2021) that flowed from these initiatives, provide a mandate and implementation framework for SPC, supported by PFTAC, the UN system and other international agencies, to provide technical assistance and capacity building in statistical services and coordination across the region. However the diversity of statistical systems amongst the countries of the region presents a number of challenges to standardising statistical processes. The need for NSOs, and governments in general, to report on an ever-increasing number of indicators linked to international treaties and conventions also places a massive burden on scarce statistics capacities and resources.

<p>Pacific Plan</p> <p>Priority Strategy for Statistics Development</p> <p><i>12.4 Upgrade and extend country and regional statistical information systems and databases across all sectors; Country and regional statistical information systems and databases upgraded and extended with coverage to include the harmonisation of standards, policies for access, information sharing, dissemination of information on poverty, judicial information and technology services, and the retention of historically significant records.</i></p>
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Current Status of TYPSS

Within the broad framework of the Pacific Plan strategy the TYPSS plan outlines six strategic objectives to guide statistical development in the Pacific over the decade to 2021, these strategies are:

- implementing a regular census and core survey program;
- producing a core set of statistics;
- addressing capacity constraints;
- improving data access and utilisation;
- more consistent and comparable statistical approaches; and
- effective governance.

The management and implementation of the TYPSS programme is presently overseen by regular six-monthly meetings of the Pacific Statistics Steering Committee (PSSC). The PSSC comprises six national statisticians, a development partner representative and the Director of SDD. Other development partners are permitted as observers. The PSSC keeps a close track of progress in project implementation but could, with a stronger management/governance structure, provide better oversight and stronger direction and guidance towards TYPSS implementation.

Whilst the PSSC's current mandate is generally to monitor implementation of the TYPSS, and identify strategic priorities for NSOs and development partner attention, it also has the potential to play a much greater leadership and decision-making role in the regional development of statistics. But to do this TYPSS, through PSSC, needs to have a more robust operational and governance structure.

To successfully implement TYPSS requires a more interactive and pro-active approach. It means taking statistics to current and potential users. It most certainly requires continuing support for the technical side of conducting and compiling the results from census and surveys. But statistics must become an "essential" and "go to" tool for policy development for Pacific countries and governments, assisting them to improve economic growth rates, improve performance towards key development indicators and ultimately improve the lifestyles, health and well-being of all Pacific people.

In short, on the one hand statistics need to be more policy-focused and used more effectively, and on the other, this requires users to be educated in what statistics can be used for in terms of policy guidance.

This need for statistics to be more policy-focused and for policy and decision makers to be more statistics-aware, are at the centre of my proposals for the future direction of TYPSS.

Future Directions

The following presents some discussion points as to how TYPSS, through PSSC, could become more strategic in its leadership role for statistics in the Pacific:

- a. Role and structure of PSSC: for the future TYPSS should give more emphasis to the use-of-statistics, statistics only serve a purpose when they help to influence policies and decisions; this suggests that a higher level of continuing engagement is needed between statisticians and users; the HOPS meetings are clearly essential in this regard but it is suggested that a “user-representative” be incorporated onto PSSC, this could be the Planners’ co-chair of HOPS or another Planners nominee.
- b. Besides building its user-base, other areas where more technical emphasis might be given in the future include: developing regional/international standards and meta-data across a wider range of statistics, continuing technical support in areas such as sampling in small populations, techniques for *bootstrapping* in small samples, and building south-south cooperation links. This would be facilitated by having a small core-team of trainers/mentors who would provide region-wide “institutional strengthening” and capacity building support in implementing the TYPSS work-programme. Such a team would complement and fill gaps in the existing support available through SDD, PFTAC etc. The team would be dedicated to TYPSS.
- c. Role of the SDD/SPC: a project of the size, duration and complexity of TYPSS needs to have a sound secretariat and administrative base; this is currently ably provided by the SDD team at SPC and this should continue. However it is suggested that, in addition, the PSSC Chair should be able to call on a budget for travel, communications and local office support when necessary to enable PSSC members to engage between six monthly meetings. Given the resource constraints in many small NSOs it would be desirable for the Chair to be able utilise these resources to attend high-level statistics meetings where PSSC presence would be beneficial (e.g. FEMM, SPC, UNS & ESCAP statistics).
- d. For implementation of TYPSS to be driven, rather than just perhaps happen, there needs to be an “engine”. It is therefore suggested that a Project Coordinator should be appointed with the specific task of driving TYPSS implementation forward on a day-to-day basis. The Coordinator would be supported by SDD as required for servicing PSSC and would work closely, and under the day-to-day supervision, of the Director SDD. The Coordinator would be responsible for delivering on the TYPSS work programme as mandated by the PSSC and would play a very critical role in liaising with all NSOs and development partners contributing to the TYPSS. The Coordinator would provide PSSC (including Director SDD) with regular monthly summaries of activities completed and programmed, and would provide PSSC with progress reports at each meeting. For any strategic guidance the Coordinator would refer to PSSC chair and for day-to-day issues would liaise with Director SDD.
- e. Within this framework PSSC would be responsible for: i) setting and reviewing the strategic direction of TYPSS; ii) setting the work-programme for the Project Coordinator, and iii) monitoring overall progress. In giving effect to this direction the Coordinator would

need to work closely with SDD, PFTAC, ABS, NZ Statistics and the many other potential partner agencies to coordinate and bring-in resources and expertise as necessary to deliver on the workprogramme. A “division-of-labour” between the various partner agencies would need to be agreed.

- f. The SDD would continue to be the principal supporting agency, and the work programmes of both SDD and TYPSS would need to be fully integrated and mutually supportive. SDD provides the technical strengths in demography, vital statistics, surveys, GIS etc. to support the TYPSS strategic direction but could also consider strengthening its analytical capacity and capacity building capability in the use of statistics for policy. Although the importance of statistics as a policy-informing tool is now much more widely recognised, the actual use of statistics (from population & agricultural census, HIES etc.) for policy development at national level is still weak in many countries.
- g. And further, taking up the Pacific Plan strategy, there is a need for more attention to be given to the institutional aspects of statistics development in the region. In this regard there is a need for more countries to:
 - i. establish their own national statistics development strategies in compliance with Paris 21;
 - ii. review their statistics legislation to ensure it meets the needs of today’s electronic age;
 - iii. strengthen links between NSOs and the users of statistics at national and regional levels;
 - iv. improve analytical capability in order to be able to meet the needs of users for statistics that are meaningful in a policy context and sufficient to enable countries to meet their reporting needs under international agreements and conventions;
 - v. build institutional and human capacity in all aspects of statistics compilation and use.
- h. Meeting the Pacific Plan expectations will be greatly facilitated through stronger linkages between Pacific statisticians as a group and Statistics’ Ministers acting collectively. That could be initiated by the PSSC chair being invited to be among the officials involved in such meetings, e.g. FEMM & SPC annual meetings. It is important that the links with SPC accelerate the development of this level of relationship.

Recommendations

It is therefore recommended that consideration be given to:

- a. the appointment of a full-time TYPSS Project Coordinator (PrC) to drive the implementation of the TYPSS; the PrC would work under the general direction of the PSSC and the day-to-day supervision of the Director SDD and would be responsible for delivery on the TYPSS work-programme to PSSC;
- b. strengthening the links between statistics’ producers and users by appointing a senior planner to be a member of PSSC;
- c. provision of a budget for PSSC chair to support the chair’s (and PSSC) increased role in the governance, management and implementation of TYPSS;
- d. the establishment of a small regional institutional strengthening and capacity building team (a core team of perhaps 2 or 3) with access to additional funding resources in order to be able to conduct training courses at regional, sub-regional and national levels and call on other specialist inputs as necessary; this team would, *inter alia*, assist countries to:
 - develop their national statistics strategies;

- provide institutional development support to smaller NSOs (and others as requested);
- conduct regular country or sub-regional based training (e.g. restoring the Data Analysis & Report Writing programme), calling on specialist inputs as necessary;
- promote the use of statistics for policy analysis, and reporting at regional and international levels (MDGs/NMDI);
- bring about the harmonisation aspects of the Pacific Plan and TYPSS strategies.

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