

SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY

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

(Noumea, New Caledonia, 22–26 July 2013)

Session 1: Progress in Adopting a Standardized Pacific HIES Methodology

(Document presented by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The standardized HIES project came about as a result of an endorsement by the *Pacific Statistics Steering Committee* (PSSC), which was established at the last HOPS in 2010.
2. To date, 4 countries have utilized the new standardized approach (or a slight modification of it) which include Solomon Islands, Nauru, Samoa and FSM. It is expected another four countries will adopt this approach over the coming 18 months, with HIES anticipated in the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Niue, Palau, and Tokelau.

Key Achievements

3. The main achievement of the project thus far are as follows:
 - a. development of a standardized HIES questionnaire, standardized classifications for income and expenditure, and a standardized data processing system; and
 - b. a 12 months field work strategy adopted by all countries thus far.

Main Challenges faced

4. The main challenges faced by the HIES working group are:
 - a. still have not got all countries on board, but hoping this will change in the near future;
 - b. still teething issues to be properly addressed such as defining household members and identifying which part of the non-private household sector should be included;
 - c. still heavily reliant on sound field work supervision for survey to succeed; and
 - d. need to develop a better long-term plan for countries in the region running HIESs.

Recommendations

5. All countries to subscribe to the regional HIES methodology, which was developed in line with Pacific Leaders call in the Pacific Plan, for a greater harmonization of statistical concepts, classifications and system, and which has been endorsed by the *Ten Year Pacific Statistics strategy* and the Pacific Statistics Steering committee.
6. Reach agreement on a list of common desirable outputs upon completion of HIES, including a poverty assessment and CPI rebase within an acceptable timeframe, and the conduct of a data analysis and report writing workshop with key staff from national statistical and planning agencies.

INTRODUCTION

7. In line with Objective 1 and 5 from the Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy “PICTS are undertaking key statistical collections as scheduled” & “New and innovative statistical tools and systems have been introduced”, the following paper provides an update of the progress made with the standardized HIES being developed for the pacific region. Included in the paper will be the following information:
 - i. Background on how the standardized HIES came to fruition
 - ii. An update on where things are at now with the standardized HIES
 - iii. Key achievements thus far
 - iv. Challenges encountered thus far
 - v. Future strategy for completion of the project

BACKGROUND

8. In 2006, the Pacific Plan, a regional policy framework, was established. Strategic objective 12.4 from this plan holds two key messages:
 - i. Development of a core set of statistics/indicators across sectors
 - ii. Striving for greater harmonization of statistical standards, classifications and systems
9. In order to address this, a consultancy team was established a little over 3 years ago which provided the platform for developing the Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy (TYPSS), 2011 – 2020. This report was endorsed by the 2010 HOPS, and in this process decided to establish the Pacific Statistics Steering Committee (PSSC) to guide and monitor TYPSS implementation.
10. The PSSC met for the first time in November in 2010, with its second meeting in March/April 2011. At this second meeting, SPC tabled a proposal for the establishment of the HIES Technical Working Group (TWG), which was endorsed and met for the first time in August 2011. The HIES TWG is comprised of representatives from 5 NSOs, TA providers as well as donor agencies.
11. It has met twice now, and provides guidance on how to move forward in standardizing the HIES throughout the pacific region.

WHERE WE ARE AT NOW

12. At this point the standardized HIES has progressed as follows:

Currently in the field

Nauru: Started in September 2012 – due to complete field work in September 2013

Solomon Islands: Started in September 2012 – due to complete field work in September 2013

Samoa: Started in April 2013 – due to complete field work in March 2014

FSM: Just started on July 11 2013 – due to complete field work in July 2014

Coming up (not fully confirmed)

Palau: Possibly due to commence in November 2013, depending on funds and staff resources

Cook Islands: Possibly starting in the next 6-8 months, depending on funds

Kiribati: Aiming to start early in 2014, but also dependent on funds

Niue: Aiming for early 2014 – planning yet to commence

Tokelau: Aiming for late 2014 – planning yet to commence

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

13. Although there is still much work to be done, a great deal of progress has been made thus far with standardizing the HIES across the region.
14. Some of the main areas of progress have included the following:

- i. Developed a very solid questionnaire template: Although this questionnaire will still need to be fine tuned more over the course of the next 12-18 months, the template in place is close to being finalized. The initial drafts were developed for Nauru and the Solomon Islands and additional improvements have been made for the FSM HIES. It is important to note that it is only the structure and approach of the standardized questionnaire that is being promoted for the region. Countries will still have every opportunity to tailor this template to their specific country needs.
- ii. Development of a standardized set of classifications for income and expenditure: In line with international best practices, classification codes have been developed for the survey to address both income and expenditure. These classifications have been modified where appropriate to address the different situations confronted with in the pacific.
- iii. Development of a standardized data processing system: This will be covered in more detail in session 5 of this meeting, but in short the new system should better address:
 - a. Data edits for checking each rounds data as the survey unfolds
 - b. Monitoring tools for the survey manager to better track the performance of field staff
 - c. A more structured approach to producing outputs in a much more timely manner
- ii. Adoption of a 12-month field collection strategy. Whilst all countries aren't tackling this the same, each country thus far is aiming to spread the sample out over a 12 month period. The key benefits from this approach include:
 - a. Better capture of seasonal effects on income and expenditure data
 - b. Smaller more qualified field teams
 - c. Opportunity to improve fieldwork over time through close monitoring of performance
15. In developing the standardized questionnaire and processing system, a lot more emphasis has been placed on addressing the key outputs along the way. This has included key outputs such as CPI, National Accounts, Balance of Payments, NMDIs, Poverty, etc.
16. In other areas of field collection there is still opportunity for flexibility from country to country in how they coordinate the field operations. A push to move towards a more team orientated approach is encouraged, and the best manner in establishing those teams will be dependent of the situation for that country. There are also numerous options for tackling data entry with the first three countries each adopting a different approach:
 - i. Nauru: One central location for all data entry
 - ii. FSM: One central location for each of the four states
 - iii. Solomon Islands: Data entry done in the field by the supervisor
17. Each has its own benefits, and is therefore up to the country to establish which works best for them.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED THUS FAR WITH IMPLEMENTATION

18. As much progress has been made with the new standardized HIES, there are still challenges which lie ahead. From a country perspective, due to the projects infancy, we still don't have all the countries on board, but as progress is made, we anticipate this will change.
19. This presents a challenge to our programme as we have limited resources to assist the countries with conducting their HIES and if countries choose to adopt different approaches we will be unable to provide the required support.
20. Another minor issue which is still being addressed is dealing with complex conceptual and coverage issues the HIES produces. A couple of examples include:
 - i. Defining a household: Whilst sounding simple in theory, when trying to capture economic activity for a pre-defined group of people "the household", identifying viable members of that household, especially in the pacific, throws forward many challenges. Developing a set of guidelines which we wish to follow is still a work in progress. This definition needs to suitably address the treatment of people who spend lengthy periods of time away from home (eg,

seafarers) as well as domestic helpers who live alongside households under a wide range of circumstances.

- ii. Inclusion of non-private dwellings: Whilst the HIES is primarily a private dwelling survey in many countries, inclusion of certain non-private dwellings may be appropriate to better capture economic activity within that country. A prime example is workers barracks in Palau, where many foreign workers reside and contribute significantly to the economic well being of the country.
21. Whilst those challenges still exist, the number one issue still facing the success of the standardized HIES is how well field supervision takes place. Regardless of how well the planning of the survey unfolds, if the field work is not supervised suitably then significant shortfalls in the surveys full potential will be realized. In order to assist with this process a lot of effort has gone in to developing survey monitoring tools in the data processing system which will be discussed in more detail in the session 5 papers. These tools will enable the HIES manager to determine which field staff are not performing to a suitable level so things can be rectified before it's too late.
 22. A final challenge faced by the HIES team is developing a programme for future HIES work in the region. It appears from recent experience that a lot of interest is generally displayed by countries wishing to conduct a HIES, often with significant urgency. However, upon commencement of the work, motivation slips considerably, to the point where significant delays take place thus impacting on the support which can be provided by the SDD (the main technical assistance provider). This causes major planning issues for the SDD, as delays in projects such as these also impact upon the delivery of services to other countries. In order to address this, more commitment by all parties to the agreed timing of survey activities needs to be maintained as best as possible.

FUTURE STRATEGY

23. Whilst most of the work has been done to develop the standardized questionnaire and data entry system, a lot more work still needs to be done to fine tune the manner in which the processing system will generate outputs with minimum effort, maximum accuracy and in a timely manner.
24. The processing system is currently being designed in a way to simplify this as much as possible, but plenty still needs to be done to strategize the simplest way to generate all key outputs. With the Nauru and Solomon Islands HIES nearing the conclusion of their fieldwork in mid-September it is proposed to conduct an internal SDD workshop (involving a couple of senior staff from Nauru and Solomon Islands) to identify and produce each key output immediately following the cleaning of the data from these two surveys. This will then form the basis for how this stage of future HIES work will be tackled for other countries.
25. Whilst this is the proposed approach for Solomon Islands and Nauru HIES, the plan for future HIESs (once the required outputs and their strategy for their production is finalized) is to conduct in-country data analysis workshops. During these workshops participants from the NSOs, as well as other relevant government departments, will be trained in data analysis and report writing and then will then be required to produce certain components of the outputs of most relevance to them.
26. With all the requests for HIES assistance coming over the next 2-3 years, it is crucial a HIES survey plan for the region be developed such that the required assistance can be provided. This already exists in draft format, but needs to be locked in and confirmed to enable the HIES work programme in the near future can run smoothly.

DISCUSSION POINTS FOR HOPS

27. The meeting is invited to comment on:
 - i. The progress of the standardized HIES project thus far, and the approach being adopted.