

Background Brief for July 2013 HOPS Pacific Leadership Program

Introduction

In 2006, the Pacific Forum Economic Ministers' Meeting commissioned a study of the capacity of statistical services in Pacific Island Countries (PIC) and to make recommendations that would strengthen the collection, analysis, dissemination and utilization of statistics in the region. Study conclusions (completed in 2009) made reference to the need for improvements to Pacific Island National Statistical Office (NSO) resources, dissemination, coordination, training, and management¹.

2 In 2010, a second project was undertaken to develop a long term (ten year) Pacific Island Regional Statistics Plan², to provide a strategy that would lead to the development of more sustainable statistical offices in the region. The Secretariat for the Pacific Community (SPC) was charged with primary responsibility for coordinating the response to the Plan.

3 In May 2011, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) signed an agreement to provide a technical assistance program of work funded by AusAID to support the SPC and the PIC NSOs in addressing issues raised in the Plan. The program has five components:

- a a series of topic based training sessions,
- b training on Government Finance Statistics,
- c training and mentoring assistance to Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands,
- d training, mentoring and assistance on the implementation of the International Comparison Program (ICP), and
- e direct statistical training and technical assistance as required.

4 The overall outcome being sought from the ABS training and mentoring programs is to increase the leadership capacity of senior statisticians in the Pacific Island National Statistical Offices and increase the number of organisational initiatives implemented by NSOs to support the UN principles of official statistics. Specific elements of this outcome being sought include:

- a increased knowledge and understanding of the UN Principles of Official Statistics by senior statisticians in the Pacific Region,
- b increased ability of senior statisticians to identify and communicate with key stakeholders in government, multilateral & donor communities, counterpart NSOs and civil society,
- c strengthened corporate governance structures in NSOs,
- d strengthening of NSOs strategic frameworks, and
- e increased organisational capacity to plan statistical work program.

1 Phillip Turnbull, Gosta Guteland and Iete Rouatu, 'Strengthening statistical services through regional application: A benchmark study and way forward. A report prepared for the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat in association with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community. Final Report', June 2009, <http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/FEMM%2009%20Statistics%20Benchmark%20Study%20-%20Report.pdf>

2 Len Cook and Masasso Paunga 'A Pacific island Region Plan for the implementation of initiatives for strengthening statistical services through regional approaches, 2010-2020', July 2010, www.spc.int/sdp/index.php?option=com_docman...en

5 Over the two years since signing this agreement, ABS has undertaken various strategies and a range of activities to address each of the components listed above. The Pacific Leadership Program is one of those strategies, which has addressed institutional strengthening and leadership and management training for the PIC NSOs consistent with component 1, and a mentoring program targeted for Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands NSOs, consistent with component 3.

6 This brief covers only the Pacific Leadership Program (PLP) strategy and activities.

Institutional Strengthening and Leadership and Management Training

7 Two of the key issues identified for attention under the ABS program, were the need to improve the institutional governance arrangements that apply for PIC NSOs, and to raise the leadership and management capacity of senior NSO staff, and Government Statisticians in particular.

8 ABS developed a training program to address these priorities titled 'Leading a National Statistics Office Workshop' (LANSOW). A former ABS senior executive, Ms Marion McEwin was engaged to help design this program using adult learning principles. A second former ABS senior executive, Denis Farrell, assisted with the development of the course program, presentations and participant guide, and has facilitated each of the Workshops presented.

9 The first LANSOW was conducted in Canberra on 29 November to 6 December 2011. Denis Farrell facilitated the workshop. Senior ABS staff Denise Carlton and Gemma Van Halderen presented sessions and Ian Ewing and Michael Davies participated in a panel session. Ten of the fourteen PIC NSOs participated. Representatives from the SPC and BPS Indonesia also participated. Participants strongly supported the program content and workshop style and asked for similar events in the future to help develop their own capability and that of their senior staff.

10 A second Pacific LANSOW was conducted in Vanuatu on 20-22 June 2012. This workshop had 22 participants, including 12 from the Vanuatu NSO and 10 from other Vanuatu government agencies involved in providing and/or using statistics, including participants from the Reserve Bank, Treasury, the Provident Fund, and the Departments of Education, Labour, Customs and Internal Revenue, Agriculture, and Civil Registrations. Participants from the policy agencies were very appreciative of the opportunity to work with the NSO senior staff in discussing statistical leadership and management issues.

11 The focus of the LANSOW workshops was on exploring leadership and institutional strengthening for the National Statistical Office and the wider National Statistical System. The course presented the theory and principles drawn from the UN Handbook of Statistical Organisations and described the ABS approach to applying the principles in practice. Participants were given the opportunity to apply these principles to their own context and discuss the unique issues that arise in a Pacific Island country. This last aspect was given most time and seen to be the essence of the learning process.

12 The content of each workshop was tailored to the time available and priorities of the participant groups, but generally covered the following topics:

Leadership – what leadership is and how it differs from management, key elements of leadership of an NSO, key elements of leadership of the NSS, balancing leadership and management responsibilities, the role of the Government Statistician.

Role of a National Statistical Office – why statistics are important, what are official statistics? UN principles of official statistics, foundations of an NSO.

Corporate Governance –the governance framework, legislation, organisation of an NSO, role and purpose of internal and external governance forums.

Strategic Framework – the Corporate Plan, strategic planning, corporate values, role and expectations of staff.

Planning a Statistical Work Program – understanding user needs, assessing statistical priorities, the planning cycle, funding the work program

Project and Risk Management – why project planning is important, project planning, project governance, managing monitoring and reviewing projects, why risk management is important, a model for risk management, assessing and controlling risk, the ABS risk management framework.

Dissemination – why effective dissemination is important for an NSO, dissemination principles, dissemination practices.

13 The LANSOW for Government Statisticians that was conducted in Canberra in November/December 2011, was followed up with a Pacific Leadership Forum held in Brisbane in March 2013. Twenty-two representatives from 13 PIC NSOs and the SPC attended. This was held in conjunction with the bi-annual ABS national statistics conference, NatStats 2013. This was an opportunity for PIC statisticians to attend, observe and participate in a national statistical conference, and to spend time in the preceding Pacific Leadership Forum focusing on developments and issues of relevance to them.

14 The Leadership Forum included a range of sessions of topical relevance to PIC Statisticians. This included updates on progress with implementation of Phase 1 of the Pacific Island Regional Statistics Plan, current priorities of the SPC, updates on programs offered by the ABS and Statistics New Zealand, information about the future of the University of the South Pacific Official Statistics Program, progress with the Pacific implementation of the International Comparison Program and Vitals Statistics, discussion of Alternative Indicators of Well-being for Melanesia and Measuring Australia's Progress, a key note address by the Australian Statistician Brian Pink about influencing statistics in the Pacific Region, a presentation by a senior AusAID executive about the goals and aspirations of AusAID with its Pacific Program, and a panel discussion involving senior ABS and SNZ executives on topics raised by participants, covering legislation, capacity building, macroeconomic statistics, well-being and progress statistics, information technology, innovation and work program planning.

15 Leadership Forum participants expressed strong appreciation for the opportunity to attend the Forum and NatStats conference. Suggestions for future workshops included more in depth coverage of the topics of leadership, capacity building, dissemination, methodologies and

technologies used in collection and compilation, donor coordination and some presentations by policy makers who are users of statistics.

16 The LANSOW program, developed initially for the Pacific Program, has also been delivered twice to senior BPS Indonesia staff, and once to senior Timor-Leste DGE staff.

Pacific Mentor Program

17 Component 3 of the ABS technical assistance program funded by AusAID includes 'mentoring assistance to Fiji, Vanuatu and Solomon Islands'. Mentoring programs were established with the Government Statisticians from each of the relevant NSOs in mid-2012, with action plans developed for each of the Government Statisticians.

FIJI

18 The program has been progressing well in Fiji. There have been four visits to Fiji by the mentor, Denis Farrell. The program was set up during a visit to Suva in June 2012 and subsequent visits each of 3 days duration addressing the program have occurred in August and November 2012 and in May 2013.

19 For Fiji, the key projects that have been addressed have included:

- a review and updating of Fiji statistics legislation,
- b improve stakeholder engagement to gain access to administrative data,
- c undertake presentations to staff on topical statistical issues,
- d develop strategies for the provision of technical training for FIBOS staff,
- e advice on dissemination practices,
- f advice on statistical policy and practice,
- g advice on work program planning, and
- h setting up arrangements for more in depth ABS assistance through development of a possible MOU between ABS and FIBOS.

20 As examples, more information is provided below on the first three of these.

21 On the legislation review and update, two papers were prepared on aspects of Fiji Statistics legislation that might be improved. Based on these, a draft Cabinet Paper has been prepared and consultations held with key stakeholders. The draft Cabinet Paper is now with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Strategic Planning National Development and Statistics for consideration prior to Cabinet discussion and legislation drafting.

22 On stakeholder engagement and access to administrative data, priority has been given to arrangements with the Fiji National Provident Fund and with the Customs and Internal Revenue Ministry:

- A draft MOU has been prepared and presented to the Provident Fund. While it is being finalised, new access to Provident Fund unit record level member data has already commenced which will improve data sources for the national accounts and the new business register which is being developed with the assistance of SPC and the ABS. These data have also been an important alternative source of employment estimates which has helped increase confidence in separate employment estimates developed by FIBOS. It is expected that the finalisation of the MOU will lead to additional investment, loans and international transactions data being provided to FIBOS, leading to further improvements for national accounts, and for balance of payments statistics.
- A paper was prepared on the ‘potential use of taxation and business registration data for statistical purposes in Fiji’, for use as a catalyst to encourage senior Internal Revenue Department management to consider the provision of taxation and business registration data to FIBOS. The paper sets out the development of the relationship between taxation and statistical authorities in Australia, and the administrative and governance arrangements that have been put in place to underpin the very substantial access that ABS has to these data. The paper outlines the various uses that ABS makes of taxation and business registration data as an example, and sets out a strategy for FIBOS and Internal Revenue to follow to set up access arrangements in Fiji. A Draft MOU has also been prepared. Initiation of discussions with the Inland Revenue agency has recently occurred.
- It is intended to extend the MOU experience with these two agencies, with the Ministries responsible for health, education, customs, tourism and information technology.

23 Presentations to staff on topical statistical issues have been wide ranging and designed to expose FIBOS staff to new ideas on matters relevant to their work. Presentations have included the following topics:

- development of the ABS strategic framework and forward work program processes,
- how the ABS achieves high response rates in its business and household survey programs,
- how the ABS uses taxation and business registration data for statistical purposes,
- how the ABS forms and maintains strong relationships with stakeholders,
- how the ABS ensures data quality in statistical outputs,
- the use of statistics in policy formulation, and
- the purpose and content of ABS household interviewer ‘basic training’.

24 It would be possible to similarly expand on the other issues listed earlier in paragraph 19 that have been the subject of the mentor program in Fiji. However, the point has been made that the arrangement has been successful in identifying, developing and making progress on several important initiatives for FIBOS, in sharing the knowledge and skills of a senior statistician from a developed statistical agency, not only helping the Government Statistician, but also providing information and advice to the staff of the NSO.

25 The mentor program has provided the Fiji Government Statistician with support that otherwise would not have been readily available and real progress is being made in important areas as a result. A current proposal for consideration is the development of an MOU between the ABS

and FIBOS for deeper assistance on important areas for development, including the training of inexperienced staff. If this agreement is reached and this assistance provided, the opportunities for FIBOS will be very substantial and long lasting.

Vanuatu

26 ABS provided valuable assistance to the Vanuatu NSO in 2007-08 in helping to develop a strategic plan and to review the legislation which led to improvements to that legislation being implemented. The new mentor program sought to build on that success, reaching into areas such as improved stakeholder communication and management, improved NSO and NSS leadership and management and improved dissemination capability for VNSO and its staff.

27 Unfortunately, there has been no progress with the mentor program after the initial initiation session in mid-2012. The Government Statistician, Simil Johnson, is also the Chair of the Provident Fund. At the time of planned mentor visits to Vanuatu, the Provident Fund became the target of shareholder and political pressure that led to significant changes to management personnel. Simil Johnson, as Chair of the Board, necessarily gave priority to management of these issues. This has been followed by a period of attention to immediate priority VNSO matters. Simil has indicated that he will be ready to resume attention to the mentor program sometime around August 2013.

Solomon Islands

28 Denis Farrell visited Honiara for the first mentor session in September 2012. The purpose was to encourage, guide and support the Government Statistician, Douglas Kimi, in the achievement of goals outlined in the agreed Leadership Action Plan ie

- increased capacity to communicate effectively with key stakeholders, to help them understand the importance of statistics, and to work collaboratively with them to meet national and international information requirements,
 - change the management structure and position arrangements in the NSO to better achieve work program priorities, and
 - develop a long term capacity building strategy for the NSO,
- b participate in management activities in the NSO office and discuss opportunities for Douglas to improve personal leadership and organisational processes,
- c support Douglas in identifying emerging issues and plans to address them, and
- d guide Douglas in developing communication strategies for main local and international stakeholders.

29 Early in the visit it became clear that the Action Plans developed for the mentor program in May 2012 were not appropriate to fully pursue at the time. The workload with the HIES underway, the general lack of quality support that Douglas had, and the lack of delivery on most elements of the ongoing core work program, indicated that the Action Plan aspirations were not the main priorities and at a level beyond the Office capability at the time. It was clear that the NSO required much more substantial, ongoing assistance in the Office on a day to day basis. The mentor program has therefore been suspended and discussions are underway with AusAID about the possibility of funding a more substantial ongoing level of support to the Solomon Islands NSO.

Conclusion

30 Work to date has established that the initial aspirations of the ABS Pacific Leadership Program are appropriate and needed. Pacific NSOs generally have been found to be high on ideals and intention, but very needy of support in action. Generally at the Government Statistician level, learning is still occurring about most of the issues covered in the LANSOW agenda. There is encouraging progress in Fiji where the Government Statistician is actively engaged.

31 At the PSSC there has been a noticeable improvement in PIC Government Statistician participation, engagement and acceptance of role and responsibility. In this regard, perhaps the work that ABS has done over the past two years has in some way contributed to the development of the participants.

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