

SECRETARIAT OF THE PACIFIC COMMUNITY

REGIONAL MEETING OF HEADS OF PLANNING AND HEADS OF STATISTICS (HOPS)
(Noumea, New Caledonia, 17-21 September 2007)

Future directions for evidence-based decision making in the Pacific

REVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS OF PREVIOUS MEETING
(Document prepared by the Secretariat of the Pacific Community)

INTRODUCTION

1. At the first Regional Heads of Planning and Heads of Statistics meeting at SPC headquarters, Noumea, 4-7 April 2005, sixteen recommendations were made. These recommendations covered a range of issues facing statisticians and planners of the region, and can be summarised as follows:
 - a) improved quality of statistical data;
 - b) greater support for economic statistics to Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs);
 - c) enhanced analysis and reporting of social information, including MDG indicators;
 - d) maintenance, and further development, of PopGIS;
 - e) greater capacity within PICTs to determine national population and development priorities; and
 - f) assistance to PICTs with their population and housing census in the 2010 Census Round of censuses, and with other household surveys.

PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING MEETING RECOMMENDATIONS

2. Attachment 1 provides the actions taken on the 2005 meeting recommendations. Many recommendations did not specify a particular agency to take responsibility for implementation. Nevertheless, all recommendations have been either implemented, are in the process of implementation or will be implemented in 2008. It should also be noted that the actions specified in Attachment 1 focus on those taken by the SPC.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

3. The meeting is invited to comment on the following discussion points:
 - a) Are the actions documented in the attachment comprehensive and accurate?
 - b) Are there action strategies which could be pursued to further meet the 2005 meeting recommendations?

Actions taken on recommendations of the 2005 Regional Heads of Planning and Heads of Statistics meeting

	Recommendation	Action taken
1	<p>Recognising the need to work more closely together in order to improve decision-making processes, planners and statisticians agreed there was a need to review existing mechanisms for obtaining and analysing statistical data and information for policy making, planning and monitoring in order to identify ways for improving the quality, relevance and timeliness of data.</p>	<p>This recommendation is reflected in a similar recommendation of the 2006 FEMM meeting and the Pacific Plan initiative to “Upgrade and extend country and regional statistical information systems and databases across all sectors”. The SPC is the lead CROP agency in implementing this Pacific Plan initiative and is collaborating with PIFS on a benchmark study “Strengthening statistical services through regional approaches: A benchmark study and way forward” to address the FEMM recommendation. The “Future directions” sessions of the current meeting will further address this recommendation.</p>
2	<p>In recognition of the importance of economic statistics, and mindful of both the difficulties faced by PICTs in producing timely statistics and the generally inadequate levels of support provided to PICTs in the area of economic statistics on a regional basis, a regional review of issues, needs and options for meeting needs with respect to economic statistics should be carried out. In addition, the potential for developing an integrated regional plan for providing assistance to PICTs on economic statistics and analysis should be explored, possibly in the context of the Pacific Plan.</p>	<p>A draft proposal for the SPC to host an economic statistics unit has been developed and distributed to relevant development partners, and considerable “in-principle” support has been received. Further refinements to the proposal are planned in the near future to address outstanding development partner concerns. The SPC is optimistic that support will be forthcoming at that time.</p> <p>The benchmark study referred to above will also progress this recommendation.</p>
3	<p>That a statistics advisor/trainer position be established by SPC for the purpose of assisting NSOs and planning offices provide timely and accurate economic statistics for analysis and decision making.</p>	<p>The proposal referred to above directly addresses this recommendation, while going further than the proposed single position to a more effective team of relevant specialists to make a real difference in this area.</p>
4	<p>In recognition of the impact out-migration is having on small island states, the reasons for out-migration in small island nations should be studied, and recommendations provided relating to improvement of socioeconomic data and formulation of policy to deal with its effects, including the economic implications.</p>	<p>To date, no specific request for undertaking such a study has been received by SPC.</p>

	Recommendation	Action taken
5	In recognition of the significant social and health impacts of certain adolescent health issues, including but not limited to teenage (below age 15-19) births and HIV/AIDS, recommendations should be made regarding the improvement of socioeconomic data and information related to adolescent reproductive health.	SPC's sexual and reproductive health program has been gradually consolidating and expanding its database in recent years, and the regional DHS pilot program currently undertaken by SDP in four Pacific island countries will also contribute to substantial improvement in this area.
6	Appreciating the interest shown by countries and territories in the SPC population GIS, with several countries and territories requesting to be included in future development activities, the meeting endorsed the Secretariat's proposal to pursue a balanced approach ensuring that any new developments go hand in hand with maintaining active system support to current <i>PopGIS</i> countries, to ensure ongoing sustainability of the population GIS in these countries.	The SPC PopGIS project has maintained its strong support amongst PICTs. In those countries and territories where the PopGIS system had been introduced, ongoing maintenance support for the system has been provided, with existing systems periodically updated with new population and socio-economic data, to enhance policy and planning applications. Since the 2005 meeting, new national systems have been developed for the Cook Islands, Tuvalu and Wallis and Futuna, a prototype has been developed for PNG, and work is currently progressing in developing a PopGIS for Tonga and New Caledonia.
7	Noting that past surveys and reviews may not have accurately assessed overall national priorities, the methods used by agencies for determining national priorities with respect to population and development should be reviewed and improvements proposed.	The determination of national priorities is the responsibility of national governments. The 2005 meeting clearly identified that national methods and mechanisms for determining population and development priorities were weak. The major focus of the joint SPC/UNFPA project "Integrating gender and population issues into population and development policies and plans in Pacific Island countries" (2005-2007) was directed at developing national capacity in this area.
8	Taking into account country requests, technical assistance should continue to be provided to PICTs to assist them in implementing national MDG frameworks, in conducting monitoring and evaluation of MDG activities, and ensuring data quality. This assistance should include advice on the establishment of national MDG taskforces.	SPC remains committed to supporting PICTs MDG activities. SPC has shifted emphasis towards supporting PICTs in the implementation of their national development plans through Joint Country Strategies (JCSs). These plans have close linkages with the MDG framework, so the JCSs enable the full range of SPC technical assistance to be engaged to support PICTs achieve their national priorities including the MDGs.

	Recommendation	Action taken
9	<p>Recognizing the many unique features of the Pacific region, and the high number of organizations, plans, strategies and platforms that are regional in scope, there is a need to develop regional indicators for the MDGs that can assist countries and the region in accurately assessing progress in achieving shared (regional) development goals and objectives, and that can be used to fulfill international reporting requirements.</p>	<p>An SPC/UN/CROP MDG Task Force mission to Tuvalu was undertaken in 2005. This mission identified the goals, objectives and strategies in the Tuvalu national development strategy which were comparable to the MDG framework, and highlighted gaps to be addressed in the national development strategy. In addition, new targets were identified and indicators developed within the MDG framework to 'localise' the framework for Tuvalu's development priorities.</p> <p>With the establishment of the UNDP Pacific Sub-regional Centre (and appointment of a Pacific Regional MDG Specialist within the centre), the SPC has focused on assisting PICTs and the region in developing national and regional development indicators by assisting in a range of data collection activities (Population and Housing censuses; Household Income and Expenditure Surveys, Demographic and Health Surveys) and have strongly encouraged (and been largely successful) in harmonising data collection instruments and methodologies to enable regional relevance and comparison, while retaining the capacity to meet international reporting requirements.</p>
10	<p>Recognizing the benefits that can accrue from greater utilization of existing national and regional expertise, a regional directory of personnel, departments and agencies with expertise and capacity in statistics, including in relation to the MDGs, should be established.</p>	<p>This recommendation has not been implemented, but the SPC remains committed to the initiative and envisage compiling the directory in 2008.</p>
11	<p>Recognizing that Pacific territories were not covered by the Pacific Islands Regional MDG Report 2004, options should be explored for providing assistance to Pacific territories in reporting on those MDGs that they identify as relevant to their situation.</p>	<p>An MDG workshop for SPC member PITs was held in 2006 to explore the appropriateness and availability of MDG indicators in PITs. Follow-up technical assistance to PITs was offered at this regional workshop once territorial commitment to MDG reporting was secured. The SPC awaits feedback from the territories on their commitment.</p>
12	<p>That SPC, UNFPA, ESCAP and other agencies, in consultation with PICTs and in collaboration with each other, establish a mechanism for regional cooperation in the provision of financial and technical services to ensure the successful completion of the 2010 round of population and housing censuses in the Pacific.</p>	<p>The financing of population censuses in the Pacific varies markedly, from census operations funded entirely from internal national resources, to those requiring substantial external assistance. SPC and development partner agencies have successfully assisted PICTs to fund their 2010 censuses where required. Technical assistance has been successfully provided through the SPC executed 2010 Census technical assistance project (2006-2008), in collaboration with other relevant technical agencies.</p>

	Recommendation	Action taken
13	That SPC and UNFPA collaborate in producing a handbook for conducting censuses that is directly applicable to PICTs.	The production of a handbook for planning and conducting censuses that is directly applicable to PICTs will be undertaken in collaboration with UNFPA as part of the work programme of the SPC executed 2010 Census project.
14	That SPC and UNFPA undertake to review and if necessary revise the model/common census questions for use in the 2010 census round.	The model/common census questions for use in the 2010 census round was reviewed at a regional census meeting in March 2006. The agreed model/common census questions are being promoted through the SPC executed 2010 Census project.
15	That SPC review the staffing situation in the Demography/Population and Statistics Programmes, taking into account assistance requirements for the 2010 census round, and to strengthen economic statistics and related activities.	The staffing levels of the SPC Statistics and Demography Programme has been significantly increased from the 2005 meeting, from 8 to 12 professional. It is recognised that staffing levels are still inadequate to fully service the statistical needs of the region in a number of areas (particularly, but not restricted to, economic statistics) and strategies are in place (such as the development of funding proposals for the consideration of donor partners) to progress this staffing shortage.
16	That SPC assist those countries requesting such assistance to source financial aid to conduct their data collection operations and analysis.	As mentioned in the action to recommendation 12, SPC has assisted countries, where requested, to seek external financial assistance to support their population and housing censuses. Furthermore, the SPC has assisted in the direct financing and financial administration of many HIESs and DHSs.