

Statistics for Development Division (SDD)

5th Regional Conference of Heads of Planning and Statistics (HOPS)

(Noumea, New Caledonia, 14–16 November 2017)

SPC/HOPS 2017/Session 9 – Information Paper 7

Original: English

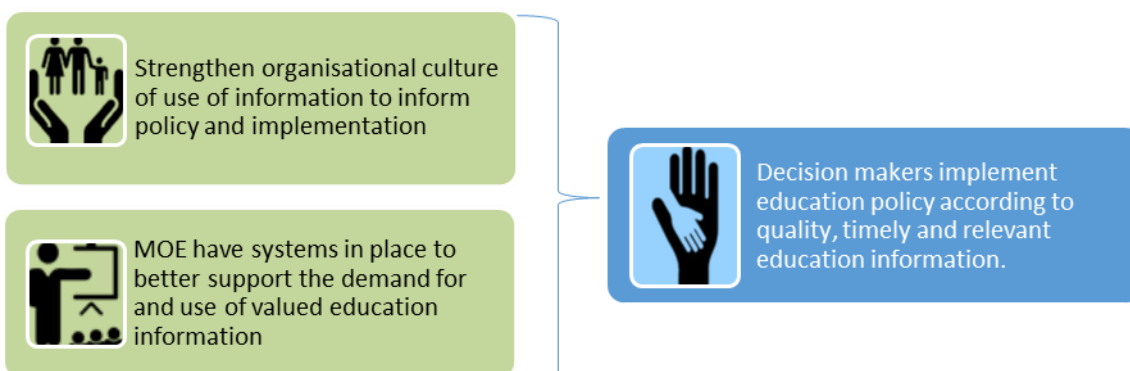
SESSION 9 – EDUCATION STATISTICS AND REGIONAL SUPPORT FACILITY FOR EDUCATION MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Document developed by Scott Pontifex, Team Leader

Education Management Information System Regional Support Facility, Pacific Community, on behalf of SPC's Educational Quality and Assessment Programme

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The establishment of the Education Management Information System (EMIS) Regional Support Facility at SPC to strengthen Pacific-wide EMISs has been a key feature of statistical development in the region as one of four core priorities of the Ten Year Pacific Statistics Strategy 2011–2020 (TYPSS).



2. The EMIS Regional Support Facility was initiated in April 2015 and is funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade with an overall goal to provide support to Pacific Island countries (PICs) to increase the effectiveness of their EMISs.
3. Stronger EMISs across the region have begun helping to provide quality education data collection, analysis and dissemination. These data enhance monitoring, lead to better education policies and decision-making, and better resource allocation in the education sector. In addition to building EMISs to better support the demand for and use of valued education information, the EMIS Facility has focused heavily on strengthening organisational culture of use of education information, which in turn helps drive informed decision-making for policy development and implementation.

CONTEXT

4. In the Pacific Islands region, education data informs decision-making for a broad audience, including the community, through parents' selection of schools for their children; school teachers and principals; central government resource allocations; and development partner investment prioritisation. Education stakeholders at all levels rely on these data being of high quality to ensure their decisions are reliably informed. Improved timeliness, quality and use of education statistics will help PICs and development partners to make more effective planning, policy and investment decisions. The consequence of statistical data not being of high quality is that users risk making misinformed decisions, resulting in inefficient allocation of private, government and donor resources, and impeding progress towards achieving education outcomes.
5. Over the past 20 years, various attempts have been made in PICs in developing EMISs within ministries of education.
6. Efforts in EMIS development historically have focused on technological aspects, including hardware purchasing and software development. Unfortunately, very little focus has been directed towards building data awareness, statistical skills and capacity building within EMISs, which is a major challenge for the Pacific region.
7. Reviews of EMISs in some PICs have highlighted issues and challenges faced in their development and the extent of their usefulness in the overall development processes of education systems of countries. For example, the review undertaken around the management of education data in the Pacific (Pacific Education Management Information Systems – Rapid Review, 2012), found that effective ongoing management of education information systems requires all stakeholders to be engaged, understanding user incentives and developing the capacity and responsibility of the data users as well as the people responsible for data collection and dissemination.
8. It is recognised that an EMIS, if fully functional, is a powerful tool for educational development, and is considered a worthwhile investment for countries, donors and development partners. However, many of the EMIS problems encountered by individual ministries of education are common across several countries. Prior to the establishment of the EMIS Regional Support Facility, such issues were often uncoordinated and addressed in a haphazard manner by each country. Development partner resources have been used to support several countries in solving very similar problems with varying degrees of success and with limited sharing of solutions, which led to the establishment of the EMIS Regional Support Facility based at SPC's Statistics for Development Division (SDD).
9. As at 1 April 2017, the EMIS Regional Support Facility moved into SPC's Educational Quality and Assessment Programme (EQAP) based in Suva, Fiji. The current scheduled EMIS facility project completion is December 2017.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

10. Significant progress has been realised by PICs in the development of EMISs and education statistics over the past three years. Some key achievements include improved coverage of primary and secondary school data in the region from each country's annual school census, publication of an Education Annual Statistical Digest report, and the establishment of EMISs in 13 SPC member countries.
11. SPC, in collaboration with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute of Statistics (UIS), has undertaken a Data Quality Assessments (DQAF) in six member countries. The purpose of the DQAF is to:
 - investigate the data production chain, and provide a diagnostic of the state of the collection, production, use and dissemination of the education data; and

- assess national capacity needs and develop recommendations for support and resources required for improving the monitoring of the education sector.
12. In 2016, the EMIS Regional Support Facility established an online Community of Practice (CoP) for Pacific education statisticians and planners – known as ‘Pacific EMIS1’ – in collaboration with UIS. CoP currently has 65 members and has a growing content and advocacy to members in PIC member countries, ministries of education and national statistical office representatives. The aim of CoP is to provide a channel for training, mentoring, sharing lessons learned and networking across the region.
 13. A major benefit of utilising SPC’s Regional Support Facility resources is the development of an application that provides a ‘One Click’ data extraction tool to fulfil the international and regional reporting requirements for external agencies. Initially targeting the annual UNESCO UIS survey questionnaires, this query tool will greatly assist and facilitate the extraction and reporting of data from Pacific Island EMISs requested by regional and international agencies.
 14. In mid-2017, SPC conducted a data-use review in Vanuatu, Kiribati and Solomon Islands, focusing on senior officials’ beliefs and behaviours about education statistics and explored data use in each country’s political and economic context. The project aims at developing a report and toolkit from the findings, which will help senior managers better understand the need for high-quality data when drafting policies and decisions in the three countries.
 15. Nearly all countries in the Pacific conduct household surveys, such as the household income and expenditure survey (HIES) and demographic and health survey, on a regular basis now. Because education is a complex topic for survey measurement, SPC with the help of UIS has created a standardised survey module for education as part of its household survey programme. The module consists of a common set of questions that can be amended to include specific questions relating to the education system in each country. As part of our development of a new Pacific HIES methodology, SPC, again in collaboration with UIS, has also revised the educational profile questions to allow for better comparison of basic education statistics among countries. This module can also be included in other survey modules, thus providing countries with an effective and inexpensive opportunity to obtain comparable information over time. The module collects data on the educational status of all household members aged 4 years and older, and captures school education-related expenses and other topics. There is a need to ensure that the data requirements for Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) indicators are captured in the household survey module, including early childhood education, technical and vocational education training, and tertiary education, as well as non-formal education participation, information and communications technology skills and adult literacy.
 16. A completely new approach to collecting data from schools has been introduced as part of the Regional Support Facility’s support to Kiribati’s Ministry of Education. This innovative approach to data verification involves ministry officials verifying school data through interviews with school leaders, supported by statistical and historical data comparisons. This is particularly well suited to Kiribati, which has a robust paper-based record keeping system, dispersed school locations, low technology and a limited communications environment. The handheld tablet technology was tested successfully and the training of ministry officials has led to all island-based officials being fully or semi-independent in using the technology.²
 17. SPC wants to place statistics and data quality at the centre of the Pacific education development agenda. This will support and inform the strategic direction and quality of education at national and regional levels, and assist to more effectively monitor sustainable development. EMISs in the region provide an important role in monitoring the Pacific Regional Education Framework (REF) and SDG Goal 4, given there is wide variation in the region when it comes to international reporting, monitoring and

¹ <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1374826572549369/>

² <http://www.spc.int/blog/pacific-community-digitalizes-education-data-collection-in-kiribati/>

evaluation of the REF framework. As a result, the EMIS Regional Support Facility works closely with the DFAT-funded project 'Improve the Quality of Regional and International Monitoring of Education in the Pacific' (2014–15 to 2016–17), which is being implemented by the UIS.

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED THUS FAR WITH IMPLEMENTATION

18. While there are technical challenges relating to information and communication technology and database support, these cannot be addressed in isolation because good statistics are derived from good data collection processes. Technical advice needs to support efforts to obtain better data quality through higher response rates for all education levels.
19. School census data continues to impact on the calculation and validity of national-level education indicators in the region. This reflects the continued poor perception of unreliable and unrealistic statistics and baseline indicators hindering effective education monitoring and evaluation, planning and policy-making, resulting in a lack of 'buy in' by countries to support project activities. Staff of Pacific Island ministries of education are typically under-resourced with regard to EMIS-related activities. Where a capacity constraint exists, activities are hampered and stalled. Another challenge has been the loss of key ministries of education EMIS-related staff, leading to a skills shortage and knowledge drain, which in turn hampers progress and data analysis reporting timelines.
20. While progress has been made, challenges in the region are strikingly similar to conclusions drawn 10 years ago by regional stakeholders. More specifically these conclusions were:
 - Pacific education data are the least comprehensively and consistently reported of any region in the world.
 - There is a disconnect between political commitments and the implementation of monitoring and evaluation frameworks.
 - Data that are collected have limited use.
 - There are discrepancies in population data used to calculate education indicators.
 - There has been duplication of requests from regional and international stakeholders due to a lack of coordination among regional and international stakeholders.
21. Currently, there is no dedicated regional database for education monitoring. Rather than develop an entirely new database, SPC believes that this resource can be effectively linked to the existing and well-designed Pacific Regional Information System Management web portal (PRISM: www.spc.int/prism) and the National Minimum Development Indicator database (NMDI: www.spc.int/nmdi). The NMDI online database will become a mechanism to assist with monitoring the REF and enable users to generate reports to ministers, and provide countries with a way to report on international reporting requirements such as those of the REF and SDGs.

FOR CONSIDERATION

22. EMIS has a dual role in both strengthening statistical development and improving education quality facilitating benefits for planning and policy-making in the region. With regard to statistical development, data collected and stored in an EMIS at the national level are a critical part of the administrative data compiled in the region. In terms of the broader statistical environment, SPC is increasingly recognising and advocating the importance of administrative data as a foundation for national and regional statistics. As such, the collection, quality assurance, analysis and publication of education sector statistics should be a key priority in NSDSs.
23. Administrative data systems operate in a unique space where the collection of information for policy and planning aims to be more entrenched than statistical functions and use of surveys and population

censuses. Further, as governments increasingly move toward national identification systems and data linkage across sectors, SPC is increasingly being asked to support system interoperability between administrative data sources. Examples include:

- Preparation of data standards because many PIC governments do not yet have common ICT platforms and solutions.
- Alignment and linkage with other important key datasets as part of a country's national statistical system (e.g. Civil Registration and Vital Statistics) and advocating and supporting the importance of integrated data and data sharing across sectors, recognising this as a central tenant of both the SDGs (re: good governance and improved data for policy) and the United Nations Data Revolution.
- Investigating, facilitating and promoting linkages in the Pacific where small populations and system sizes require countries to work within the available resources and to take advantage of overlaps and commonality between sectors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

24. During this meeting of HOPS, countries are particularly encouraged to:

- note the progress made by the EMIS Regional Support Facility, which was established in 2015;
- note the collaboration between UNESCO UIS and SPC in supporting the development of EMIS and education statistics; and
- endorse education sector statistics and the improvement of education statistics (e.g. quality, timeliness) and associated EMISs as a key priority in PICs' NSDSs.