

Seventh meeting of Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific
24 March 2015 – Bangkok

REPORT

Co-Chairs: Mr Christophe Lefranc (UNFPA) and Mr Rana Hasan (ADB)

1. Welcome and adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

ESCAP gave an overview of the upcoming 4th session of the ESCAP Committee on Statistics (CST4), highlighting the post 2015 agenda as the overriding theme of CST4. The Committee would include discussions on statistics development as well as a progress report by the Partnership.

A specific proposal on more effective collaboration of partners had been raised by countries, pointing out that the success of the Partnership needs to manifest itself at the country level. The Partnership pointed to the importance of leadership by countries in capacity development activities and in that regard recognized its stated aim and responsibility in supporting the role of the NSOs as the coordinator of the national statistical systems.

2. Positioning the Partnership in the context of the emerging Sustainable Development Goals.

In preparation for the agenda item, the following background documents had been shared:

- “Partnership Implementation Strategy”, Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific, August 2011¹
- “Expert Group Meeting on data and statistics for the post-2015 development agenda: Implications for regional collaboration in Asia and the Pacific”, ESCAP, December 2014²
- “A World that Counts”, Independent Expert Advisory Group on a Data Revolution for Sustainable Development, November 2014³

In consideration of the emerging Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the meeting revisited the Partnership strategy that was agreed at its second meeting held in August 2011, particularly the strategic areas of work contained in the strategy namely: (i) advocacy, (ii) Strengthening NSOs leadership in the NSS (iii) Modernizing countries’ statistical information systems (iv) coordination in development of core sets of indicators, (v) promoting and improving administrative data for statistical purposes and (vi) coordination of statistical training.

¹ <http://www.unescap.org/events/second-meeting-partners-statistics-development-asia-pacific>

² <http://www.unescap.org/events/statistics-and-data-post-2015-development-agenda-implications-regional-collaboration-asia-and>

³ <http://www.undatarevolution.org/report/>

Each partner had the opportunity to present their views on contributions that could be made by the Partnership to the implementation and monitoring of the SDGs.

Mr Stefan Schweinfest, Director, UNSD, described the linkages between global level initiatives by DESA and collaboration with ESCAP at regional and national levels. He highlighted how the Statistical Community should support countries to enable them to coordinate assistance at the country level.

Ms Joanne Mcfadden, Statistics Adviser, DFID described the ten programmes DFID were engaged in related to Statistics. This included programmes on economic statistics, including with ESCAP, SDMX with UNSD, an initiative with IMF to enhance data dissemination, global open data initiative on agriculture, as well as statisticians based in specific countries including Afghanistan and Nepal. DFID had just released a new approach to the data revolution. DFID would continue to focus on capacity building in countries, based on National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS), and encouraged collaboration and coordination through NSDSs as much as possible.

Mr Abdulhamit Ozturk, Researcher, SESRIC iterated how the MDGs were challenging for some countries and that the new SDGs would give an increased workload to NSOs to ensure the availability of supporting statistics. SESRIC activities focused on South- South training programmes, including over 120 training activities in recent years including many joint activities with partners.

Ms Rhiannon James, Statistics and Monitoring Specialist, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia informed that UNICEF would continue to support data collection through CRVS and MICS activities. In addition there would be an increasing focus on data dissemination and how to work with NSOs and line ministries on effectively communicating data. There would be global changes to questionnaires to align with the SDGs while the regional level would focus on survey implementation, analysis and data usage.

Mr Augustine Botwe, Monitoring Specialist, Regional Office for East Asia and Pacific, UNICEF, mentioned that UNICEF would continue to collaborate with partners in countries to support household surveys.

Mr Mukesh Srivastava, Senior Statistician, Economic, Social and Policy Assistance Group (ESP), FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, highlighted that 1/3 of the SDGs would be related to agriculture. Coordination at the global level should focus on normative issues while country level cooperation would be more practical. He further highlighted that it was official FAO policy to work more with sub regional organizations, SPC, ASEAN, SAARC etc.

Ms Gemma Van Halderen, First Assistant Statistician, Population, Education and Data Integration Division, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, Chair of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Social Statistics, presented the key elements of the regional strategy to be discussed at CST4. She mentioned that 8 of the 29 TAG activity areas of work fit within the partnership implementation strategy. These are predominantly related to strengthening NSOs and advocacy. The 8 areas are:

- Support national efforts in carrying out global assessments and/or formulating national strategies for the development of statistics by promoting mutual learning and experience-sharing
- technical support to achieve funding
- development of advocacy tools
- raising awareness of importance of data
- estimation of resource need for core set development,
- regional evidence base
- providing guidelines
- leveraging data revolution, improvements to both economic and population/social statistics

As a part of the CST4 agenda item on population and social statistics under regional initiatives, the specific suggestions will be made on how to improve country level coordination. These suggestions will be shared with the partnership.

Mr Tite Habiyakare, Senior Statistician, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific described how ILO was mainly involved in standard setting related to labour data. At the national level they depend on partners. ILO was involved in the TAG and the Steering Group for the Regional Programme on Economic Statistics (SGREP), and was promoting national level activities through regional collaboration. ILO mainly provided technical assistance, including in resource mobilization. ILO welcomed the UNSD resolution on integrating household surveys to avoid duplication and reduce costs.

Ms Theresa Dickinson, Deputy Government Statistician and Deputy Chief Executive (Architecture, Design and Programme Governance), Statistics New Zealand, argued that the term modernizing is much broader than data revolution. There will continue to be a need for modernization for decades ahead. The move to use large scale administrative data is not the only area of work, although there is a need to support NSOs to deal with large volumes of data. Ms Dickinson highlighted that support to existing data collection methods should be maintained.

Ms Nilima Lal, Economic Statistician, SPC described how SPC's work was based on the 10 year Pacific strategy. The first phase focused on data collection. SPC worked closely with Australia, New Zealand, and ESCAP (including SIAP) in providing country training and technical assistance. This work had included assisting with census, CRVS, DHS, income and expenditure surveys, education, prices, other economic elements, setting up business registries and developing manuals. Further manuals would be developed for prices and trade. Under the current second phase, there was a focus on dissemination (PRISM), and SPC was looking to facilitate a commodity trade database. Ms. Lal pointed out that ideally, international agencies should source data from SPC in the future to avoid overlaps.

Mr Grant Cameron, Manager, World Bank Group (DECDG), described how data needs to be available faster than in the past and the resulting urgency to speed up the production process. He expected a move away from predominantly government funding recipients to a broader pool of both suppliers of funding for data and recipients of such funding; i.e. an overall changing funding environment. The World Bank anticipated a larger focus on data accessibility including microdata access and anonymity as well as support to the agenda on open data. Innovation would also be needed to respond to the requirement for speed in data production and dissemination.

Ms Qi He, Advisor, IMF mentioned the IMF programme for Asia and the Pacific, supported by funding from Japan. IMF had 10 programmes on economic statistics in the region. IMF aimed to integrate the programmes further with regional partners and countries; therefore the partnership meeting was considered timely, and she suggested that more frequent meetings could be considered.

Mr Nick McTurk, Population and Development Specialist, UNFPA Asia-Pacific Regional Office, highlighted how UNFPA was pushing for more use of existing data as well as increased availability of disaggregated data.

Mr Rana Hasan, Director, Development Economics and Indicators Division, ADB described various areas of work with ADB involvement, including with the EDGE (Evidence and Data for Gender Equality) programme, CRVS, Global strategy on agricultural data, ICP collaboration. Currently ADB only had specific country activities in Myanmar. A couple of areas of work were upcoming, including on global value chains, trade and value added, and business registers. He highlighted the importance of more effective advocacy with the Ministries of Finance, ADB's counterparts at the country level, to ensure more support to NSOs for technical assistance.

Ms Lisa Grace Bersales, National Statistician and Civil Registrar General, Philippine Statistics Authority and Chair of the third Committee on Statistics thanked partners for their support to statistical development and explained how she saw the SDGs change the nature of demands to the NSS. There was a need for speed and a multitude of competing data producers. She highlighted that this issue needed to be addressed by NSOs and that it would involve work on legal frameworks. In addition, Ms Bersales iterated the need for support to capacity building of Chief Statisticians.

Ms Rikke Munk Hansen, ESCAP, noted that ESCAP would continue its focus on capacity development of national statistical systems through regional collaboration, using the groups of experts established by the Committee on Statistics as the prime mechanism. Normative work by these groups of experts would be complemented by in-country technical assistance in the areas of CRVS, social and population statistics, gender statistics, economic statistics, environment statistics, disaster-related statistics and modernization of statistical production and services. Based on recent discussions by member States, added emphasis would be placed on strengthening underlying institutional capacity and statistical infrastructure.

Following the overview of partner activities there was a discussion on the best way to share activities in the future. Developing a regional inventory was suggested, although the PRESS already does this to some extent. Mr Stefan Schweinfest mentioned that DESA was working on a global inventory. Pointing to the need to collaborate in the design and planning of activities and not only at the time of implementation, it was noted that the most beneficial way forward might be to share strategies, and that an annual statement on strategies from partners would be useful. In addition a basic list of names and emails could assist partners in coordinating.

3. Partnership intervention at the meeting on “Collaborating to Strengthen Statistical Institutions”

In preparation for the agenda item, the following background document had been shared:

- “Collaboration to Strengthen Statistical Institutions”, concept note, ESCAP, March 2015

Based on the discussion under agenda item 2, a joint intervention by the Partnership to the discussions on collaboration to strengthen statistical institutions was agreed upon. The statement included the following key points:

- The Partners welcome that statistics is shifting into a development issue in its own right. The partners recognize this as an exciting opportunity, which may attract additional funding to the area of statistics. However, it creates an added pressure for data provision at the national level in parallel with a desire for more and faster data.
- Despite this shift, the partnership strategy developed in 2011 remains relevant, although a larger focus on sharing and aligning the strategic directions of organizations may be needed while bearing in mind the short term needs for data and the long term necessity to build effective statistical systems.
- Related to this it was highlighted that predictable and continuous funding is necessary and support should not just be area-specific but also related to cross-cutting issues such as institutional development and governance.
- The partners agree on the importance of collaboration and coordination and reiterate that responsibility for coordination should be at country level with NSOs. It is acknowledged that NSOs and national statisticians should be equipped, also with partner support, to coordinate at the country level.

4. Partnership statement to the ESCAP Committee on Statistics

In preparation for the agenda item, the following background documents had been shared:

- Report of the activities of the Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific (E/ESCAP/CST(4)/13)⁴
- “Expert Group Meeting on data and statistics for the post-2015 development agenda: Implications for regional collaboration in Asia and the Pacific”, ESCAP, December 2014⁵

The work of the Partnership during 2013-2014 would be reported to the Committee on Statistics under agenda item 5(b), scheduled for Thursday 26 March.

It was agreed that the Co-Chairs would reiterate the statement given to the meeting on “Collaborating to Strengthen Statistical Institutions” to the Committee.

⁴ <http://www.unescap.org/official-documents/committee-on-statistics/session/4>

⁵ <http://www.unescap.org/events/statistics-and-data-post-2015-development-agenda-implications-regional-collaboration-asia-and>

5. Initiatives on statistics development in Asia and the Pacific

For time keeping purposes, it was agreed to skip this agenda item, which had been partly covered under agenda item 2.

6. Election of Co-Chairs

While the Terms of references of the Partnership indicate that co-chairs should be elected every two years, ADB and UNFPA have co-chaired the Partnership since its initiation in 2010. The Partnership thanked ADB and UNFPA for their services and welcomed the offer by the two organizations to continue as Co-Chairs should no other members wish to come forward. It was agreed that any partner wishing to nominate should do so by email to Rikke Munk Hansen, ESCAP before 7 April 2015.

Note from the secretariat: By 7 April, no expressions of interest have been received; ADB and UNFPA will therefore continue to co-chair the Partnership for the period 2015-2016.

7. Next meeting and other matters

The 8th meeting of the Partnership will be organized in conjunction with the 26th Session of the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities to be held in Bangkok at the UN Conference Centre during 1-2 October 2015.

The secretariat informed the Partnership that the CCSA in 2015 would be held back-to-back with the Global SDMX Conference, taking place in the UN Conference Centre during 28-30 September, and encouraged participation by Partners.

Annex 1

Seventh meeting of Partners for Statistics Development in Asia-Pacific
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LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

MEMBEERS

Australia

Ms Gemma Van Halderen, First Assistant Statistician, Population, Education and Data Integration Division, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra

New Zealand

Ms Teresa Dickinson, Deputy Government Statistician and Deputy Chief Executive (Architecture, Design and Programme Governance), Statistics New Zealand, Wellington

Philippines

Ms Lisa Grace Bersales, National Statistician and Civil Registrar General, Philippine Statistics Authority, Quezon City, Philippines and Chair of the Third Committee on Statistics

Samoa

Mr Aliielua Salani, Assistant Chief Executive Officer, Samoa Bureau of Statistics, Samoa

UNITED NATIONS SECRETARIAT

Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)

Mr Stefan Schweinfest, Director, United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), DESA, New York

UNITED NATIONS BODIES

United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

Mr Augustine Botwe, Monitoring Specialist, Regional Office for East Asia and Pacific, UNICEF, Bangkok

Ms Rhiannon James, Statistics and Monitoring Specialist, UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, UNICEF, Kathmandu

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

Mr Christophe Lefranc, Technical Advisor on Population and Development (Census and Data), UNFPA Asia-Pacific Regional Office, UNFPA, Bangkok

Mr Nick McTurk, Population and Development Specialist, UNFPA Asia-Pacific Regional Office, UNFPA, Bangkok

SPECIALIZED AGENCIES

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

Mr Mukesh Srivastava, Senior Statistician, Economic, Social and Policy Assistance Group (ESP), FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, FAO, Bangkok

International Labour Organization (ILO)

Mr Tite Habiyakare, Senior Statistician, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, ILO, Bangkok

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

Ms Qi He, Advisor, IMF, Washington, D.C.

World Bank

Mr Grant Cameron, Manager, World Bank Group (DECDG), World Bank, Washington DC

INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

Asian Development Bank (ADB)

Mr Rana Hasan, Director, Development Economics and Indicators Division, ADB

OTHER ENTITIES

Department for International Development (DFID)

Mr Robert Morrison, Deputy Programme Manager, DFID, Glasgow, United Kingdom
Ms Joanne Mcfadden, Statistics Adviser, DFID, Glasgow, United Kingdom

Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC)

Mr Abdulhamit Ozturk, Researcher, SESRIC, Ankara, Turkey

INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION

Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC)

Ms Nilima Lal, Economic Statistician, SPC, Noumea Cedex

SECRETARIAT

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Mr Anisuzzaman Chowdhury, Director, Statistics Division (SD)

Ms Rikke Munk Hansen, Chief, Economic and Environment Statistics Section (EES), SD

Mr Yanhong Zhang, Officer-in-Charge, Population and Social Statistics, Section (PSS), SD

Ms Tanja Sejersen, Statistician, Office of the Chief, SD

Mr Marko Javorsek, Associate Statistician, EES, SD
