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**EXPERIENCES IN PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING OF NATIONAL  
STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES**

**A Consolidated Report on the Synthesis of Country Statements**

**7 January 2004**

## **Introduction**

This report provides a synthesis of the country statements received from 22 National Statistical Offices (NSOs) in the Asia Pacific Region. The NSOs submitting country statements in time for incorporation in this report are listed in the attachments to this report.

The report follows the same format as the guide questions sent to NSOs to assist them in the preparation of their country statements. It is organized in three parts. Part A covers the role of national statistical systems in supporting the requirements of national, regional and global development goals, policies and plans; Part B covers planning, programming, and implementation of national statistical activities; and Part C provides an analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT).

Attachments A, B and C provide summaries of the responses covered in Parts A, B and C respectively, by country.

### **A. Role of national statistical systems in supporting the requirements of national, regional and global development goals, policies and plans.**

#### Alignment of policies and programs with the Millennium Development Goals and Human Development Report.

All but three NSOs specifically addressed the issue of whether their policies and programs in the National Development Plan (NDP) or the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) aligned with:

- a) Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), and
- b) Human Development Report (HDR).

Of those NSOs that are not fully aligned:

- Australia and Hong Kong reported policies and programs are aligned where relevant;
- Cambodia indicated that the PRSP is aligned with the MDGs and that the HDR is to be developed. Vietnam reported alignment with MDGs, but did not specifically address the HDR.

Three countries reported that their policies and programs were not aligned in the National Development Plan or the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, alignment is with the World Bank Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF). While Brunei Darussalam and Macao China have not directly aligned with the MDGs and HDR, they report, respectively, that they are indirectly aligned, and that most indicators are available. Macao China also notes that there is neither an internationally accepted definition of poverty nor a standard in its measurement. In Tonga, the current National Strategic Development Plan (2001-04) does not incorporate the MDGs or HDR. Design and development of national policies and programs in accordance with MDG, HRD and National Development Plan is the responsibility of the Tongan Central Planning Department.

Virtually all NSOs reported playing some role in the design and development of national policies and programs in accordance with the MDG, HRD and NDP/PRSP; and/or monitoring and evaluating such policies and programs. Provision of data for policy design and development; and provision and/or collection of data for monitoring and evaluation were the most commonly reported roles of NSOs. Several countries (Australia, Bhutan, Cambodia, Hong Kong China, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal) also reported playing a role in the

identification of data gaps, and Bangladesh has initiated new collections to support their monitoring and evaluation role. Only Fiji reported playing no specific role. The country statements of Japan, Macao China, and Myanmar did not specifically address the question of what role their agencies play.

### Institutional arrangements to promote collaboration between planners and statisticians

All but 2 (Myanmar and Vietnam) NSOs addressed this question. Of the 20 NSOs that did address the question, 5 (Brunei Darussalam, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Mongolia and Tonga) did not have formal institutional arrangements specifically established to promote collaboration between planners and statisticians. Even so, most had some structural or informal arrangements in place.

- In Brunei Darussalam, the NSO is in the same organization as the main users.
- To develop mutual cooperation in Kyrgyzstan, the NSO concludes bilateral agreements with ministries and agencies.
- In Lao PDR, the NSO belongs to the Committee for Planning and Cooperation (CPC), which also includes the Planning Department, which is a regular statistics user.
- In Mongolia, annual and mid-term economic and social plans are developed with the participation of the Ministry of Finance and Economy and related ministries. In addition, the head of the Ministry of Finance and Economy is a member of the NSO's national statistical board, and the deputy chairman of the NSO is a member of the Ministry of Finance and Economy's Minister's Board.
- Tonga simply reported that there is a close working relationship between planners and statisticians.

Two NSOs, Cambodia and Fiji, are in the process of establishing Statistical Advisory Councils. Cambodia also plans to establish a Statistics Consultative Committee, comprised of other data producers, in order to better coordinate statistical collection activity.

The remaining 13 NSOs all had some formal statistical advisory council or committee in place. Membership of these councils/committees typically includes representatives from the major planning and policy agencies, and in many countries, representatives from academia, community organizations and the private sector. Data producers are also represented on the advisory councils/committees of some countries (eg. Bangladesh, Hong Kong China, Malaysia and Nepal).

The main roles of these advisory councils/committees are to:

- advise on data needs for planning and policy making, and to specify their priority;
- approve work plans for major surveys and censuses (Thailand);
- determine guidelines and policy for the NSO in implementing its responsibilities (Malaysia);
- coordinate activities related to the collection, production and dissemination of statistics carried out by government agencies (Bangladesh and Malaysia) and non-government agencies (Nepal);
- develop a standardized statistical system (Nepal).

In some countries (eg. Australia, Malaysia and Pakistan) the advisory council/committee is complimented by a user committee or committees. Australia and Thailand also reported bilateral discussions with major users, seminars, workshops and conferences, outposted

officers and day-to-day contact with clients as means of gathering information on data needed by policy makers and planners.

### Support for capacity building

Myanmar and Tonga did not address this question. As one would expect, the NSOs of Australia, Hong Kong China, and Japan did not receive support from international agencies for statistical capacity building. Australia and Japan reported that they contribute to capacity building in developing countries. Hong Kong China participates actively in international fora and has developed strong bilateral relationships with multi-lateral organizations and other statistical agencies.

The remaining agencies all reported receiving support from UN agencies and/or multi-lateral agencies. Brunei Darussalam has not received support from ADB as it is not a member. Iran made no mention of support from multi-national agencies such as ADB, World Bank or IMF.

The most common forms of assistance were capacity building, conduct of surveys, training, and technical and financial assistance. Some countries (Cambodia, Iran and Mongolia) also reported receiving support in the form of database and processing systems, and equipment.

## **B. Planning, programming, and implementation of national statistical activities**

### Current procedures for developing long-term and annual programs and in defining long term and annual objectives

Only Tonga reported not having any long term plan or objectives. Lao PDR, Pakistan and Thailand reported having no consolidated national statistical plan. In these three countries, each agency has its own long term plans and objectives. The remaining countries all had long term work programs, typically 3 to 5 years, though Bangladesh, Japan, Lao PDR and Vietnam all reported having longer term visions or plans looking out 10 to 20 years. Australia and Malaysia reported having overall Corporate or Strategic Plans in addition to long and short-term forward work programs.

All NSOs reported having annual work programs linked to their annual budget cycle.

Australia provided the most comprehensive account of its planning, programming and implementation of national statistical activity, and would appear to have the most sophisticated planning, programming and monitoring practices and procedures of the 22 countries reporting. A Corporate Plan provides the higher level frame within which the 3 year rolling forward work program is developed each year. The Corporate Plan defines the mission, sets the medium to long-term objectives and puts forward strategies to achieve them. The plan also facilitates subsidiary levels of planning, such as the Financial Plan, Human Resource Plan and strategic plans and work programs for individual business areas and projects. These subsidiary plans are usually revised annually in the context of the three year forward work program “roll-forward” exercise.

Each year, relative priorities and competing resource requirements of all programs are extensively considered by senior management. Particular attention is given to:

- the extent to which particular statistical activities continue to be justified vis-à-vis other work for which a demand has been expressed by users;
- the cost imposed on respondents by collections, in terms of time, effort and loss of privacy

- prospective total resources available to the ABS within the three-year period
- the market potential and revenue implications of the various initiatives proposed
- productivity gains which have been achieved or which might be possible in the future
- total demands on the service areas which the proposed forward work program would entail.

Australia also notes some principles that it follows for good planning of statistical priorities.

- Regularly scan the "political" environment for changes which may effect the operation of the national statistical office.
- Maintain a strong understanding of the current and future needs of users.
- Document the statistical needs within a logical framework. The ABS has started a new process known as Information Development Plans (IDPs) and are generally prepared for a special field of statistics (eg health, transport). IDPs are developed in collaboration with key users and providers of statistical information. The IDPs summarise the most important needs of statistics, the key existing sources of statistics whether ABS or another organisation, and the specific activities which will lead to increased availability of statistics and the roles and responsibilities of key players; how effective relationships will be maintained between the key players; and the relative priorities of the different activities.
- Get an independent assessment of the overall statistical program through the Australian Statistics Advisory Council.
- Review the work program with key users from time to time to ensure it still reflects the highest priorities.
- Involve users in major methodological and conceptual changes in our statistics. Ensure they are not "surprised" when we change the methods for those statistics.
- Be responsive to informed criticism.
- Ensure that key support areas (eg information technology, methodology) are involved in discussions on statistical priorities so their work is closely aligned with that of the statistical areas.

Several countries (eg. Armenia, Hong Kong China, Mongolia, Myanmar, and Thailand) also took account of or at least acknowledged some of these important considerations and principles in describing their procedures and practices.

Malaysia's procedures for developing long-term and annual plans are not dissimilar to those described by Australia in that Five-year Corporate Plans are developed which include the overall strategic plan, human resource development program, work program by activities, new products and services anticipated, infrastructure needed and ICT Strategic Plan, the succession plan for the Department, and plans for fulfilling the requirements of international organizations and regional bodies are also considered. In developing its annual work program, the NSO convenes strategic planning sessions that refine the requirements to be completed for the particular year in line with the long-term plan taking into account the budget approved and funds available as well as priorities set by the government and user requests for the year.

Most other countries develop their annual work programs in the context of their long-term plan and objectives, but subsidiary plans and processes (financial plans, human resource and

ICT strategic plans), to the extent they exist, may not be as well integrated.

### Involvement of stakeholders

It seems that the vast majority of NSOs involve both internal and external stakeholders in the development and review of their long and short term plans and programs. While Nepal and Vietnam involve external stakeholders in the development of their long-term plans or vision, neither involve external stakeholders in developing their annual work programs.

Those countries with a statistical advisory body typically seek advice or approval from those bodies in establishing their long and short-term plans and programs.

### Approval of National Statistical Plan and programs

Final approval of long and short term plans rests with:

- the head of the NSO in Australia, Fiji, Hong Kong China, Malaysia, and Thailand. In Mongolia, Nepal and Vietnam, short-term plans are approved by the head of the NSO but long term plans are approved by the government or a government department;
- national statistical boards or councils in Bhutan and Iran;
- a government minister, cabinet, or parliament in Armenia, Brunei Darussalam, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Macao China, and Vietnam; and
- a government department or departments in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Pakistan and Nepal.

### Difficulties in the preparation and approval of National Statistical Plan and programs

Almost all developing countries identified obtaining sufficient budget as the primary difficulty in the preparation and approval of their national statistical plan. Other difficulties noted were balancing demands with provider load and budget, the lead time to develop surveys (Australia), activities in the plan not undertaken by some sectors (Bhutan), articulation of needs by users (Iran and Pakistan), provider load (Macao China), and no coordinated national statistical plan (Thailand).

### Changes to the approved National Statistical Plan

Only Hong Kong China, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Macao China and Nepal did not or only rarely made changes to their national statistical plans. Of the remaining NSOs which responded to this question, most cited budget as the primary reason for making changes. Australia, Bangladesh Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia and Mongolia all cited changing government/user priorities as a reason for change. Timing was mentioned by Brunei Darussalam and Pakistan, and availability of staff was mentioned by Lao PDR.

### Monitoring of progress and evaluation of strategic plans

In the vast majority of cases, no distinction was made between the methods used to monitor progress on implementation, and mechanisms for evaluation of the strategic plan. None-the-less, it is evident that most NSOs have some form of formal monitoring arrangements in place, although Australia, Hong Kong China, Lao PDR and Pakistan appear to have the most rigorous monitoring and review regimes.

Australia, Bangladesh, Hong Kong China, Lao PDR, Nepal, Pakistan and Samoa all reported

having their own sub-annual and annual reporting/monitoring processes. In Bangladesh, monitoring is undertaken by the Coordination Committee and the Ministry of Planning; and in Iran, progress on plans is monitored by the Department of Technical Supervision and the Secretariat of the High Council of Statistics in the NSO. The Kyrgyzstan NSO reports on a quarterly basis to the Government and the Minister of Finance. In most other NSOs, monitoring is by regular reporting against targets by project/program managers to senior management. It is not clear whether any review of the overall plan takes place in these cases.

Only Australia, Hong Kong China, Lao PDR, and Pakistan specifically mentioned having formal evaluation processes. Apart from internal evaluation and review processes, Australia and Pakistan both have independent audits and Australia belongs to a benchmarking network which it uses as a means of evaluating performance relative to other NSOs. Mongolia noted that its mechanisms for evaluating its strategic plan are underdeveloped.

### **C. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis**

#### Strengths

The most commonly recorded strengths or advantages correspond closely with what one would consider to be essential characteristics of a successful national statistical system. The ten most commonly reported strengths are listed below in order of the frequency with which they were mentioned.

1. **Good legal basis or backing for statistical activities** (Armenia, Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Fiji, Hong Kong China, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Macao China, Malaysia, Myanmar, Samoa, Thailand). Most countries citing their legislation as strength referred to the authority to collect data, provisions to protect confidentiality, and authority to coordinate official statistical activity to avoid duplication and minimize burden. Independence of the Statistician/NSO (Australia, Kyrgyzstan, Macao China) and equal access to data (Australia) were also regarded as strengths in those countries where such provisions exist.
2. **Experienced/professional/trained staff** (Armenia, Australia, Bhutan, Fiji, Hong Kong China, Iran, Lao PDR, Macao China, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Samoa, Thailand). Other important human resource strengths mentioned were dedicated, cooperative teams (Bhutan), planned programs of human resource development (Hong Kong China), Stability of management, good relations between staff and management, and involvement of young people in management functions (Armenia).
3. **Well equipped/good statistical and/or physical infrastructure, including ICT** (Armenia, Bhutan, Hong Kong China, Macao China, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Samoa, Thailand, Tonga). Other similar strengths mentioned were a good working environment (Tonga), modern premises (Bangladesh), and head office staff located in the same building (Bangladesh, Malaysia).
4. **Relevance** (Australia and Fiji). Similar strengths mentioned, which help ensure the NSO's statistical outputs remain relevant to the needs of users, were good communication networks for soliciting users' needs and feedback (Cambodia, Hong Kong China), belonging to the same organization as major users (Bhutan, Iran), decentralised system enables quick response (Japan), and direct involvement in creation and supervision of national and regional policies, programs, plans and developments (Vietnam).
5. **Public confidence/good reputation/well known** (Australia, Iran, Japan, Mongolia, Vietnam). These strengths relate to both users and providers of statistical information.
6. **Support from the government** (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Tonga).

7. **Network of statistical offices in all States and sub-districts** (Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand).
8. **Clarity of purpose** (Australia, Hong Kong China).
9. **Integrity** (Australia, Hong Kong China, Macao China). This strength covers the statistical and ethical integrity of methods used to collect and compile statistics and to the objectivity of analysis and interpretation of outputs.
10. **Well established contacts and networks/good reputation with other NSOs and international organizations** (Fiji, Kyrgyzstan).

Some other relevant strengths mentioned were proper planning systems (Armenia), good relations with other agencies and sectors (Bhutan), outputs produced with regularity and improving quality (Lao PDR), and activities are largely financed by government (Malaysia).

In terms of what NSOs do well, the two most common responses were: conducting censuses and surveys using sound methodologies and in accordance with international standards (Bhutan, Fiji, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Macao China); and being skilled in organizing and conducting censuses and large scale surveys (Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Samoa).

### Weaknesses

Not surprisingly, many of the most common weaknesses reported are the corollary of the strengths of a strong and successful statistical system. It is interesting to note that, although the most frequently cited strength was a good legal backing for statistical activities, poor cooperation or coordination of the national statistical system was identified as the most common (and potentially most serious) weakness of NSOs in the region. The ten most commonly reported weaknesses are listed below in order of the frequency with which they were mentioned.

1. **Poor cooperation and coordination**, reported by most NSOs with decentralised statistical systems, was frequently associated with a lack of consistency and duplication (Cambodia, Iran, Japan, Myanmar, Thailand), poor inter-administrative communication (Armenia), lack of support from some sectors (Bhutan, Lao PDR, Vietnam), poor statistical organization (Lao PDR), or no proactive plan (Thailand).
2. **Insufficient well-qualified /professional/trained/experienced staff** in some fields, regions and/or agencies (Armenia, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Fiji, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Macao China, Nepal, Samoa). Another related and commonly reported weakness was inadequate or not well targeted training (Macao China, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Tonga). A large number of senior staff approaching retirement (Australia) or older staff requiring frequent training (Mongolia) were also reported as weaknesses in terms of maintaining an adequately experienced and skilled workforce.
3. **Insufficient human and/or financial resources** to perform role or deal with contemporary fields of statistics (Bhutan, Cambodia, Hong Kong China, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Thailand, Vietnam), or manage quality and timeliness with available resources (Malaysia). In some NSOs this problem is exacerbated by high staff turnover (Samoa, Tonga).
4. **Inadequate accommodation, equipment, IT infrastructure** – especially in regional and branch offices (Armenia, Cambodia, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia, Nepal).
5. **Insufficient support for and recognition/priority of statistics** (Bhutan, Cambodia, Tonga). Similar or related weaknesses include an insufficient degree of legitimacy or influence to fulfill the NSO's role (Lao PDR, Nepal), not enough public relations

(Thailand), and moving from censuses to sample surveys not well understood or supported by important decision makers (Lao PDR).

6. **Data quality** does not meet user needs (Australia, Cambodia, Lao PDR).
7. **Time lag between implementation of surveys and release of results**, including response times (Fiji, Iran, Lao PDR).
8. **No reward and punishment systems** (Nepal, Samoa) and low levels of staff motivation (Armenia).
9. **Dissemination systems** are not sufficiently effective (Australia, Malaysia).
10. **Bureaucracy** surrounding recruitment, promotion and selection for training (Fiji), or budget and financing (Mongolia).

Other significant weaknesses included inadequate administrative structures in the country (Armenia) and administrative register systems in ministries (Iran, Armenia); inadequate responsiveness to emerging demands (Australia); breadth and quality of statistical publications (Bhutan); no current effective statistics legislation, professional independence or autonomous budget (Cambodia); and insufficient use of administrative data (Fiji).

### Opportunities

Questions on opportunities drew a more condensed list of responses from NSOs, with the majority identifying the increasing demand for and reliance on statistics as the single greatest opportunity to raise the priority of funding statistical activity and increasing statistical capacity building efforts by governments and donors. The five most commonly reported opportunities are listed below in order of the frequency with which they were mentioned. The extent to which and how they can be acted upon and targeted toward the weaknesses identified in the previous section presents a significant challenge to the Heads of NSOs.

1. **Growing reliance on and priority given to statistics by users and governments** (Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Hong Kong China, Iran, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Macao China, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Samoa, Thailand).
2. **Improved information and communication technology** to support business reengineering to improve data capture, processing, exchange, data warehousing and dissemination (Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Fiji, Hong Kong China, Japan, Kyrgyzstan, Macao China, Pakistan, Samoa). In turn, data warehousing of statistics compiled by NSOs and other agencies was seen as an opportunity to reduce duplication and improve access (Cambodia).
3. **Increased emphasis by international organizations** on capacity building and developing statistics in the region (Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Thailand).
4. **Increased regional cooperation**, sharing and staff exchanges (Armenia, Brunei Darussalam, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Malaysia).
5. **Good relations with/cooperation from other government authorities** (Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Malaysia).

Other significant opportunities for particular countries include the prospect of additional funding from government (Australia, Fiji) or clients (Vietnam); an agreed vision of a national statistical system where all agencies work together to deliver the statistics required, no matter what their source (Australia); plans for improving national statistics agreed (Myanmar, Nepal); the introduction of international classifications and standards (Armenia); NSO granted

autonomy to operate and an independent authority on statistics (Bhutan); training initiatives for government officials (Brunei Darussalam); establishment of a “Statistical Frame of Establishments and Enterprises” (Japan); willingness to innovate and improve (Kyrgyzstan); and a higher public profile through dissemination of NDGs and MDGs (Vietnam).

### Threats

As one would expect, there is a close correlation between the weaknesses and threats identified in this analysis. It is also worth noting that some opportunities (eg. increasing demand for statistics) also represent potential threats if users’ expectations are not managed or met.

1. **Budget constraints and uncertainty** – including dependence on funding from donors (Armenia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Fiji, Lao PDR, Mongolia).
2. **Insufficient staff/resources** (Armenia, Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, Mongolia, Myanmar) and increased responsibilities without additional resources (Lao PDR). Related threats, and significant contributors to the lack of adequately qualified and trained staff are low salaries of civil servants (Armenia, Cambodia, Mongolia) and insufficient staff training (Armenia, Pakistan).
3. **Limited coordination and cooperation** of statistical activities between ministries resulting in more duplication and inconsistency (Cambodia, Iran, Japan, Nepal, Thailand).
4. **Real reductions in resources** (Australia, Hong Kong China, Kyrgyzstan, Thailand).
5. **Increasing pressure on the statistical system** through increasing demands and complexity (Australia, Malaysia, Pakistan).
6. **Loss of public confidence** (Australia, Myanmar, Thailand). Related threats that could lead to a loss of confidence include the increasing demand for micro-level data, raising conflicts between confidentiality and utility (Japan), and significant gaps that preclude monitoring development outcomes on a regular and timely basis (Cambodia, Laos PDR).
7. **Reporting burden** on large enterprises (Macao China) and cooperation from data suppliers in poor business climate (Hong Kong China, Thailand).
8. **Security issues** related to IT (Malaysia) and insurgency (Nepal).
9. **Integrity** compromised by merger with Treasury (Samoa), conduct of public opinion surveys concerning government policies (Thailand).
10. **Response rates** and timeliness of outputs (Brunei Darussalam).

Other significant threats identified include: unsatisfactory relations with users (Armenia); occupational health and safety concerns (Fiji); low levels of statistical literacy among the general public (Macao China); and government bureaucratic controls (Malaysia).