

**DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL CAPABILITY FOR
AFGHANISTAN CENTRAL STATISTICS ORGANIZATION¹**
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PART A

Recruitment

Q1. Do the recruited staff possess the professional skills generally needed by NSO? Or is significant additional training required? Which skill area is the greatest ongoing problem?

Due to the long period of war and conflict in the country, the Central Statistics Organization (CSO), which is the only official statistical organization in Afghanistan, had neither acquired enough human resources nor the needed infrastructure during the war. It has therefore not been completely built its capacity hindering plans to collect, process, analyze, and disseminate data during and even, for quite some time, in the post war situation. The last population census conducted in Afghanistan was in 1979 and only few surveys such as Multi Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS, 2005), National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Survey (NRVA, 2005 as well as in 2007/2008), Consumer Price Index Surveys in six provinces, Household Listing (2003-2005, and in 2009-2010), as well as Integrated Business and Enterprise Survey (2009) were also carried out.

There were constraints that limited the development of skills for CSO staff to professionally carry out its tasks. However, there were trainings conducted mostly by international experts but were not enough to enable CSO to fully function as an organization that is capable of completing all stages of data collection process. Hence, considerable additional trainings are needed so that CSO can address this concern. These trainings should be packaged in such a way that it is not just limited to a classroom but more on the hands-on/doing by learning manner.

Areas that would be given priority for capacity building are in monitoring, data processing, analysis, and data dissemination. However, appropriate training in administration is also needed for proper performance in all statistical activities such as financial monitoring and reporting, budgeting, etc.

¹ Prepared for the Ninth Management Seminar for the Heads of National Statistical Offices in Asia and the Pacific, 31 August – 2 September 2010, Tokyo, Japan

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Q.2 Do you use or have used any special strategies for recruitment to ensure new staff have required skills ? (e.g. cadetships, graduate recruitment programs, take graduates from associated statistical training institutes). Please list the strategies and indicate which ones are successful and which ones have not been successful and why.

CSO still has a significant number of employees who were recruited in the past. For new recruitment, CSO is planning to tie-up with Kabul University so that fresh graduates on economics, statistics, demography, Information Technology, and Geology (for GIS and map related tasks) could be recruited. However, low salary of Government employees, in general, is a problem that limits recruitment of new graduates. With so many international and Non-governmental organizations offering high salaries, the new graduates are least interested to work with organizations such as CSO.

Q3. Have you worked closely with universities to ensure graduate programs meet the skills needs of NSO? Please briefly describe any arrangement.

In close coordination with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), an assessment has been made on the institutional capacity of CSO. On the basis of this assessment, a follow-up is currently being undertaken by the same agency to review basically if the curriculum of Kabul University would be able to respond to the needs of CSO as well as of other ministries (Ministries of Education, Health, Rural Development, Economy, etc.) responsible for data utilization for policy making and program development. After this assessment, a project document will be prepared outlining the strategies on how to incorporate skill needs of CSO and other agencies in the curricula, and to find out how the current staff of these institutions will be able to benefit. Training modules will also be incorporated in the university's system. At the same time, the program will include how the university students will benefit from these institutions available either as a venue for practical/on-the-job training (OJT) or job opportunities after graduation. This project which is planned to be operationalized by 2011 is called Training Research Information on Population and Development (TRIPOD).

Development

Q4. Does your NSO have staff development plan that is linked to goals and objectives of its long-term strategic plan or National Strategy for Development of Statistics?

Yes, the first Statistical Master Plan (SMP) was prepared in 2004. This was envisioned not only to fill in a number of data gaps but also to respond to the need for institutional capacity building needs of CSO. However, most of the plans indicated in SMP did not materialize since there was no implementation plan prepared in order to carry out the plan.

However, on the basis of the said plan and the current assessments undertaken for CSO, an Afghanistan National Statistical Plan (ANSP) was prepared, which is basically the practical feature of SMP. ANSP covers a period of four years (2010-2013), which includes the undertaking of surveys and other data collection activities as well as capacity building and statistical system development.

Q5. How does your NSO integrate the need of professional development of individual employees into the long-term plan?

Part of the assessment conducted for the preparation of ANSP and TRIPOD is on the professional capacity of CSO staff. Plans for capacity building such as classroom trainings, on-the-job trainings, diploma courses, Bachelor and Masters Degrees, which are aimed at professional development of individual employees are already incorporated.

Q6. How does your organization identify the need for professional capability building of each individual employee?

It is done through needs assessment, which includes assessment of the performance of the employees, direct interview as well as study of the educational background and institutional needs of the employee.

Q7. What are the main means used for development of professional skills of staff?(e.g. formal courses, on-the-job training, self help courses, certificates or post graduate courses offered by universities, training programs conducted by international organisations, study tours) Which means are considered to be the most effective and why? Which means are considered to be the least effective and why?

Several means are used for development of professional skills of staff. These are formal courses, on-the-job training, self help courses, certificates or undergraduates and post graduate courses offered by universities (local and international), training programs conducted by international organisations, and study tours.

As noted before, Afghanistan did not have the means to build CSO's capacity in the past. It may be noted that only one means of capacity building does not build enough capacity as all are complementary relations among several means. A theoretical course helps only when it is followed by a relevant practical work, on the job training. Meanwhile, self help is another means by which people can learn and can develop themselves.

Formal courses coupled with on-the-job training would benefit several staff at a time compared to sending one or two staff for graduate courses. However, the latter would provide extensive training which will also benefit CSO. Equally important is the training program provided by international experts. This is especially true for Afghanistan since there are only few (none in some areas) who can be considered experts. Study tours, on the other hand, will allow for exposure in new technologies and best practices of other organizations or countries.

Q8. How does your organization select employees to participate in training or other capacity building activities, especially funded by international organizations?

Knowledge of English is a major consideration in the selection of participants for international trainings. The second criterion is the relevance of the training topic with the work currently

assigned to him/her or the work he will be assigned in the future. The third criterion is based on trainings attended in the past, that is, people are not sent to the same or similar course again and again. Examinations will be there for those who qualified in the mentioned criteria.

Q9. What performance measures does your organization use to assess the effectiveness of capacity building efforts? Please describe the key indicators that you found useful in measuring the success of capacity building initiatives supported by your NSO or by others.

(If your organization has an agreed/draft list of capacity building indicators, please share it as annex to your country paper

Since CSO is just starting its comprehensive capacity building plan, there is no prepared qualitative means yet to assess the effectiveness of the capacity building efforts. However, conduct of re-echo classes by the participants which is currently being done at CSO is one means of knowing if the participants were able to absorb what was imparted in them during the training.

Organizational strategies

Q10. Are there special career paths for professional staff? Please describe arrangements.

Most of CSO employees are still undergraduates. Hence, to encourage them to complete their university courses, their working hours is shorter than those employees who are not studying so that they will be able to attend their evening classes. Also, they are provided with transportation from the office to their universities/institutes. On the other hand, those who already obtained their undergraduate degrees are encouraged to take the next higher level of education either locally or abroad. Funding support is solicited from international organizations for those who are willing to study abroad for masters/doctorate degree.

Q11. How does your NSO determine the professional skills its employees need in order to meet current, emerging and future statistical information requirements?

In order to determine the professional skills of CSO employees' need in order to meet emerging and future statistical information requirements, an evaluation of their current qualification in terms of educational level attained and trainings imparted are done. Also, the current capacities are matched with the current and emerging statistical information requirements.

Q12. Are competencies for various positions spelt out and do incentives exist for staff to obtain new competencies? Please describe the arrangements, if yes.

The government has recently adopted a scheme to increase the salary of staff based on educational qualifications and experience. Based on that, for those who do not qualify may not be able to continue unless they acquire the required training. This is expected to encourage staff to improve their educational qualification so that they could get a permanent position.

Q13. Is staff membership of professional associations encouraged? Is there active NSO participation?

There is a relatively loose association for all employees in general (contracted staff and regular employees). However, it does not seem to very active and powerful enough to help its members, yet.

Q14. Have decisions on organisational and job structure been made to address capability? e.g. centralisation of functions such as methodology or subject expertise. Please provide details, if yes.

The current structure of CSO allows for the formation of specialization by sector. For instance, there are different departments such as demography and social statistics, economic statistics, national accounts, publication and dissemination, and administrative matters. However, some restructuring appears to be needed and have to be done particularly for the Field Operations and Sampling Department. The department should be separated into two, the first one may have to deal more with the operational aspect of data collection whereas the second one may have to deal more with the methodological process and improvement of procedures for selecting sample units for surveys. These two sectors are completely different in terms of specialization and therefore need to be separated.

Q15. Does the range of work available in the organisation attract and retain qualified staff? – e.g. analysis as well as operational work

The main consideration for attracting and retaining qualified staff is the salary and not the range of work. At this point, the range of work in the Afgan context seems to be too sophisticated.

Q16. Is there a formal regular program for particular categories of staff to broaden their knowledge and skills?

With the implementation of ANSP through the funding support from the Statistics for Result Facility (SRF) supported by World Bank, the TRIPOD of UNFPA, international experts of UNFPA assisting CSO, and future cooperation with UNESCAP, a formal comprehensive regular program is envisaged to be established.

Q17. Are professional skills obtained regularly by contracting in staff or contracting out work?

International experts play a significant role in building the capacity of CSO's regular staff. In case of projects funded donors through UNFPA for the Afghanistan Population and Housing Census, experts both international and local, are contracted by UNFPA to assist CSO staff in performing census related activities. The rest is expected to be done in a different way after the SRF funded program begins to be implemented, which will materialize in about a month or two. In the latter case, CSO will be mainly responsible for most of the things with the help of a structure called Project Implementation and Coordination Team (PICT), which will be working under the CSO leadership. The said structure is not expected to stay around for long and should disappear as soon as CSO is able to carry on the work on its own.

Other

Q18. Have developments in IT made the development and maintenance of the capability of national statistical service easier or more challenging? How?

The developments in IT indeed made the processing and other statistical service easier. This is in terms of data generation and dissemination. However, with the changing technologies and increasing demand for data, CSO is not fast enough to keep up with the pace. CSO needs to be updated with new software for processing, mapping, analysis, and data dissemination. A lot of help is needed in these areas.

Q19. Are the professional requirements of NSO acknowledged in your government? Or is there no special recognition and allocation of staff occurs without consideration of the professional capability of the NSO?

As mentioned, the pay and grading system of Afghanistan acknowledges the professional requirements of government employees in general.. At the same time, it also is a way of recognition for the staff who improves his/her level of qualification.

Capability of the national statistical service

Q20. What is the general level of professional capability of the national statistical service as a whole compared with that of the NSO? Lower, the same, or higher?

As pointed out earlier, CSO still lacks enough professional capacity in almost all aspects of statistical services. Compared with statistical organizations of neighboring countries, CSO Afghanistan is considered way below. We have a long way to go before we could be at least at par with these organizations. However, compared with the small statistical units of ministries and organizations in Afghanistan, CSO is much better. The ANSP and TRIPOD noted before are putting CSO in a much better position.

Q21. Does the NSO or some other government body have strategies for developing the professional capability of the national statistical service? (e.g. career paths managed service wide, outpostings, secondment of staff, inpostings, fellowships, joint or collaborative projects, service-wide training or development events such as seminars) If so what are the most successful strategies used and which strategies have been unsuccessful and why?

As mentioned above, the strategies for developing the professional capability of the national statistical service are part of ANSP and TRIPOD. For TRIPOD, it is both through career paths and short term training courses as the program is through Kabul University. It will also serve a tool for practicum/OJT of students where they will be allowed to work at CSO and other ministries for hands-on training prior to the acquisition of their respective degrees.

It is believed that these approaches will be both effective since these will allow opportunity for hands-on training.

Q22. Which professional capabilities are the most challenging to develop or maintain? Please explain why

Among the stages of data collection, developing the capacity to be able to properly analyze the data collected is considered the most challenging to develop as this area requires qualitative and critical thinking to be able to convert the numbers into meaningful findings. The findings should be able to show the important information for policy makers and to the public, in general.

PART B

Please provide details of one or two strategies that have been used with the aim of improving or maintaining professional capability. In doing so please place an emphasis on what worked or did not work and why.

As pointed out earlier, since CSO had a low capacity in the past, basic trainings were first conducted. For some areas, these were coupled with on-the-job training. This strategy proved to be effective. However, for trainings with no follow-up and mentoring, trainees tend to forget what they have learned.