

Developing Professional Capability for National Statistical System

Uttam Narayan Malla
DG, CBS
Nepal

Brief introduction of Nepalese Statistical System

Statistical Act, 1958 envisage the statistical system of the country to be more of a centralized and data collection activities in many areas were commenced by Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) accordingly. Apart from censuses, crop cutting surveys, surveys of establishments, foreign trade statistics, price collection and vital registration were started by CBS. However, these activities could not be retained by CBS for many reasons. The then CBS was staffed with the civil servants of the administration services which can not bind experienced and trained staff from moving out of CBS as per the civil service act. With these limitations of CBS, it could not meet the demand for updated annual statistics of various ministries and departments and as a result, collection and dissemination of current statistics shifted gradually to respective ministries and departments. Current agricultural statistics was undertaken by Ministry of Agriculture forming the then Department of Food and Agricultural Marketing Services (DFAMS). Annual educational statistics was shifted to Ministry of Education. Likewise, data compilation and dissemination of foreign trade statistics was transferred to Department of Custom. The act has mandated CBS to require production of details, inspect records and demand for details of an individual or an establishment. The Government of Nepal by a notified order, may require any persons of any class to supply to the Director General (of CBS) such information, schedules and statistics in their possession or control in such format and within such time as may be specified in the notified order. The Director General may delegate power to give direction to collect statistics. The Act mandates CBS to serve as a coordinating body for statistical activities in the country

In the context of Nepal, the system moved from centralized to decentralized spontaneously in order to cater statistical need of the government agencies and accordingly, the role of CBS as been broadened. Apart from conducting statistical operations CBS has been attempting to designate statistical activities to various agencies and coordinate thereby. CBS now conducts decennial national population census, decennial agricultural census, quinquennial census of manufacturing establishments are conducted by CBS. Household surveys (such as Nepal Living Standard Survey, Nepal Labour Force Survey), Establishment surveys and other occasional surveys (e.g. water survey, survey of drug users) etc. Also, National Accounts compilation and compilation of other social statistics such as health, education, drinking water, natural disaster are being done regularly. Census and survey data are published in various forms of publications. Besides census and survey publications some other regular publications such as *Statistical year book*, *Pocket book*, *Environment statistics of Nepal*, folders and leaflets (e.g. *Nepal in Figures*, *MDG indicators of Nepal*, *Nepal at a glance*,

NepalInfo in CD etc.) are brought out to the users for quick reference. Also, data are being disseminated electronically either by providing data in CDs or uploading in its website (www.cbs.gov.np).

At present the Bureau is under the supervision of the National Planning Commission Secretariat. According to the present organization chart (Annex), the Bureau has a total 663 positions of which 166 are in the central office and 497 are in the various BSO's. Total number of supporting staff positions are 562.

Other agencies involved in statistical activities are Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperatives (MOAC), Department of Custom, Department of Education (DoE) under Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES), Department of Health Services, Ministry of Finance etc. Among non government organizations, Nepal Rastra Bank (NRB), a central bank of Nepal is one of the major producer of statistical information. The bank collects and publishes consumer price index (CPI), whole price index (WPI) and Balance of Payment (BOP) Statistics on monthly basis.

Development of professional capability

Statistical service under civil service act

Previously before 1990, when there were no separate statistical service and statistical activities were assigned to officers of general administrative services even in CBS and other agencies as well. Those officers of general administrative service possess Bachelor Degree (in any field). Those officers are entitled to seek transfers to any of the government ministries and departments and they can be transferred by means of promotion or upon their will to work in other areas of the government. There were no concept of statistical career till 1990. Statistical professionalism have virtually been taken off only after the creation of statistical service in 1990. However, there were officers of general administrative services who with their own individual interest had given up general administration service and chosen to remain in the statistical service. Also, the creation of the separate service has helped to retain statisticians in the govt service. In a developing country like Nepal where the size of the statistical service is small, career development also happens to be limited. So, later a new service within the civil service act , namely Nepal Economic Planning and Statistical Service (NEPSS) was formed and a statistical group was accommodated into the NEPSS with a purpose to broaden the path career of statisticians under the government service.

Recruitment

Master Degree in Statistics, Mathematics, Population Studies or in any other stream with some predetermined credit hour on statistics are eligible as per the current NEPSS (statistical group) to apply for the position of statistical officer. So, statistical officers recruited usually are good in mathematical statistics but requires to be trained in official statistics. Newly recruited officers are found to be good in population

statistics but with limited knowledge of economic statistics. They also need to be trained in using software such as SPSS, STATA CSPro etc. National accounts is the area newly recruited officers are unknown about and mathematical statisticians usually do not prefer to work in also. Among the government officers, statistical officers are the one required to have Master Degree to enter into the government service. Officers of other government services require only Bachelor Degree. Similarly, positions of Statistical Assistant and Field Supervisor of junior officer level require to have at least Bachelor Degree against the proficiency certificate required for other administrative services. Not having additional financial or other incentives despite having higher qualification, staffs of statistical group express their dissatisfaction over current situation.

CBS can not apply new strategies to ensure new staffs have required skill. The recruitment is done by Public Service Commission (PSC) and PSC has its own recruitment regulation and procedure. Nevertheless, PSC seldom invites CBS senior officials for interviewing candidates. But, the test process is done completely by PSC with its given general criteria which applies to all kinds of PSC recruitment.

Training

Because of the limited involvement in the recruitment process, CBS has now extended its hand with universities in imparting knowledge of official statistics to the university students. Recently, CBS officers has been providing lectures on official statistics to the students of Masters Level of Statistics, specifically on Population studies and Economics Census, surveys (NLSS, NLFS etc.). CBS has formulated a program of providing intern for limited number of university students for 3 months. The purpose is to provide practical skills of official statistics of their interest.

The training section of the CBS has been conducting in-service training for staff of CBS and other ministries and departments through the number of training is not adequate to meet the demand.

It is difficult to identify individual professional capability or match the requirement of CBS and area of individual interest. However, the academic background of individual, requirement of each section of CBS are taken into account in an attempt in building professional capability.

OJT (on-the-job-training) is the main means of training. Instruction manuals are developed on official statistics covering social, economic and methodological part of statistics. Besides, specific survey trainings have also been useful to develop individual capacity. For example training on Nepal Living Standard Survey (NLSS), Nepal Labot Force Survey (NLFS) are quite useful to enhance data collection, processing and analysis capability of CBS.

International trainings

International trainings offered by SIAP/ESCAP, IPC/Bureau of Census and short courses conducted by various organizations are extremely useful. Participants for the international trainings are nominated on the basis of the criteria developed by the CBS. Individual officer's job responsibility, academic background, seniority or experience and equality of opportunity among officers are the criteria normally applied while nominating participants. However, workshops and seminars are attended by officers involved and related in the subject matter. CBS Nepal, lately has impression that international training events have been reduced probably due to the capability developed in the countries. But, countries like Nepal is in difficulty to fill up the gap of trained officials which occurred due to retirement of experienced statisticians. For example, number of experienced demographers of CBS have been retired in last 2 years just before planning census 2011.

Career path: cohort problem of statistical officers

It is worth mentioning a typical problem the CBS is facing. After the creation of new statistical service, CBS organization was expanded and around 65 statistical officers were recruited in 1997. Now after 13 years, seniors have been gradually retiring, few have been promoted from the same cohort of 1997 recruitment and it is expected that, all officers in CBS, from DG to SO will be of the same cohort in next 8 years.

Because of the small organization and small size of the statistical service, opportunities of career development in terms of upgrading or promotion are limited. There are altogether, 80 Statistical Officers, 17 Senior Statistical Officers (Director level) and 3 Deputy Director General (DDG) and 1 DG (Director General) under statistical service in CBS and other government organizations. So, due to very few opportunities of promotion, officers may be suffered of the frustration and the organization may be deprived of the certain discipline of hierarchy.

Organizational Strategies and development

CBS has prepared a Comprehensive National Statistics Plan (CNSP) and the programs recommended by CNSP was mentioned in the Country's periodic plan as well (Ninth Plan and Three Year Interim Plan). Main objective of the CNSP is to develop a National Statistical System coordinating statistical activities conducted by CBS and other ministries, departments and central Bank, initiate designated statistical system so as to reduce duplication of efforts and coordinate and standardize statistical operations as well.

CBS ,Nepal so far has not developed any specific capacity building indicators for statistical manpower. But, there is a performance evaluation system developed for civil servants by Ministry of human resource management and the same criteria is used for statistical staff of CBS and other organizations. However, the

criteria is generic and is not specific to the statistical service and not very useful for assessing the effectiveness of the capacity building efforts.

In order to develop interactions with statisticians outside CBS and other government agencies, it has encouraged relationship with Nepal Statistical Association (NEPSA). CBS encourages to develop mutual cooperation with NEPSA in areas of human resource development and research activities.

IT development

The recent development of IT is a significant move towards IT within CBS. Census related GIS works being conducted by CBS on its own without external assistance is remarkable. Preparation of EA maps based on the satellite maps is being done by CBS as part of the census preparation. Nevertheless, the Government of Denmark has generously extended hands to work together in the area. CBS recently has been equipped with advance computers, laptops, software and web technology too.

Bottlenecks

The government of Nepal is extremely preoccupied with matter related to political transition and hence, have not been able to allocate enough resources for CBS on the one hand and also to pay attention on organizational restructuring of CBS. Since the state itself is in the process of restructuring and the country's embark upon federalism, restructuring of the CBS is delayed.

It has been difficult to retain or to optimally use national accounts experts and data management experts.

Strategy to retain or use CBS experts

CBS can not provide economic incentives for its experts. However, CBS now has an undeclared policy to use retired experts in its projects. Recently, Survey experts of CBS's own has been contracted in for Nepal Living Standard Survey -III. Also, a senior demographer, an agricultural Statistician and an economic statistician have been hired. This policy has encouraged new officers to be engaged in statistical activities and gain expertise with generous involvement.