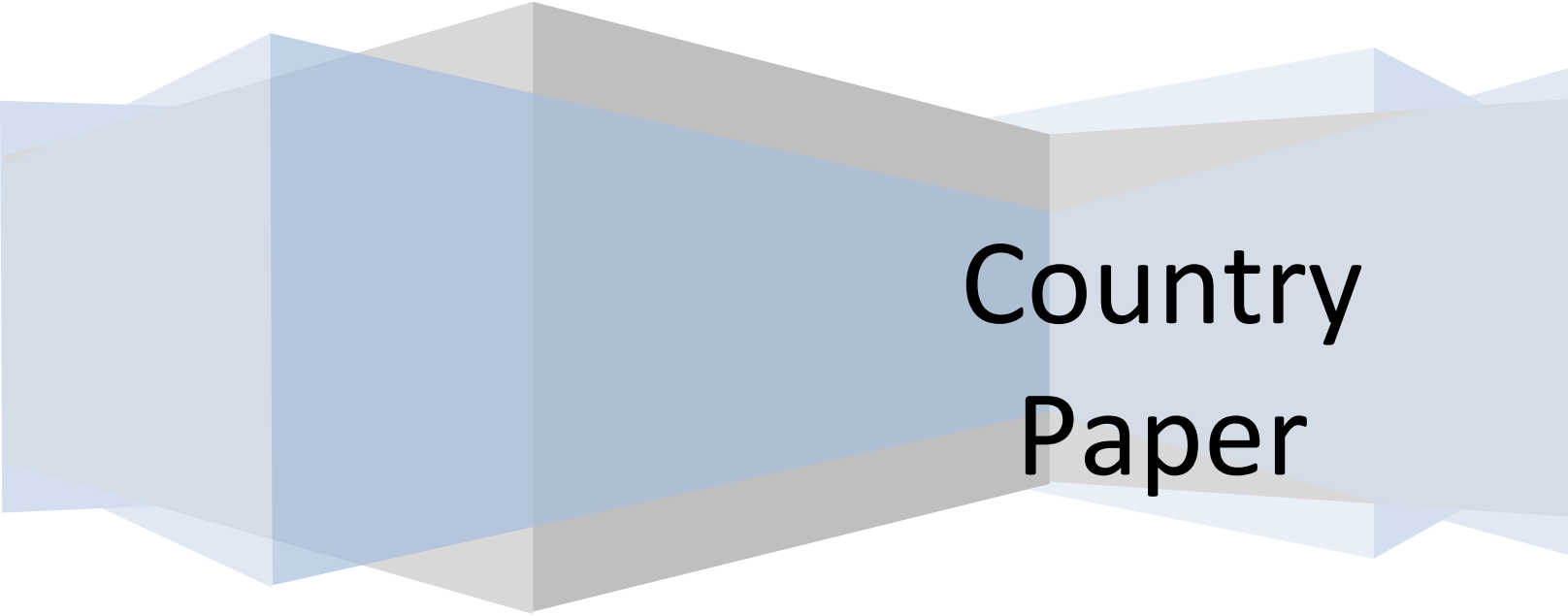


40th Anniversary Celebration of SIAP

Ninth Management Seminar for the
Heads of National Statistical Offices in Asia and the Pacific
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***“Developing Professional Capability for National
Statistical Systems”***



**Country
Paper**

Introduction

The introductory section of this paper focuses on country's background and a legislation establishing NSO PNG with a brief discussion on the current government policies and strategies in PNG.

Background

Papua New Guinea became an independent country in 1975. It has a total land area of 463,840 km². It has 23 provinces (included 3 proposed ones) and occupies the eastern half of the island of New Guinea and some 600 associated islands. The terrain of the island is very rugged with high mountain ranges and very steep and deep valleys with extensive marshes in the coastal areas. Most parts of the country are inaccessible by vehicles. Nearly 85 percent of its population lived in rural areas and 15 percent in urban areas, has diverse culture and speaks more than 700 languages.

Establishment of NSO PNG

NSO PNG was first established by the Statistical Services Act 1980. This act has given a mandatory role to this organisation particularly to conduct censuses, surveys, analyse data and produce wide range of statistical information for government and the public to use.

Since its establishment, NSO PNG has not been producing all the statistics as required by an Act due to insufficient available resources (this include insufficient professional workers). The office is producing only the core statistics in terms of economic statistics, population and social statistics. Other statistical information are compiled and produced by respective statistical agencies in other line departments (ministries).

With the current government policies and strategies (i.e. LTDS, MDG, PNG Development Strategy 2010-2030, 2050 Vision Strategy and other policies all aimed to reduce poverty and improve people's lives) in place, the urgent need for quality, reliable

and timely statistics is very crucial at this stage. NSO PNG and line statistical agencies have been urged to provide the required statistics and indicators on timely manner to measure the progress of these policies and strategies, and also urged to improve professional capability of the staffs.

As a newly appointed head of the National Statistical Office of PNG, I see this seminar on *'Developing Professional Capability for National Statistical Systems'* as timely and important as the outcome will surely benefit the developing of the good national statistical systems for each country. In other words, the outcome of the seminar will assist all NSOs in each country to align their developing of professional capability plans towards achieving better national statistical systems.

This paper is divided into two main parts: Part A is my experiences and thoughts with respect to planning, developing and maintaining professional skills in NSO PNG. Part B is all about the strategies used in planning and developing the staffs of NSO PNG in the past 20 years. The last section is the recommendation.

Part A: Experiences and thoughts regarding developing and retaining of professional skills

Many of the things discussed below are done in accordance with the Public Service General Order (GO). I shall firstly discuss my experiences and thoughts on the recruitment, development, organisational strategies and capability of the national statistical services with respect to maintaining professional skills and competencies.

Recruitment

NSO PNG's current recruited staff-on-strength is 91 altogether (excluding casuals) and half of them have possessed professional skills while the rest do not have professional skills. The on-going skill problems identified so far are lack of knowledge and skills in calculating the GDP and Government Finance Statistics, lack of sampling methods

techniques and analysis of data. Due to these limitations, NSO PNG has gone out of its way to bring on board the expertise or consultants from outside to do these jobs.

The staffs recruited in the public service are in accordance with the recruitment procedure spelt out in the Public Service General Order of PNG. Every government department or agent has to follow this recruitment procedure (normally done through applying for the advertised positions). In other words, a person applying for the advertised positions has to meet the full requirements in order for him/her to be recruited into public office, and NSO PNG is no exception in following this procedure. The recruitment done in NSO PNG has been based on merit. This is to ensure quality people are employed.

One unfortunate thing that NSO PNG did not implement in the last 15 years was that it did not liaise with the universities in the country to design their programs to suit the organisation's needs. As a newly head of NSO PNG, I will be looking into this seriously to ensure the arrangement with the universities is integrated into the proposed Human Resource Development Policy so universities could be urged to redesign their courses more towards meeting our organisation's needs.

Development

In terms of staff development plan, NSO PNG does not have one at the moment which can be linked to the long term strategic plans or National Strategies for the Development of Statistics (NSDS). The main reason is that NSO PNG under current structure does not have the Human Resource Development Branch its own to develop such a plan. Most of the activities with respect to human resource development have been done on ad-hoc basis and are developed and coordinated by the current staff development section comprised of two officers. The proposed organisational structure (soon to be implemented) is going to accommodate establishing a new Human Resource Development Branch. We are looking forward to this branch to develop long term strategies (currently missing) with respect to staff development to ensure all staffs are professionally developed and retained.

In regards to integrating or identifying of the professional development of individual employees needs, our organisation used three main approaches. These approaches have been developed in line with the Public Service General Order. The first is staff appraisal forms where there is a section that requires the needs for the staff. The second is conducting of training needs analysis survey (TNAS) where staff needs are also known through this process. The third is personal interview where we conduct staff interviews to find out their views and needs. Also, through these processes we derived career paths for the staff as well.

Training is one of the needs identified through the above processes. The main means for development of professional staffs are through on-the-job training, postgraduate programs offered by universities and training conducted by international organisations (i.e. UNSIAP, IMF and other Statistical Institutions). These means are effective as courses offered are designed to suit the needs of NSOs. Another is that staffs are very effective in their performance after going through the said means. Other means are not as effective as the courses are not well designed to suit NSO needs.

Further, the management of NSO PNG do select officers for those trainings based on certain criteria used which include an officer should at least possess university undergraduate degree and has a potential in performing his duties well, commitment towards work and at least 5 years of work experience. Apart from these, minimum requirements are also being used in terms of attendance and punctuality, dressing well and well conducted person.

In regards to measuring the performance of assessing the effectiveness of the capacity building efforts in my organisation, the following indicators are considered to be useful: increased number of skilled workers; quality output; number of publications produced (quarterly and annual), effective management services; high performance of staff; reduced number of staff complains; effective statistical services and increased staff participations.

Organisational strategies

Currently, there are no special career paths for our professional staffs. However, we are working hard to develop a Human Resource Development Policy that could guide and regulate the organisation to develop special career paths for professional staff. For example, we want to initiate arrangements with the Australian and New Zealand Bureau of Statistics to allow our professional staffs for job attachments to ensure our staffs are strengthened and confident in performing their statistical duties, and also learnt as much as possible from them.

In regards to determining the needs of the staffs, we firstly identify their needs through the three approaches discussed earlier in the paper. For example, if their needs on further training are given, we place them on training list. Apart from this, we also recommended them for higher positions based on their performances.

In terms of the decisions on organisational and job structure, these had not addressed the capability of my organisation as far as I am concern.

With respect to retaining and attracting of professional staffs in our organisation, the professional staffs do enjoy the range of statistical work especially in terms of analysis and operational work in which they are attracted to. For example, demographers love conducting surveys, census and analysis of data because of the natures of these jobs associated with their qualifications. The same applies to all economists working in our organisation as well.

However, we are very cautious on this as well. For example, in the past years we have lost good number of professional staffs although, they were attached to doing those jobs. They left office through the early retrenchment exercise and had left for other organisations (domestic and international) because of huge incentives offered to them. Since their departure, the number of professional staffs had dropped in our organisation bearing on the output.

With regards to regular programs for particular categories of staff, we do conduct in-house training programs for those same staffs purposely to broaden their knowledge and skills. The facilitators for in-house training programs are sometimes coming from overseas.

In sum, NSO PNG obtained professional skills both through contracting-in staff and contracting-out work. Contracting-in staff occurs when there are not enough professional workers available or it depends on the nature of work which demands professionals from outside. However, in general, our organisation benefited directly from these two processes.

Other

In my view on IT development, I think this development had actually made the capability of national statistical services easier in our organisation. For example, most of our NSO IT staffs have greater computer experiences and skills, and applied these experiences and skills in statistical work in terms of data analysis and processing. However, IT development needs to conform to the increasing challenges as well in terms of high demand of statistical information by community of users and other factors involved.

In general, NSO professional requirements are not very much acknowledged by the government. The fact is that resources in terms of government annual allocation for developing the professional capability of our NSO staffs are very small. That is why we cannot deliver statistical services effectively in the country. In fact, this is one of the most contributing factors to low national statistical system.

Capability of national statistical service

Generally speaking, the professional capability of national statistical services is low, meaning that we do not produce many statistics required by users, outdated statistics produced, lack of professional staffs available to produce the required statistics on time and lack of resource management knowledge and skills. These are some of the core factors contributing to the low national statistical services.

Further, there are no coordinated strategies in place for developing the professional capability of the national statistical services. NSO PNG in the past had failed in this area. However, one of my proposed plans as a new head of PNG NSO is to work closely with the line statistical agencies in other departments as partners to develop a professional capability for national statistical services. To make this plan possible, we will adopt strategies like career paths managed service wide and develop events such as doing wider consultations through workshops/seminars to gauge views to ensure better national statistical service is available for the country.

The professional capabilities discussed above have been lacking in our NSO right now. In other words, most staffs lack practical statistical knowledge and skills in terms of conducting sample surveys and censuses, lack of project management skills, lack of skills in sampling methods, lack of knowledge and skills to calculate GDP, government finance statistics, balance of trade, international trade statistics and other methods applicable for other statistics. The existing problems spelt out above have been due to new staffs recruited without having adequate professional skills. That is why we decided to engage consultants from outside to do these jobs for us.

Part B: Detailed description of strategies used for development of professional capability

This section discusses the detailed description of two strategies used in developing the professional capability of the staffs. These two strategies are staff training and long term study programs with particular emphasis on their success and failures.

Staff Training

NSO PNG is just like any other organisation that have been promoting staff training to ensure all its staffs have the necessary knowledge and skills acquired in order to perform their statistical duties professionally. In the past 15 years, NSO PNG has sent staffs to be trained in UNSIAP, IMF and other statistical institutions which were funded by the development partners. The total staffs trained so far are more than 20.

Amazingly, after completion of courses in those assigned training institutions, officers performed very well especially when applying what they have learnt upon returning from those institutions. The training skills gained have brought self development to them as well development on our organisation. The officers that went for trainings at those institutions were selected based on the set criteria stated above.

However, the bad side of it is that most of those staffs that got trained in the said institutions had left our office and are working for other organisations because we could not retain them due to non-attractive incentives available. Some had gone for early retrenchment and have engaged in consultancy work using the knowledge and skills gained from the trainings attended.

Another bad side is that when some officers are selected for overseas trainings, they are not effective upon returning to our country. In other words, they could not apply effectively the skills and knowledge learnt. This is embarrassing and it seems to me that they had not been concentrating whilst on training. The office had made big mistakes in selecting these officers.

Long Term Study Programs

Long term study programs are referred to as undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs. NSO PNG has been banking on this strategy for a long time as it gives the staffs opportunity to undertake studies at higher levels especially at postgraduate level in international universities. In my observation, the officers who have completed postgraduate study programs have been contributing positively well in the development of the organisation. In other words, they performed significantly well when discharging their statistical duties.

However, the sad thing is that these same staffs worked little awhile with us and left office after attaining their highest qualifications. They depart our office with a wealth of experience, knowledge and skills and pursued their own working careers with other

organisations. Our office could not retain them as we do not have the best strategies in place, in other words, they leave office once they find opportunities outside.

Recommendation

In conclusion, I would like to make three recommendations with respect to building the capabilities of NSOs in developing countries:

Firstly, with the high demand of statistics posing pressure on all NSOs in the developing countries now, I recommend that 2 officers from NSOs from each country should participate in any training offered by the SIAP, IMF and other statistical institutions. So upon their return, they can contribute positively towards the development of the organisation. International development partners (i.e. UN, JICA, AUSAID and others) should jointly meet the funding cost for this activity

Secondly, in-country basic statistical trainings should be conducted in two years time so to train the statistical officers both from NSOs and other line departments in each country. The funding cost for this activity should be jointly met by the host country and development partners. The facilitators for these trainings should be organised by the UNSIAP and IMF and other statistical institutions.

Lastly but not the least, a special task force should be set up after this seminar to travel to all developing countries to assess the statistical training needs of the NSOs and based on their reports proper development plans should be designed to increase NSOs capabilities in developing countries.